



# **Orkney Islands Council**

## **Homelessness Strategy**

### **2023 to 2028**

## Version Control

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# 1. Introduction and Background

This is the fourth Homelessness Strategy of Orkney Islands Council. It aims to build on the previous three and reflect the developing context of homelessness in Scotland including legislative and policy changes as well as our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan.

This strategy sets out how we will seek to address homelessness, build on existing improvements; identify new or further ways to prevent homelessness and support people to find sustainable housing solutions.

The Council's Local Housing Strategy (LHS) 2017- 2022, which is currently under review, sets out a number of key priorities for the Council in relation to the future of housing and housing related services in Orkney. Two key priorities have specific pertinence in relation to the Homelessness Strategy and for the progress of our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRPT).

## **Ensuring an adequate supply of houses.**

- Ensure that Orkney has a sufficient range, number and type of houses to meet demand and need and offers a suitable range of housing options.

## **Preventing and Alleviating Homelessness.**

- Improved housing options and early intervention leading to reduced periods of time in temporary accommodation. The provision of housing support as required.

These priorities from the Local Housing Strategy are interlinked for without sufficient affordable housing it will be difficult to prevent and address homelessness successfully in the longer term.

# 2. Legislative and Policy Context

Since the last strategy there have been a number of legislative and policy initiatives. This has included the Scottish Government's vision "Ending Homelessness Together" and the requirement for local authorities to produce and implement Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans (RRTP).

The 2017 Programme for Government made a renewed commitment to tackle homelessness, to end rough sleeping and to transform temporary accommodation. It established the short-term Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group to identify the actions needed to achieve these ambitions.

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG) identified the actions that may be required. The Scottish Government produced their initial "Ending Homelessness and Rough Sleeping: Action Plan" in 2018 as a means of addressing the issues identified.

The Scottish Government responded to the recommendations stemming from the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group in their “Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan”. The Plan introduced the term Rapid Rehousing meaning:

- A settled, mainstream housing outcome as quickly as possible;
- Time spent in any form of temporary accommodation reduced to a minimum, with the fewer transitions the better;
- When temporary accommodation is needed, the optimum type is mainstream, furnished and within a community;
- And, local authorities were required to produce Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans for which the Scottish Government provided some funding.

The Scottish Government is looking at introducing legislation which would ensure that all public bodies work jointly to prevent homelessness and they established a Prevention Review Group to consider options for such a law in 2019. The Group's Report published in February 2021 included a recommendation for a new law ensuring all public bodies work together to prevent homelessness.

The Scottish Government consulted on this proposed homeless prevention duty which included:

- the introduction of duties on public bodies and landlords to prevent homelessness and in particular to ‘ask and act’, to identify if there is a risk of homelessness and if so to act upon that information;
- increased responsibilities in relation to strategic and joint planning;
- changes to the homelessness legislation to prevent homelessness for example by extending the existing duty to take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness for up to six months before it occurs;
- to prescribe what actions that reasonable steps may involve.

The consultation period ended at the end of March 2022 and there is the intention is for legislation in 2023.

The Scottish Government updated their “Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan”, in 2020. The Plan outlines how they along with local authorities and the third sector should work jointly to "end homelessness". The revised Plan has reflected actions that are required to respond to COVID-19.

Other recommendations from HARSAG have included the definition of intentionality be changed to it being a 'deliberate manipulation' of the homelessness system. The Scottish Government proposed to review the impact of the change in the summer of 2021.

There is provision in the 2003 Act to allow the Scottish Ministers to modify referrals between local authorities relating to local connection. The HARSAG recommended that the provision in the 2003 Act to allow the Scottish Ministers to modify referrals between local authorities in Scotland relating to local connection be enacted. The suspension of the power to refer to another local authority was implemented in

November 2022. The Council has particular concerns about how this change might impact island authorities such as Orkney.

The legal framework itself has not, as yet, changed to any significant degree though the Code of Guidance was updated in 2019 - the previous version was updated version in 2005.

There are further developments which are likely to impact directly or indirectly on homelessness.

In 2020 The Scottish Government introduced temporary changes regarding eviction. The period of notice, in many circumstances such as rent arrears, was lengthened to six months. Also, changes were implemented which allowed the First-tier Tribunal, in all private rented housing cases, to use their discretion on whether or not to grant an eviction notice.

Some of these measures were made permanent in the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Act 2022. This includes the grounds for repossession for Assured Tenancies and Private Residential Tenancies remaining “discretionary” and pre-eviction protocols relating to rent arrears in the private rented sector being introduced.

As a response to the ‘cost of living crisis’ the Scottish Government introduced legislation to freeze rents for both social and private tenants and put in place a moratorium on evictions (similar to what was in place during the pandemic), this is to last until March 2023.

From 1 October 2022 people who intend to use properties for short-term lets within Scotland have to apply to their local Council for a licence.

The Scottish Government is intending to introduce a new Housing Bill in 2023 and consulted on – ‘a new deal for tenants’. It is proposed that the legislation include:

- the establishment of a regulator for the private rented sector to enforce defined standards;
- implementing a national system of rent controls in the private rented sector;
- the creation of a new Housing Standard to cover all homes;
- setting minimum standards for energy efficiency and zero emissions heating.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 placed a specific duty on local authorities to carry out an assessment of the extent and nature of homelessness within their area and to prepare and submit a strategy for preventing and alleviating homelessness.

Since 2007, local authorities have not had to produce separate homelessness strategies, and guidance from the Scottish Government advises that homelessness strategies should now be integrated with the Local Housing Strategies. Orkney Islands Council took the decision to continue to produce a separate Homelessness Strategy that expands on what is contained within our Local Housing Strategy. The reason for this is that significant research exists in relation to homelessness in an

urban context but very little exists in relation to homelessness in a remote and rural context.

Other statutory requirements in respect of homelessness include to:

- Provide advice and assistance and prevent and alleviate homelessness wherever possible.
- Ensure that advice and information is available in the local area free of charge.
- Endeavour to prevent homelessness where action has been taken by a mortgage lender or landlord to repossess the property.
- Assess the circumstances of households if there is reason to believe they are homeless or threatened with homelessness and Councils can use their discretion on whether to carry out an assessment of intentional homelessness.
- Take into account the Code of Guidance when making decisions on homelessness latest update 2019.
- Assess if homeless households require the housing support services and provide such services if they are required.
- Provide suitable temporary/emergency accommodation for those who require it.
- Implement the Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2020 - details what sort of temporary accommodation is unsuitable for homeless households.
- Provide suitable settled accommodation for those who are assessed as unintentionally homelessness.

The Scottish Social Housing Charter sets out the standards and outcomes which all social landlords are expected to meet when carrying out their housing activities. The Scottish Housing Regulator monitors, assesses and reports on how well social landlords meet the Charter's outcomes.

The Charter includes some outcomes of particular relevance to homelessness which are taken into account in this strategy as well as the latest Scottish Government's guidance on Local Housing Strategies. This includes guidance in respect of what local authorities should take into account in developing their approach to meeting their responsibilities towards preventing and addressing homelessness.

The Charter was reviewed in 2021 and as a result of the consultation exercise some minor changes were made and the revised Charter came into force in late 2022.

The Scottish Government identifies five outcomes contained in the National Performance Framework which are viewed as essential to their aspiration to end homelessness in Scotland. These outcomes are:

- The importance of inclusive communities.
- Respecting human rights.
- Tackling poverty.
- Education.

- Safety.

This Homeless Strategy contributes to these National Outcomes and to the Homelessness Vision set out in the Scottish Government's Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan<sup>1</sup>.

|   |   |  |  |                                   |
|---|---|--|--|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Homelessness vision:</b><br><b>Everyone has a home that meets their needs.</b><br><b>Homelessness is ended.</b><br><b>To end homelessness we will:</b> |   |  |  |                                   |
| Embed a person-centred approach.  | Prevent homelessness from happening in the first place. | Join up planning and resources to tackle homelessness. | Respond quickly and effectively whenever homelessness happens. | Prioritise settled homes for all. |

The Strategy contributes also to Orkney's Local outcomes<sup>2</sup> namely:

- Strong Communities - Orkney's communities and individuals are fulfilling their potential.
- Living Well - Our people are resilient and live well.
- Vibrant Economy - Orkney has a vibrant economic environment.

## Equality and Diversity

Orkney Islands Council is committed to promoting equal opportunities, challenging discrimination and fostering good relations, in carrying out its work and delivering services and in employment. Our aim is for Orkney to be a community where we all have the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

As a partner in the Orkney Partnership the Council has signed up to their Equality and Diversity Strategy (2012) and its position on equality and diversity, as follows:

“Promoting equalities means recognising that everyone has different needs and taking positive action to ensure that everyone is able to contribute to society. We will do our best to provide equal opportunities to our most remote communities and hard-to-reach individuals, while respecting everybody's right to privacy”.

Promote equal opportunities for all:

- Ensure that everyone is enabled to participate in society.
- Welcome and celebrate diversity.
- Place equality at the heart of policy and practice.
- Raise acceptance of rights and responsibilities.

<sup>1</sup> Ending Homelessness Together: High Level Action Plan 2018 (updated 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Orkney Community Plan 2019-2022 incorporating the LOIP.

- Secure access for all to national services.

There are also separate strategies that focus on equalities and accessibility.

## Local Outcome Agreements

At the outset of the first Homelessness Strategy, the Council set up Local Outcome Agreements with various local agencies to endeavour to prevent and alleviate homelessness. These include:

|  |  |                     |
|--|--|---------------------|
| Orkney Citizen's Advice Bureau.                    | To employ an independent homelessness and welfare rights officer.  | £41,166.            |
| Employability Orkney.                              | Support for Co-Ordinator's post covering umbrella organisation including supported employment project and furniture store.                               | £17,334.            |
| OIC's staffing and related costs.                  | Related costs include training for staff and other agencies to focus on homelessness and prevention activities (including Local House Condition Survey). | £168,546.           |
| Advocacy Services.                                 | To provide funding to ensure there is access to an advocacy service (CAB).   | £16,673.            |
| Drug and Alcohol and Counselling Advisory Service. | To support the service to assist those with drug and alcohol issues (currently under development).   | £8,085.             |
| Women's Aid Orkney and MARAC.                      | To support the service to assist women and their children who have experienced domestic abuse.   | £14,150.<br>£2,266. |
| Employability Orkney -Restart Orkney.              | To support the furniture reuse project.  | £8,005.             |
| Starter Packs Orkney.                              | To support the starter packs project.  | £2,404.             |
| Relationships Scotland.                            | To provide counselling and mediation to endeavour to prevent homelessness.   | £2,164.             |
| Right There.                                       | To provide housing support inside the Young Persons' Supported Accommodation Projects.   | £223,207.           |
| <b>Total:</b>                                      |  | <b>£504,000.</b>    |

## 3. Aim of the strategy

To prevent homelessness as far as possible, and where it does occur, that time spent in homelessness is kept to a minimum.

## Objectives/outcomes

- Ensure that homeless households' views are sought and taken into account when reviewing and developing services.
- Provide accurate advice and information including through our Housing Options service, ensure the service is accessible, that differing needs are met and the service widely publicised.
- Enhance and improve the Housing Options approach including by introducing a housing options 'tool'.
- Continue to develop and improve services to prevent and address homelessness through partnership working with other services/organisations.
- Develop training programmes with partners in the public and third sectors to enable all relevant services to participate in a broad range of preventative approaches/activities.
- Ensure staff are kept fully informed of any developments relating to the cost of living crisis to enable them to appropriately assist Orkney residents.
- Develop with partners including Women's Aid Orkney policies and good practice procedures in relation to Domestic Abuse.
- Ensure that no one is prevented from making a homeless application.
- Have an effective, timely response to those presenting as homeless including those in crisis.
- Discuss with appropriate partners developing a Housing First pilot for young people who would benefit from the model.
- Keep stays in temporary accommodation to a minimum.
- Reduce the use of temporary accommodation.
- Continue to explore ways to reduce rents in temporary accommodation.
- Increase the proportion of social lets (both Council and OHAL) that are made to homeless households.
- Increase the role of the private rented sector in preventing and alleviating homelessness.
- Seek a sustainable solution for individuals who have experienced homelessness or who are threatened with homelessness.
- Provide appropriate advice and support to assist households in sustaining their accommodation including housing support.
- Revisit housing education and develop/access to suitable materials to be used in schools/college.

## 4. Homelessness in Orkney

### Applications

In 2021/22, the Council received 132 homeless applications, four applications fewer than the previous year, a fall of 3%. This compares with 2020/21 which saw a 15% rise in applications from 2019/20.

At 21 February 2023 there were 122 homeless applications, which compares with 117 applications received at the same time in 2020/21.

**Table 1: Homeless applications and homeless assessments 2017/28 to 2021/22.**

| Reason.                          | 2017/18. | 2018/19. | 2019/20. | 2020/21. | 2021/22. |
|----------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Homeless applications.           | 118.     | 134.     | 119.     | 136.     | 132.     |
| Assessed as homeless.            | 97.      | 107.     | 93.      | 108.     | 105.     |
| Percentage assessed as homeless. | 82%.     | 80%.     | 78%.     | 79%.     | 80%.     |

(HL1 figures<sup>3</sup>) (OIC figures).

The proportion of those who initially applied as homeless and who were subsequently assessed as homeless remains relatively constant.

The time taken to assess an applicant decreased in 2021/22 from 23.5 days to 21.6 days.

**Table 2: Average time (days) from assessment to closure for applications assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness.**

| 2017/18. | 2018/19. | 2019/20. | 2020/21. | 2021/22. |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 146.     | 114.     | 188.     | 208.     | 199.     |

(HL1 figures).

## Rough Sleeping

The number of people who slept rough in the previous three months prior to presenting as homeless to the Council remains relatively steady - 10 applicants in 2021/22 in comparison to eight applicants for financial years 2020/21 and 10 in 2019/20.

There were no applicants who had been roofless the night before presenting as homeless in 2021/22, in comparison with three applicants in 2019/20 and five in 2019/20.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/collections/homelessness-statistics/>

**Table 3: Homelessness presentations where applicant slept rough 2016/17 to 2020/21.**

| <b>Year.</b> | <b>At least once during the last 3 months.</b> | <b>The night before.</b> |
|--------------|--|--------------------------|
| 2017/18.     | 15.  | 10.                      |
| 2018/19.     | 10.  | 10.                      |
| 2019/20.     | 10.  | 5.                       |
| 2020/21.     | 8.   | 3.                       |
| 2021/22.     | 10.  | 0.                       |

(HL1 figures).

Rooflessness is likely to be a one-off situation and there is no chronic rough sleeping in Orkney. If it comes to the Council's attention that someone is roofless then the person is directly approached and offered assistance.

### **Reasons for homelessness**

The three most common reasons for people applying as homeless in Orkney (as in Scotland as a whole) continues to be

- 'Non - violent' dispute within household /relationship breakdown.
- Asked to leave.
- Violent/abusive dispute within the household.

There was an increase in both the number and proportion of applicants who presented as homeless in 2021/22 due to non violent relationship breakdown. This was the case also for those who applied as homeless where there was violence/abuse within the household.

In 2021/22, 41% of presentations were because of non violent relationship breakdown compared to 34% in 2020/21. Violence/abuse within the household rose to 16% in 2021/22 from 10% of applicants in 2020/21.

**Table 4: Reasons for applying as homeless in Orkney, 2016/17 to 2021/22.**

| <b>Reason.</b>  | <b>2017/18.</b> | <b>2018/19.</b> | <b>2019/20.</b> | <b>2020/21.</b> | <b>2021/22.</b> |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| <b>Dispute in household/<br/>relationship<br/>breakdown: non-<br/>violent.</b>  | 37.             | 58.             | 52.             | 46.             | 54.             |
| <b>Dispute within<br/>household: violent or<br/>abusive.</b>                    | 6.              | 18.             | 13.             | 13.             | 21.             |
| <b>Asked to leave.</b>  | 20.             | 31.             | 19.             | 38.             | 20.             |
| <b>Harassment/abuse<br/>outwith the home.</b>                                   | 13.             | 5.              | 7.              | 7.              | 4.              |
| <b>Mortgage default /<br/>rent arrears.</b>                                     | 3.              | 1.              | 2.              | 1.              | 1.              |
| <b>Other action by<br/>landlord.</b>  | 5.              | 3.              | 3.              | 4.              | 2.              |
| <b>Secure<br/>accommodation given<br/>up.</b>                                   | 3.              | 5.              | 3.              | 3.              | 3.              |
| <b>Loss of service / tied<br/>accommodation.</b>                                | 1.              | 0.              | 2.              | 4.              | 2.              |
| <b>Discharge from<br/>prison / hospital /<br/>care / other<br/>institution.</b> | 1.              | 2.              | 0.              | 1.              | 1.              |
| <b>Emergency (fire,<br/>flood, etc).</b>  | 0.              | 0.              | 1.              | 1.              | 1.              |
| <b>Forced division and<br/>sale of matrimonial<br/>home.</b>                    | 0.              | 1.              | 2.              | 1.              | 0.              |
| <b>Overcrowding.</b>  | 1.              | 1.              | 1.              | 4.              | 0.              |
| <b>Other reason.</b>  | 29.             | 9.              | 13.             | 13.             | 23.             |
| <b>Total.</b>   | 119.            | 134.            | 118.            | 136.            | 132.            |

(OIC figures).

In 2021/22, the level of people subject to of harassment or abuse from outwith their home decreased from the previous year and was the fourth most common reason for applying to the Council as was the case in 2020/21.

## Households

Single households remain the predominate group of people presenting as homeless as is the case across Scotland. Seventy two percent of applicants in 2021/22 were single households, just slightly lower than the previous year - 79% of applicants.

In 2021/22:

- Male single households were the largest group at 46% of all applicants
- Just over a quarter of applications - 26% - were from single female applicants.
- A fifth (20%) of all applicants were single parents, this is the highest number and proportion of applicants over the last five years. All, apart from one applicant, were female single parents.
- There was also an increase in the total number and proportion of households applying as homeless with children, again the highest over the last five years. Twenty four percent of applicant households contained children, the vast majority of which were in single parent households.

**Table 5: Household type of homeless applicants in Orkney, 2017/18 to 2021.22.**

| Household.             | 2017/18.    | 2018/19.    | 2019/20.    | 2020/21.    | 2021/22.    |
|------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Single male 16-24.     | 13.         | 19.         | 11.         | 23.         | 12.         |
| Single male 25-64.     | 46.         | 42.         | 46.         | 43.         | 49.         |
| Single male 65+.       | 1.          | 3.          | 3.          | 1.          | 0.          |
| <b>Single males.</b>   | <b>60.</b>  | <b>64.</b>  | <b>60.</b>  | <b>67.</b>  | <b>61.</b>  |
| Single female 16-24.   | 16.         | 14.         | 13.         | 12.         | 9.          |
| Single female 25-64.   | 7.          | 25.         | 19.         | 21.         | 24.         |
| Single female 65+.     | 2.          | 1.          | 2.          | 7.          | 1.          |
| <b>Single females.</b> | <b>25.</b>  | <b>40.</b>  | <b>34.</b>  | <b>40.</b>  | <b>34.</b>  |
| Couple.                | 7.          | 5.          | 3.          | 6.          | 5.          |
| Couple with children.  | 3.          | 0.          | 1.          | 1.          | 5.          |
| Single female parent.  | 20.         | 17.         | 19.         | 18.         | 26.         |
| Single male parent.    | 2.          | 4.          | 0.          | 1.          | 1.          |
| Other.                 | 2.          | 4.          | 1.          | 3.          | 0.          |
| <b>Total.</b>          | <b>119.</b> | <b>134.</b> | <b>118.</b> | <b>136.</b> | <b>132.</b> |

(OIC figures).

In 2021/22 just over a fifth (22%) of all single applicants were young single people aged between 16 and 24 years. This is a fall both in numbers and in proportion - just over a quarter - of the single 16 – 24 years old who applied in 2021/22. In 2019/20 20% of applications were from young single people. In 2020/21 the proportion of

young people presenting as homeless, per 1,000 of the total population, was slightly higher than the Scottish average of 13 per 1,000 of population. Comparisons for previous years are 11.7 for 2019/20 and 20.6 the previous year.

Few care experienced young people applied as homeless between 2018/19 and 2020/21. There were:

- Three young people who were looked after less than five years before presenting as homeless, and
- A further eight young people whose experience of care was more than five years from presenting as homeless.

The Housing Service has a positive working relationship with the Through and After Care Team and there is a joint protocol which tries to ensure that a young person who leaves care does not go through the homeless route to access housing.

### Ethnicity

In the three years from 2018/19 to 2021/22 the largest proportion of those applying as homeless described themselves as white Scottish with other white British groups also recording a substantial proportion of applicants.

**Table 6: Ethnicity of main homeless/threatened with homelessness applicant as a proportion of all applicant households.**

| <b>Ethnicity.</b>     | <b>2018/19.</b> | <b>2019/20.</b> | <b>2020/21.</b> | <b>2021/22.</b> |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| White Scottish.       | 42%.            | 44%.            | 66.9%.          | 59.6%.          |
| White Other British.  | 26%.            | 27.5%.          | 20.6%.          | 31.6%.          |
| White Irish.          | 0.7%.           | 0.8%.           | 1.5%.           | 0.7%.           |
| White Polish.         | 0.7%.           | 0.8%.           | -               | -               |
| White Other.          | 0.7%.           | 3%.             | -               | 2.9%            |
| Other Ethnic Group.   | 1.5%.           | -               | 1.5%.           | 2.2%            |
| Not Known or Refused. | 28%.            | 23%.            | 9.5%.           | 3%              |

(OIC figures).

There were very few who fell into the white other category (including Irish or Polish applicants). Over the three years it was very uncommon for someone from another ethnic group to apply as homeless.

The 2011 Census recoded “white Scottish” as the most dominant group at 79% of Orkney's population and 18% self-identifying as “white British”. The least populous

groups (as in those applying as homeless) were those who self-identify as “white other” - 2%.<sup>4</sup>

## **Veterans**

The number of ex armed forces personnel who have applied as homeless has, in the five years to 2021/22, been between zero and ten applicants, ranging as a proportion from 0% to 8% of applicants. The Council is conscious of the specific housing related issues that some ex Service personnel can face and will consider how best to respond to the recommendation in the Veterans’ Homelessness Prevention Pathway Report.

## **Temporary Accommodation**

The majority of the temporary accommodation in use for homeless households is self-contained Council properties taken from our general needs stock, there are a few properties leased from Orkney Housing Association Ltd. All the accommodation is situated on mainland Orkney. It is as follows (and includes temporary accommodation for young people):

- 53 self-contained properties in Kirkwall.
- 4 self-contained properties in Finstown.
- 12 self-contained, 3 shared in Stromness.
- 7 self-contained in St Margaret’s Hope.

The majority are one bedroom properties reflecting the domination of single person households.

Bed and Breakfast - a few establishments may be used in an emergency. All these establishments, used by the Council, are accredited by Visit Scotland after being subject to their quality assurance checks.

In 2021/22 more people moved out of temporary accommodation, 106 households, than moved in, 100 households. This is in contrast to the movement in and out of temporary accommodation in 2020/21 where 114 households moved in and 56 households moved out. This reflected in part at least the impact of COVID-19 in 2020/21 which led to households remaining in temporary accommodation for longer. They were unable to move on, predominantly due to a smaller number of properties becoming available for relet and there was a need to ensure there was sufficient temporary accommodation to meet demand.

The rate at which homeless households left temporary accommodation increased in 2021/22 when compared to the previous two years.

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<sup>4</sup> Scottish Council Areas 2001 to 2011 Census Profile Comparator Tool, February 2018, National Record for Scotland.

**Table 7: Households entering and exiting temporary accommodation.**

| <b>Year.</b> | <b>Entering.</b> | <b>Exiting.</b> | <b>Net Difference.</b> |
|--------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| 2019/20.     | 91.              | 89.             | 2.                     |
| 2020/21.     | 114.             | 56.             | 58.                    |
| 2021/22.     | 100.             | 106.            | -6.                    |

(HL1 figures).

The Council tries to avoid the use of B&B to house homeless households however, there are times when its use is not avoidable but every effort is made to keep its use to a minimum and the Council is endeavouring to plan for the imminent changes to the Unsuitable Accommodation Order.

While there was a decrease in the length of time households stayed in B&B in 2021/22 there was a considerable increase in the number of nights spent in B&B. This was in part due to some particular circumstances and as a result of there being insufficient temporary accommodation. There were, however, no breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order regulations.

**Table 8: Number of nights and average time spent in B&B 2017/18 to 2021/22.**

| <b>Year.</b>  | <b>Number of nights.</b> | <b>Average duration – nights.</b> |
|---------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 2021 to 2022  | 266.                     | 5.2.                              |
| 2020 to 2021. | 55.                      | 6.1.                              |
| 2019 to 2020. | 149.                     | 4.8.                              |
| 2018 to 2019. | 21.                      | 2.1.                              |
| 2017 to 2018. | 52.                      | 3.25.                             |

(OIC figures).

### **Time spent in temporary accommodation**

Single person households and other households without children had the longest wait for rehousing. There was a fall in the length of time single parents spent in temporary accommodation compared to the previous two years, they make up the vast majority of households with children.

Overall the time spent in temporary accommodation was higher in 2021/22 than has been the case over the last five years reflecting the decrease in the supply of houses to let.

**Table 9: Average total time (days) spent in temporary accommodation, by household type.**

| Year.      | Single Person. | Single Parent. | Couple. | Couple with Children. | Other. | Other with Children. | No HL1. | All. |
|------------|----------------|----------------|---------|-----------------------|--------|----------------------|---------|------|
| 2017/2018. | 148.           | 87.            | 156.    | 147.                  | 166.   | 256.                 | 42.     | 138. |
| 2018/2019. | 118.           | 76.            | 119.    | -                     | 143.   | 25.                  | -       | 111. |
| 2019/2020. | 203.           | 168.           | 102.    | -                     | 246.   | 158.                 | -       | 193. |
| 2020/2021. | 194.           | 205.           | 190.    | 113.                  | -      | -                    | -       | 194. |
| 2021/2022. | 225.           | 157.           | 314.    | -                     | 200    | 181                  | -       | 207  |

(HL1 figures).

As at 31 March 2022, 47 households were accommodated in temporary accommodation. This was a significant decrease from the previous year when 69 households were in temporary accommodation and nearer the number of households accommodated in 2020 and 2019. The significantly higher numbers in 2020/21 reflects the impact of Covid 19.

**Table 10: Number of households in temporary accommodation.**

| Year – as of:  | Number of households: |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| 31 March 2022  | 47 households.        |
| 31 March 2021. | 69 households.        |
| 31 March 2020. | 45 households.        |
| 31 March 2019. | 45 households.        |
| 31 March 2018. | 28 households.        |

(OIC figures).

At 21 February 2023, 72 households were in temporary accommodation. In addition to this, 13 households were staying with either friends or family and therefore do not require temporary accommodation. In effect this equates to 85 households in temporary accommodation representing an increase of 189% on the figures for March 2020. This reflects the increase in the number of presentations and the negative impact that COVID-19 has had on letting properties.

The Council 'flipped' four properties in 2021/22 and in 2020/21 in comparison to one property in 2019/20. Flipping relates to turning a temporary tenancy into a permanent let. We intend to continue 'flipping' tenancies when appropriate and feasible.

## Prevention

As noted above one of our Local Housing Strategy's key priorities "is to prevent and alleviate homelessness through early intervention and improved housing options". We remain committed to this goal. And this was similarly highlighted in our Housing Contribution Statement which highlights the need:

- For better and shared baseline information of the housing and support needs from people with long term, multiple health conditions and complex needs.
- To develop, with health and care teams, better shared assessment processes which would allow for links with housing support plans and the housing allocation process.

It is hoped that such developments would assist in preventing any potential homelessness.

The emphasis on prevention by the Council, as well as the Scottish Government, accentuates the need for good joint working arrangements including making timely referrals and signposting to relevant services such as primary care.

There has been a further decrease in the numbers of people seeking / provided with housing options information and advice. It is not yet clear why there has been such a decline in housing options work. The lack of other housing options could well be a factor and resource constraints in having insufficient time to fully explore other options may also play a part.

The Council's housing service is accredited at the National Standard for Information and Advice to provide Type I and Type II and the Council has maintained its accreditation since 2008 and was successfully re-accredited in 2022. The Council supports Orkney CAB in maintaining their accreditation.

In 2021/22 the most common information provided was on housing options across tenures this was generally at Type I level (provision of advice and signposting). Homelessness and security of tenure issues were the next most common areas of information and advice provided.

In 2021/22, regarding Type II advice (which is casework), the main area housing staff provided advice was tenants rights including security of tenure issues. Further measures taken by the Scottish Government until March 2023 – such as a moratorium on evictions - should mean there is limited need to provide very limited provision of information and advice in this area.

It is not yet clear how extensive the negative impact that the cost of living crisis will have on the residents of Orkney. The Council is acutely aware of the real difficulties that many residents in Orkney face including the potential for an increase/deepening of those in fuel poverty along with possible effect on residents' health. We will work

jointly with other agencies and services to mitigate negative consequences. We will seek to ensure that our staff are kept fully up to date with relevant developments so they are able to provide appropriate information and advice and to signpost residents to organisations and services to make sure that they are able to access all the available help.

**Table 11: Number of households receiving housing options/advice and information.**

| Year.   | 2017/18. | 2018/19. | 2019/20. | 2020/21. | 2021/22. |
|---------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Number. | 58.      | 31.      | 19.      | 22.      | 18.      |

(OIC figures).

The Council is hoping to introduce a housing options app to enhance effectiveness of our work in this area. Due to COVID-19 the introduction has been delayed. The app offers the opportunity to explore the possibility of broadening out the housing options approach to other organisations (with appropriate training). Also, discussions with other services such as health and social services regarding their potential role in preventing homelessness, for example by identifying and responding to any issues that could lead to future homelessness.

From the latest available figures, in the four years from 2018/19 to 2021/22 over a fifth of homeless applicants were not living in settled accommodation when they presented as homeless. The proportion fell slightly in 2019/20 to just under a quarter of all applicants. When they presented as homeless, in:

- 2018/19 thirty eight (28%) had no settled accommodation.<sup>5</sup>
- 2019/20 twenty seven (23%) of applicants had no settled accommodation.
- 2020/21 forty seven (34%) of applicants had no settled accommodation.
- 2021/22 thirty three (25%) of applicants had no settled accommodation.

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<sup>5</sup> Settled accommodation is defined as having the same accommodation for 6 months or more.

**Table 12: Number of applicants who were not living in settled accommodation 2018/19 to 2020/21**

| Year.                  | 2018-19.  |           |          | 2019-20.  |           |          | 2020-21.  |           |          | 2021-22.  |           |          |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| Age.                   | Under 25. | 25 to 64. | Over 65. | Under 25. | 25 to 64. | Over 65. | Under 25. | 25 to 64. | Over 65. | Under 25. | 25 to 64. | Over 65. |
| Female.                | 6.        | 7.        | -        | 6.        | 8.        | -        | 8.        | 12.       | 1.       | 5.        | 9.        | -        |
| Male.                  | 4.        | 20.       | 1.       | 4.        | 9.        | -        | 6.        | 20.       | -        | 7.        | 12.       | -        |
| Total male and female. | 38.       |           |          | 27.       |           |          | 47.       |           |          | 33.       |           |          |
| % of all applicants.   | 28%.      |           |          | 23%.      |           |          | 34%.      |           |          | 24%       |           |          |

(OIC figures).

Across the four years, young women, aged 16 to 24 years, were more likely to have presented as homeless from accommodation that was not settled compared to young men. The numbers of women presenting as homeless from 'unsettled' accommodation has been slowly rising in recent years as has the proportion. This has risen from 28% of applicants in 2018/19 to 23% in 2019/20, increased to 34% in 2020/21 and dropped to 24% in 2021/22.

The proportion of homeless applicants who were registered also on the common housing register has risen slightly over the three years up to 2020/21 where it stood at 42% but has decreased to 35% in 2021/22.

**Table 13: Number of applicants registered on the housing waiting list 2018/19 to 2020/21.**

| Year.                  | 2018-19.  |           |          | 2019-20.  |           |          | 2020-21.  |           |          | 2021-22.  |           |          |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| Age.                   | Under 25. | 25 to 64. | Over 65. | Under 25. | 25 to 64. | Over 65. | Under 25. | 25 to 64. | Over 65. | Under 25. | 25 to 64. | Over 65. |
| Female.                | 6.        | 15.       | -        | 9.        | 17.       | 5.       | 5.        | 18.       | 2.       | 12.       | 17.       | 0.       |
| Male.                  | 6.        | 16.       | 2.       | 6.        | 20.       | 0.       | 5.        | 10.       | 1.       | 6.        | 14.       | 0.       |
| Total male and female. | 45.       |           |          | 41.       |           |          | 57.       |           |          | 49.       |           |          |
| % of all applicants.   | 34%.      |           |          | 34%.      |           |          | 42%.      |           |          | 35%.      |           |          |

Women, who are homeless, are more likely to have registered on the housing list both in overall numbers and proportionately. Over the four years, 106 women were registered on the housing list in comparison to 86 men.

The proportion of applicants who were already on the housing list, when they became homeless and were also not living in settled accommodation, is a small proportion of the total number of homeless applicants. This amounts to less than a third of overall applicants for 2018/19 to 2021/22.

**Table 14: Applicants who were registered on the housing list and not living in settled accommodation 2018/19 to 2021/22.**

| Year:   | 2018 to 2019. | 2019 to 2020. | 2020 to 2021. | 2021 to 2022. |
|---|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Applicants on housing list and homeless from non-settled accommodation. | 11 (24%).     | 8 (20%).      | 5 (15%).      | 16 (33%).     |
| Percentage of total homeless applications.                              | 8%.           | 7%.           | 4%.           | 12%.          |

Though the proportions are small overall it could be a useful exercise to look in more detail at those or a selection of those applicants to assess if this could assist in future preventative approaches.

The number of people who presented as homeless within one year of having been previously assessed as homeless is generally very small and in 2021/22 there was one household where this applied. This compared to two households in 2020/21 remains very small at two households. The percentage of Scottish homeless households reassessed as homeless within one year was 5% in 2020/21 this compares with our figure of 0.75% in 2021/22.

**Table 15: Repeat homelessness 2018/19 to 2021/22.**

| Year.    | Number of cases of repeat homelessness. |
|----------|---|
| 2021/22. | 1.                                      |
| 2020/21. | 2.                                      |
| 2019/20. | 2.                                      |
| 2018/19. | 1.                                      |

(OIC figures).

The percentage of new Council tenancies allocated to homeless applicants which were sustained for more than a year was 90.91% for financial year 2020 to 2021, slightly higher than the figure of 88.37% for 2019/20.<sup>6</sup> And, at a slightly higher rate than those housed from the waiting list (89.2%).

We are conscious of the need to closely monitor repeat presentations and to go back further than a year to see if there any useful information that emerges which could assist future preventative measures.

<sup>6</sup> Orkney Islands Council Housing Services Annual Report 2020 -2021.

## **Support/Supported Accommodation**

In 2021/22, of those assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness, 27% of households were recorded as having one or more support need. This was similar to the previous year which accounted for a quarter of households and in 2019/20 32% of households (HL1 Figures).

Mental health and independent living/housing management skill were the most common areas of recorded support needs and in 2019/20 mental health issues were recorded for 23% of applicants. In 2020/21 there was a notable fall to 7% of households. Those households where support with independent living/housing management skills was identified stood at 11% and 13% respectively.

**Table 16: Support needs identified for households assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness 2019/20 to 2020/21.**

| Year.                        | Mental Health. |        | Learning Disability. |        | Physical Disability. |        | Medical Condition. |        | Drug/Alcohol Dependent. |        | Housing Management. |        |
|------------------------------|----------------|--------|----------------------|--------|----------------------|--------|--------------------|--------|-------------------------|--------|---------------------|--------|
|                              | 19/20.         | 20/21. | 19/20.               | 20/21. | 19/20.               | 20/21. | 19/20.             | 20/21. | 19/20.                  | 20/21. | 19/20.              | 20/21. |
| <b>16 – 24.</b>              |                |        |                      |        |                      |        |                    |        |                         |        |                     |        |
| <b>Single person.</b>        | 6.             | 2.     | 0.                   | 0.     | 0.                   | 0.     | 0.                 | 1.     | 1.                      | 0.     | 4.                  | 14.    |
| <b>Single parent.</b>        | 0.             | 0.     | 0.                   | 0.     | 0.                   | 0.     | 0.                 | 0.     | 0.                      | 0.     | 1.                  | 0.     |
| <b>Couple without child.</b> | 0.             | 0.     | 0.                   | 0.     | 0.                   | 0.     | 0.                 | 0.     | 0.                      | 0.     | 1.                  | 0.     |
| <b>Couple with child.</b>    | 0.             | 0.     | 0.                   | 0.     | 0.                   | 0.     | 0.                 | 0.     | 0.                      | 0.     | 0.                  | 0.     |
| <b>Other.</b>                | 0.             | 0.     | 0.                   | 0.     | 0.                   | 0.     | 0.                 | 0.     | 0.                      | 0.     | 0.                  | 0.     |
| <b>25 – 64.</b>              |                |        |                      |        |                      |        |                    |        |                         |        |                     |        |
| <b>Single person.</b>        | 14.            | 6.     | 0.                   | 0.     | 3.                   | 2.     | 1.                 | 4.     | 2.                      | 3.     | 3.                  | 1.     |
| <b>Single parent.</b>        | 1.             | 0.     | 0.                   | 0.     | 0.                   | 0.     | 0.                 | 0.     | 0.                      | 0.     | 1.                  | 0.     |
| <b>Couple without child.</b> | 0.             | 0.     | 0.                   | 0.     | 0.                   | 0.     | 0.                 | 0.     | 0.                      | 0.     | 0.                  | 0.     |

| Year.                 | Mental Health. |        | Learning Disability. |        | Physical Disability. |        | Medical Condition. |        | Drug/Alcohol Dependent. |        | Housing Management. |        |
|-----------------------|----------------|--------|----------------------|--------|----------------------|--------|--------------------|--------|-------------------------|--------|---------------------|--------|
|                       | 19/20.         | 20/21. | 19/20.               | 20/21. | 19/20.               | 20/21. | 19/20.             | 20/21. | 19/20.                  | 20/21. | 19/20.              | 20/21. |
| Couple with child.    | 0.             | 0.     | 0.                   | 0.     | 0.                   | 0.     | 0.                 | 0.     | 0.                      | 0.     | 0.                  | 0.     |
| <b>Over 65.</b>       |                |        |                      |        |                      |        |                    |        |                         |        |                     |        |
| Single person.        | 0.             | 0.     | 0.                   | 0.     | 2.                   | 1.     | 0.                 | 0.     | 0.                      | 0.     | 0.                  | 0.     |
| Single parent.        | 0.             | 0.     | 0.                   | 0.     | 0.                   | 0.     | 0.                 | 0.     | 0.                      | 0.     | 0.                  | 0.     |
| Couple without child. | 0.             | 0.     | 0.                   | 0.     | 0.                   | 0.     | 0.                 | 0.     | 0.                      | 0.     | 0.                  | 0.     |
| Couple with child.    | 0.             | 0.     | 0.                   | 0.     | 0.                   | 0.     | 0.                 | 0.     | 0.                      | 0.     | 0.                  | 0.     |
| <b>Total.</b>         | 21.            | 8.     | 0.                   | 0.     | 5.                   | 3.     | 1.                 | 5.     | 3.                      | 3.     | 10.                 | 15.    |

Issues relating to the mental health of some young people, in particular care experienced young people has been identified also in Orkney Health and Care's Mental Health Strategy.

Regarding care experienced young people Orkney Health and Care identified the need to assess "the range of supported accommodation provisions which may meet the varied needs of young care leavers". The Council works in partnership with Children and Families to ensure that there is accommodation available to young people leaving care and that they do not go through the homelessness route.

There has been no increase in the amount and type of supported accommodation provided in recent years. The supported accommodation provision for young people comprises:

- Three units with shared kitchen (Kirkwall).
- Four separate rooms, one of which has en-suite facilities and a kitchen area. Additionally there is a fifth room which is also en-suite and is used as accommodation for support staff (Stromness).
- Six move on self contained properties (Kirkwall).

Phoenix House (Women's Aid refuge):

- Three self contained flats within a refuge; and
- Four units of move on accommodation, owned by Orkney Housing Association Ltd and managed by the Council.

The Housing and Homelessness Service plan to discuss with Orkney Health and Care how best to meet the housing and support needs of those young people who have complex needs and who may require high levels of support including any care experienced young people. This will include exploring the potential of a HF4Y (Housing First for Youth) model. Financial resources are a key issue.

The Council's Housing Service provides a visiting/floating housing support service available to those with relatively low support needs. This includes for those in temporary accommodation, resettlement support and assistance, where necessary, with tenancy sustainment. The Council has a positive relationship with third sector organisations that also provide housing support services to which the Council makes referrals.

## **Settled Accommodation**

In relation to housing for let in Orkney, the proportion of both social sector and private sector housing to rent, is lower than the Scottish average.

It was estimated that in 2019 the private rented sector made up 10% of the housing stock in Orkney compared to 14% in Scotland as a whole and that the social rented

sector was estimated at comprising 15% of Orkney’s stock compared to 23% of the Scottish housing stock<sup>7</sup>.

While the average waiting time for the different property sizes has roughly remained the same there has been a noticeable increase in the number of households waiting to be housed, in particular of those waiting to be housed in one bedroom properties. This reflects the predominance of smaller households seeking housing whether through the housing list or because of homelessness.

**Table 17: Homeless households waiting time by size of property, 2017/18 to 2021/22 .**

| Year.    | Waiting time for one bed. | No of House holds. | Waiting time for two bed. | No of House holds. | Waiting time for three bed. | No of House holds. |
|----------|---------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| 2021/22. | 9 months.                 | 60.                | 5.3 months.               | 23.                | 8.9 months.                 | 10.                |
| 2020/21. | 9.2 months.               | 40.                | 5.4 months.               | 15.                | 11.6 months.                | 5.                 |
| 2019/20. | 8.2 months.               | 42.                | 4.1 months.               | 19.                | 8.6 months.                 | 2.                 |
| 2018/19. | 5.9 months.               | 37.                | 3.3 months.               | 15.                | 3.2 months.                 | 6.                 |
| 2017/18. | 7.5 months.               | 43.                | 3.4 months.               | 29.                | 5.8 months.                 | 5.                 |

(OIC figures).

The number of OIC properties available to let saw a welcome increase in 2021/22 compared to the previous four years where the numbers had been declining.

**Table 18: Number of OIC vacant self-contained properties 2017/18 to 2020/21.**

| Year:   | 2017/18. | 2018/19. | 2019/20. | 2020/21. | 2021/22. |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Number of lets of self-contained houses that became vacant. | 123.     | 94.      | 72.      | 67.      | 118.     |

(From OIC Annual Housing Reports).

In 2021/22 the Council let 118 properties, of those 72 were to homeless households (61%% of lets) a significant increase in numbers and the proportion compared to 2020/21. Fifteen properties (13% of total vacancies) were on the Orkney mainland, but outwith the main population centres of Kirkwall and Stromness, of those six were let to homeless households.

Sixty five of the lets to homeless households were in Kirkwall (48) or Stromness (17), 55% of the total number of lets in 2021/22.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-statistics-stock-by-tenure/>

The majority of homeless households are waiting for a one bedroomed property in Kirkwall.

In 2020/21 the Council let 67 properties, 23 of which were to homeless households (34% of lets). 29 properties (43% of total vacancies) were on the Orkney mainland, but outwith the main population centres of Kirkwall and Stromness. Only 3 homeless households were housed within these areas. During 2019/20 the Council had 72 properties to let of which 22 were let to Homeless Households (30.5%); (14 Kirkwall, 7 Stromness, 1 Mainland). This compares to lets to homeless households in 2018/19 where the Council let 94 properties of which 30 were to homeless households (32% of Council lets).

**Table 19: OIC housing allocations by household type.**

| Year:                    | 2017/18. | 2018/19. | 2019/20. | 2020/21. | 2021/22. |
|--------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Homeless households.     | 31.2%.   | 28.7%.   | 30.6%.   | 35.7%.   | 58.4%.   |
| Waiting list applicants. | 54.7%.   | 56.4%.   | 48.6%.   | 48.6%.   | 31.2%.   |
| Transfer applicants.     | 14.1%.   | 12.8%.   | 20.8%.   | 15.7%.   | 8.8%.    |
| Other.                   | -        | 2.1%.    | -        | -        | 1.6%.    |

(From OIC Annual Housing Reports 2019/20).

In 2021/22 Orkney Housing Association Ltd re-let 65 properties of which 23 were referrals to the Council which were let to homeless households (35% of lets). There was a total of 85 lets and 6 mutual exchanges. In 2020/21 OHAL let 53 properties of which 36 were to homeless households (68% of their lets)<sup>8</sup>. In 2019/20 OHAL let 78 properties and let 35 to homeless households (45% of lets).

During 2020/21 Orkney Housing Association Ltd let 53 properties of which 36 were let to homeless households (67% of lets). In 2019/20 OHAL let 78 properties of which 35 were to homeless households (45% of their lets)<sup>9</sup>.

Compared to previous years there the housing outcomes for homeless households in 2021/22 have been concentrated in the social housing sector – 72% permanently housed by the Council and 28% permanently housed by Orkney Housing Association.

<sup>8</sup> These percentages are based on a mix of OIC, OHAL and HL1 figures.

<sup>9</sup> These percentages are based on a mix of OIC, OHAL and HL1 figures.

**Table 20: Outcomes for households assessed as unintentionally homeless or threatened with homelessness, 2018/19 to 2020/21.**

|   | 2018/19. | 2019/20. | 2020/21. | 2021/22. |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| LA tenancy.                                 | 30.      | 25.      | 27.      | 71.      |
| RSL tenancy.                                | 30.      | 35.      | 36.      | 28.      |
| Private rented tenancy.                     | 0.       | 5.       | 12.      | 4.       |
| Returned to previous/present accommodation. | 10.      | 5.       | 14.      | 4.       |
| Moved in with friends/relatives.            | 5.       | 10.      | 10.      | 4.       |
| Home Ownership                              | -        | -        | -        | 1.       |
| Home Ownership – Shared Ownership           | -        | -        | -        | 1.       |
| Other – known.                              | 0.       | 5.       | 6.       | 2.       |
| Not known – contact maintained.             | 0.       | 10.      | 10.      | 4.       |
| All outcomes.                               | 75.      | 100.     | 115.     | 119.     |

(HL1 figures).

As noted above the greatest number of lets to homeless households each year is in Kirkwall. The ability to house homeless households is affected by the size and area where vacancies arise. The predominant need/demand is for one bedroom properties and there are insufficient vacancies of this size.

Currently 28 homeless households are waiting for a one bedroom property in Kirkwall. The majority of social housing developments detailed in the Council's Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) are planned for Kirkwall where the highest demand for social rented housing lies.

The proportion of young people housed in the social sector decreased in 2021/22 and accounted for 28% of those housed. This compared to 50% in 2020/21, 60% in 2019/20 and 67% in 2018/19. As with other homeless households young people are predominately housed in settled accommodation in the social sector - 93% of those housed.

**Table 21: Outcomes for young households assessed unintentionally homeless and contact maintained 2019/20 and 2020/21<sup>10</sup>.**

| Year.    | LA tenancy. | Private rented tenancy. | Returned to previous / present accommodation. | Moved-in with friends/ relatives. | RSL. | All. |
|----------|-------------|-------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|------|------|
| 2020/21  | 5.          | 5.                      | 5.  | 5.                                | 10.  | 30.  |
| 2019/20. | 5.          | 5.                      | -   | 5.                                | 10.  | 25.  |

(HL1 figures).

The Council has seen the proportion of their let to homeless households increase and will keep under review the proportion of our lets made to homeless households. We continue to monitor, with Orkney Housing Association Ltd, our section 5 agreement.

The Council's new allocations policy scheduled for introduction in April 2021, has been delayed due to COVID-19. Once implemented, we will be reviewing its implementation to assess what, if any, impact it has on housing homeless households.

COVID-19 delayed the start of and completion of some developments in Orkney. Some new build social housing scheduled came on stream in the summer of 2021 including 32 one and two bedroom properties. This assisted us in addressing the need of a number of those homeless households waiting to be rehoused.

The Council's Strategic Housing Investment Plan 2020/21 to 2025/26 aims for the Council and Orkney Housing Association Ltd together to complete 297 affordable units of housing by the end of the Plan.

## **5. Challenges and Gaps**

### **Main Challenges and Gaps**

While the Homelessness Service has achieved much since the last Homelessness Strategy there are a number of developments which this current strategy will address so we continue to improve our response to prevent homelessness and to alleviate homelessness as quickly as possible when it occurs. New challenges which the Council has to address and areas where further improvements can be made are outlined below.

<sup>10</sup> Scottish Government figures; <https://www.gov.scot/publications/youth-homelessness-statistics>

## **Information and Advice and Housing Options**

The Council places great importance on preventing homelessness by the timely provision of accessible, professional information and advice and recognises that the service continues to improve and is able to meet new demands.

It is important that the Council and partners are able to assist people on a range of housing issues across tenures with the aim of preventing homelessness and assisting in sustainability of accommodation. This requires well trained and knowledgeable staff, and appropriate means of providing information, advice and advocacy across a broad range of areas.

The Council and Orkney CAB are the main sources of information and advice. It is also important that all organisations which deal with homelessness or people who are threatened with homelessness have access to sufficient information and training so they are comfortable in taking on a role of providing information and advice which could for example prevent homelessness occurring.

The strategic principles/objectives of the advice and information strategy include:

- To provide a comprehensive and up to date service in an expanding range of areas in an increasingly complex environment.
- To ensure that other services are sufficiently on board with their role in homelessness prevention.
- To ensure that staff are properly trained, are kept up to date with relevant developments to enable them to fulfil this role and that sufficient resources are made available.
- To ensure advice and information services are equally available throughout the Orkney Isles given the nature of Orkney's geography with its dispersed rural and islands communities.

## **Housing Options**

The Council's Housing Options approach emphasises homeless prevention and we are committed to developing this approach and ensuring that the staff providing advice and information on housing options continue to be kept up to date with all relevant changes and developments.

We are keen to develop a pilot on Personal Housing Plans we are, however, conscious of the additional resources required for this to be undertaken properly.

There are particular challenges in being able to provide a realistic range of housing options. This is due to, for instance:

- The shortage of social housing to rent and of the appropriate size.
- Accessing the private rented sector which is smaller in size than the Scottish average and the shared room rate for those under 35 years of age.
- For some affordability issues particularly regarding owner occupation.

This is set against a backdrop of population growth and household formation for example through relationship breakdown.

### **Relationship breakdown**

Being 'asked to leave' and non-violent relationship breakdown remain the two most common reasons provided by those presenting as homeless. The third most frequent reason is homeless due to violent or abusive disputes within the household. This is so in Orkney and across local authorities in Scotland. The restrictions imposed by the response to COVID-19 have resulted in an increase in demand to a number of services and already there is a knock on effect on the numbers that present as homeless.

### **Abuse**

There is a consistently high proportion of applicants who become homeless due to violent or abusive disputes within the household. Women's Aid Orkney provides accommodation, advice and support to women and children who have experienced domestic abuse. There are security measures available through current legislative structures. The introduction of further protective measures will allow for greater choice in whether to remain or leave the home and if the choice is to remain this could mean an increase in homeless presentations from the abusive partner.

While there is a Corporate Domestic Abuse Strategy there is not a specific policy which covers the Council's housing management and homelessness service and is underpinned by the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 which will be phased in shortly.

### **Young People**

The Council's supported accommodation currently managed by Right There is an important resource which prepares young people, including for some care leavers, to live independently. There are some care leavers and young homeless people who have high and complex support needs and who would benefit from a more specific type of housing with support model such as the Housing First for Youth.

There is a need to ensure that support is available when young people move into their own tenancies to assist with resettlement and that it is available at a later stage if the young person is encountering difficulties in sustaining their tenancy. Support to assist in accessing employment, training and education is also important for many young people.

### **Health and social care**

The Housing Contribution statement highlights a number of ways in which the Council's Housing Service assists Orkney Health and Care in meeting their outcomes for health and social care, for example by:

- Developing better shared assessment processes with health and care teams to link with housing support plans and the housing allocation process.

- Maintaining our existing housing options approach but extending it to improve longer term planning and anticipating future needs by extending our prevention/early intervention approach to housing need.
- Recording and analysing a range of data and indicators on housing need, demand and provision to provide a robust baseline of future and anticipated needs.

The importance of further joint work with Orkney Health and Care is underlined with the increased focus on homelessness prevention and also the likelihood of the introduction of public bodies having a duty to assist in the prevention of homelessness.

While there are few people presenting as homeless on discharge from hospital there should be a joint review of admission and discharge protocols to avoid wherever possible the use of temporary accommodation and to identify and address any potential risk before a stay in hospital leads to a crisis.

### **Support**

The Council has a positive working relationship with a range of third sector organisations which offer a variety of services which homeless people can access. It is important to ensure that homeless people are kept informed of and referred to, if required and agreed, to appropriate services. Such services could include, for instance:

- Women's Aid Orkney which provides emotional and practical support to women who have experienced domestic abuse. It also provides support with their children as well as refuge accommodation.
- Orkney Blide Trust which provides a number of services including housing support to people in their own home, support to survivors of childhood abuse, a counselling service and a Befriending Service.
- Right There's Y-Talk provides a youth counselling service for children and young people up to the age of 25 and their Y-Change service which provides support to people aged 16 years and over who misuse drugs and alcohol and have been involved in offending/reoffending or anti-social behaviours.
- Relationships Scotland Orkney offers relationship and individual counselling, family mediation and parenting support for separated parents. They also offer specialist drug and alcohol support and counselling; specialist support and play therapy for children. In addition, trained support workers can help individuals and families with a range of issues such as anxiety and depression, parenting, relationship difficulties and other challenges.

The Council's Housing Support Service plays an important role in enabling homeless households to sustain their accommodation and to live independently. There is a qualified Social Worker and a Housing Support Officer, employed directly by the Housing Service. Their work is targeted at ensuring the housing support needs of homeless people are being met appropriately. This allows specialist Social Work skills to be used to assist those with a range of issues including addictions.

In addition, the Council employs a Housing Support worker who works directly with tenants in this respect. Currently COVID-19 adjustments mean that support is predominantly provided by telephone to clients. Socially distanced visits for the more vulnerable of our tenants were undertaken. In 2021/22, of those who presented as homeless, 65 were given a housing support assessment and of those 35 were recorded as not requiring any support, 25 required support and five were assessed as requiring, but not provided with, support. This indicates the pressure which the housing support/support services face.

Mental health is often the most frequently identified support issue of people assessed as homeless. Orkney Health and Care's Mental Health Strategy highlights that demand for mental health services continues to grow including an increase in referrals to Child and Adolescence Mental Health Service (CAMHS) in 2019/20 compared to the previous year.

We are not yet able to assess if there will be increasing number of homeless people who may have support needs as a result of COVID-19 including in relation to their mental health.

The Council recognises the difficulties there are in trying to ensure that those living on the isles are able to access appropriate support services.

For homeless people's health and well being it is essential that these services are adequately resourced to be able to meet the demand for their services.

### **Temporary Accommodation**

The pressure for temporary accommodation increased in 2020/21. For example In the three months since December 2020 the number of households in temporary accommodation did not fall below 61 with the highest number standing at 65 at the beginning of January. During that period, 17 households were rehoused into settled accommodation.

In the light of COVID-19, 16 additional units of temporary accommodation were sourced as part of the Council's stock for housing homeless households. These properties were either 'flipped', rotated or maintained as part of our temporary accommodation stock.

The Council had four housing projects under development and the majority of them came off stream in the second half of 2021. This increased supply of houses assisted the Council in meeting some of the demand from homeless households who were in temporary accommodation.

There continued to be pressure on our temporary accommodation in 2021/22, though not to the same extent. While there was a fall in the number of households accommodated at the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2021/22 there was an increase in the number of days households spent in temporary accommodation.

There was an increase also in 2021/22 of the number of nights spent in Bed and Breakfast though there was a fall in average length of stay compared to the year

before. The Council reluctantly uses Bed and Breakfast establishments and the extent of its use is dependent on the availability of temporary accommodation. The Council has not, since the introduction of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order, breached the Order. We intend to ensure that this remains the case in the future even as the Order now covers all homeless households.

We are aware of the challenges of meeting the temporary/emergency accommodation needs if someone's homelessness is due to an emergency (for example a fire) and for those who become homeless on the isles where demand is not predictable.

The number of homeless households varies as does their length of stay. This is affected by a number of factors including demand, housing supply, particularly of social housing, and the proportion of social housing lets being made to homeless households.

One of our main challenges which relates, in part at least, to the supply of social/affordable housing is to minimise the time spent by homeless households in temporary accommodation. This highlights the need for continued investment in social/affordable housing to meet the high level of demand in Orkney.

The Council flipped four properties in 2021/22 and we will continue to look for appropriate accommodation to convert from temporary into settled accommodation.

## **Settled Accommodation**

### **Social Housing**

The demand for social housing in Orkney remains high. The Council and Orkney Housing Association Ltd operate a joint housing list which stood at 1001 in July 2022, and, the greatest demand - from 604 applicants on the waiting list is centred on Kirkwall as is the case of homeless households.

The vast majority of homeless households are permanently rehoused in the social sector. Over the last 5 years the time taken to rehouse homeless applicants was greatest in 2019/20 and 2020/21. This may be explained, in part at least, by the delay in some new build properties coming on stream and the historic imbalance of required house sizes compared to the demand including demand from homeless households.

The Council is aware that there needs to be an increase in the proportion of social housing being let to homeless households (the proportion of Council lets in 2021/22 increased to 61%) and this should result in a decrease in the time spent in temporary accommodation. This increase should be in both the Council and Orkney Housing Association Ltd stock. The Council's arrangement with Orkney Housing Association Ltd for section 5 referrals currently remains at the same level of 75%.

Four Council housing projects were developed during 2021 and 2022. These properties becoming available for let greatly assisted with housing homeless households previously in temporary accommodation.

The Council has been supporting the efforts of Islands Trusts to attract funding for housing. Several island communities have been successful in attracting funding from the Scottish Land Fund and the Scottish Government's Rural and Islands Housing Fund.

### **Private Rented Sector**

The ability to access the private rented sector is limited and is impacted also by affordability and benefit issues. Seven percent of households were housed in that sector in 2019/20 whereas no household was housed in private sector properties the year before. In 2020/21 ten percent of households were housed in the private sector.

It is difficult as yet to assess what impact, if any, COVID-19 may have had on the private rented market for instance any growth in AirB&B can affect the numbers of properties available to rent.

The Council operates a rent deposit scheme to assist some of those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness in accessing this sector. The number of participating landlords has declined in recent years and if sufficient resources were available, the Council would wish to re-engage with private landlords in order to increase their participation.

Orkney Islands Property Developments Ltd (OIPDL) is a private sector company which provides a range of rented accommodation including some general lets and student accommodation. OIPDL is a registered Letting Agency. The Council has a good relationship with OIPDL and means to explore the potential for closer partnership working with OIPDL, for example, in relation to increasing access to the private rented sector.

## **6. Actions**

The actions the Housing Service intends to use to respond to the issues raised are set out below. These are generally (not always easily) within the context of some of the outcomes contained in the Scottish Social Housing Charter.

There are a number of actions which may be difficult to undertake without additional resources including staff and the actions emphasise the importance of joint and collaborative working in meeting the needs of people who are homeless or people who are threatened with homelessness.

The Housing Service recognises the importance of ensuring that the views and voices of homeless people are heard and responded to, and we will carry out consultation exercises regularly regarding our service and where improvements can be made. We will consider different methods to involve them to ensure and that their experiences inform the delivery, and future planning, of services.

**People looking for housing get information that helps them make informed choices and decisions about the range of housing options available to them (Outcomes 7,8,9).**

The Housing Service is seeking to improve our Housing Options Service by introducing a Housing Options 'app'/tool (this was delayed due to COVID-19). This will increase the scope and reach of Housing Options advice and information. Its introduction will provide further opportunities for joint work with our partners and the expansion of a housing options approach. This should allow for early intervention in cases of people who are threatened with homelessness with a view to preventing homelessness from occurring.

Further the Housing Service will examine the possibility of establishing a pilot of Personal Housing Plans which would allow for an assessment of the resources required to broaden their use and ensure that they were comprehensive. This will include consulting with partner services/agencies.

If it is evident during a Housing Options interview that the person is homeless or threatened with homelessness we will ensure that they complete a homeless assessment, while still progressing with other Housing Options solutions. We will ensure that any identified support needs are responded to.

We will discuss with Women's Aid Orkney on the implementation of the Domestic Abuse Policy and the development of accompanying procedures to include possible ways of safely preventing homelessness for those who have experienced domestic abuse taking account of forthcoming legislative changes<sup>11</sup>.

Also we will consult with Orkney's Domestic abuse/violence against women forum regarding how, for example sexual abuse, rape and sexual assault may impact on housing and the potential for homelessness which should be incorporated into policy and practice.

We will consider different ways to increase awareness of, and to publicise, the range of services available. A review of the Council's website has recently been completed. The development of a Facebook page and other possibilities may assist to ensure that more rural and island communities are also able to access information and advice.

### **Tenants and people on housing lists can review their housing options (Outcomes 7,8,9).**

We wish to establish if there are any other and more appropriate housing solutions for people on the housing list including those who do not have a 'priority pass'. Where this could be the case, we will offer a housing options interview.

### **People at risk of losing their homes get advice on preventing homelessness (Outcomes 7,8,9).**

Use the introduction of the enhanced Housing Options Services to publicise widely the Services and homelessness prevention to a broad range of agencies and to the general public.

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<sup>11</sup> Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Bill 2020

We will maximise the use of Discretionary Housing Payments to prevent homelessness.

We will discuss with Orkney Housing Association Ltd and private landlords, the potential to introduce enhanced practices relating to serving section 11 notices<sup>12</sup>, and discuss with private landlords their new responsibilities regarding pre action requirements if taking actions for repossession. This should allow for earlier intervention in cases of potential evictions, as a further means of preventing homelessness.

The Council has a protocol with through care and after care services to ensure that young people leaving care do not go through the homelessness system to access accommodation. They may though be housed in the same supported accommodation service as young people who presented as homeless. We will along with our partners consider the recommendations contained in the 'Youth Homelessness Prevention Pathway- Improving Care Leavers Housing Pathways' with a view to how best they could be implemented within Orkney's setting.

In order to try and prevent young people becoming homeless we will examine in greater detail their housing history to get a better understanding of triggers and the potential for early interventions to prevent homelessness occurring. This exercise could assess also the accommodation and support needs of young people who are becoming homeless and if current provision is meeting their needs. Also, this exercise will consider the second 'Youth Homelessness Prevention Pathway' which is for all young people who are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.

**Homeless people get prompt and easy access to help and advice (outcome 12).**

**12).**

Review the training needs of staff in the homelessness/housing options service. We will also open discussions with other services/agencies regarding any knowledge gaps and areas where training would be beneficial and develop jointly a training programme with a focus on prevention particularly given the potential for legislative change in this area. This could include joint/interagency training:

- to assist in identifying, for example, those threatened with homelessness, the need for early intervention and possible sources of assistance;
- to develop a deeper and shared understanding of what services can offer, how best they can be accessed and support homelessness prevention;
- relating to developing trauma informed practice.

Further:

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<sup>12</sup> Note North and Island Hub section 11 Report, 2020 and subsequent guidance <https://www.scotlandshousingnetwork.org/what-we-do/publications/section-11/>

- Training targeted to particular services and their particular role in prevention, for example, for NHS staff in homelessness issues, housing options advice and discharge protocols.

To gain a better understanding of the respective roles and resources of our partners in preventing or alleviating homelessness we will seek to engage with our partners in 'pathway mapping' and that processes are informed by those who have experienced homelessness. We will consider different means to keep our partners informed and up to date with developments regarding homelessness and related services.

We will make sure that housing staff and staff in other agencies are able to respond appropriately to Orkney residents who are affected by the cost of living crisis through being kept fully informed and up to date of all relevant developments.

We will ensure that people living on the Isles can access the up to date information and advice they require. Continue to explore the potential of social media as a method of providing information and keeping people up to date.

**Provision of suitable, good-quality temporary or emergency accommodation when needed (outcome 12).**

Temporary accommodation needs will be reviewed regularly, will be guided by the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan, while ensuring we can meet people's needs including the geographical spread of the properties. We will discuss with OHAL the potential for using some of their properties for temporary accommodation.

We will continue to consider ways in which rent in temporary accommodation could be reduced.

We will continue to explore how best to meet emergency accommodation needs for those who become homeless on the isles such as exploring the possibility of locally provided Bed and Breakfast for use in such occasions or sourcing private lets while ensuring that any accommodation used meets the Council's standards.

We will explore with Orkney Health and Care and any other appropriate services how best to provide appropriate support and accommodation for those with complex/multiple needs including 'Housing First' model and in particular, a Housing First for Youth model for those young people and care leavers who have complex/multiple needs who may benefit from such a provision.

Ensure all homeless households when leaving temporary or emergency accommodation continue to have the opportunity to participate in an exit survey as a means of checking the quality of the accommodation and to ensure it is maintained and improved. An electronic means of sourcing quality information should be sourced.

**Homeless people are offered continuing support to help them get and keep the home they are entitled to (Outcome 12).**

We will seek the cooperation of Orkney Health and Care and the Third Sector in assessing the type and capacity of support services available in Orkney. This would identify if and where there are any gaps in provision and could inform preventative approaches and any developments with Housing First. This should include reviewing the times at which support is available to assess the possibility of having more flexible services which operates outwith 'office hours'. This could encourage greater uptake of services where there is non-engagement by service users.

Assess and where appropriate develop or update joint protocols and procedures for needs assessment to ensure appropriate support for people including those with complex or multiple needs. Ensure there are effective referral arrangements in place to enable links into the full range of relevant services.

Ensure that staff are kept aware of the links between health and housing including the impact of dampness and fuel poverty can have on health, any such issues are recorded and where appropriate people are referred/signposted to relevant services.

**Tenants (and others) get the information they need on how to obtain support to remain in their home; and ensure suitable support is available (Outcome 11).**

The council is aware of the need to increase the number of housing lets which homeless people receive and will increase the proportion of allocation initially so we met the Scottish average of 42%.

We will, along with Orkney Housing Association Ltd, review our section 5 agreement to assess how well it is working. We will also consider if Orkney Housing Association Ltd 's choice based lettings methods of allocating properties has any impact on the rehousing of homeless households.

Review the extent of joint work with Orkney Health and Care. In doing so we will explore ways in which joint working can be improved such as around prevention of homelessness, in accessing and in the delivery of support services including housing support.

Discuss with our partners such as Orkney Health and Care ways to strengthen/increase capacity of the housing support services in order to assist with homelessness prevention and sustainability of accommodation, across tenures.

Explore with other partners the potential for further prevention and early intervention activities including referral arrangements to assist in maintaining people in their homes, to be across all housing tenures and include those falling into arrears or those who require adaptations.

We hope to revive the multi-agency (involving both the public and third sectors) Homelessness Strategic Group to assist in taking these actions forward and to monitor progress.

## **7. Monitoring and Reviewing the Strategy**

The Homelessness Strategic Group will be responsible for the implementing and monitoring of the Homelessness Strategy. Where useful subgroups may be set up to implement specific aspects of the Strategy.

The Council also monitors the success of its local outcome agreements through its Service Level Agreements. Funding is allocated annually and is aligned with budget commitments.

Progress will be reported annually to the Council's Education, Leisure and Housing Committee on a regular basis and Information will also be made available to the public through the Council's website.