

## **Item: 11**

**Education, Leisure and Housing Committee: 8 September 2021.**

**Homelessness Strategy.**

**Report by Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing.**

### **1. Purpose of Report**

To consider revised Homelessness Strategy for the period 2021 to 2026.

### **2. Recommendations**

The Committee is invited to note:

#### **2.1.**

That the Council has a statutory duty to produce a Homelessness Strategy.

#### **2.2.**

That the national policy area surrounding homelessness has been subject to significant change in recent years.

#### **2.3.**

The draft Homelessness Strategy for the period 2021 to 2026, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, which is underpinned by a detailed Profile of Homelessness.

#### **2.4.**

That the Local Housing Strategy and the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan also include local information in respect of homelessness.

**It is recommended:**

#### **2.5.**

That the draft Homelessness Strategy, referred to at paragraph 2.3 above, be approved for consultation purposes.

#### **2.6.**

That the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing should submit a report, to the meeting of the Committee to be held in March 2022, regarding the outcome of the consultation process, referred to at paragraph 2.5 above, together with a revised Homelessness Strategy for adoption.

## **3. Background**

### **3.1.**

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires all Local Authorities to produce a Homelessness Strategy for their area.

### **3.2.**

Orkney's first Homelessness Strategy was published in 2003 and has been updated on a five-yearly basis since then.

### **3.3.**

The Homelessness Strategy is underpinned by a Profile of Homelessness which is a detailed study of the issues affecting homelessness in Orkney. An updated Profile of Homelessness is the topic of another report.

### **3.4.**

The Profile of Homelessness is a document which includes the analysis of a range of demographic information and the assessment of local services and agreements which affect homelessness.

### **3.5.**

Since 2007, Local Authorities have not specifically had to produce separate Homelessness Strategies, and guidance from the Scottish Government advises that Homelessness Strategies can now be integrated within Local Housing Strategies although they remain a statutory requirement.

### **3.6.**

The Council's Local Housing Strategy 2017 – 2022 includes a chapter on homelessness and this identified a range of actions, most of which are underway.

### **3.7.**

Since 2019 councils have been required to produce a Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan for a five-year term to outline how it intends to progress to an approach of rapidly rehousing homeless households and reducing its use of temporary accommodation.

### **3.8.**

The wider strategic planning context includes the Homelessness Strategy, Local Housing Strategy, Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan interlinking with the Strategic Housing Investment Plan and the Housing Contribution Statement.

### **3.9.**

While technically it would be possible to dispense with the production of a free-standing homelessness strategy, homelessness is commonly reported in relation to an urban context. Homelessness in the context of a remote and rural area, is less well represented and it is important to continue to keep a strong focus on homelessness.

### **3.10.**

Homelessness on Orkney may be less visible than in urban areas but it remains present and the impact of homelessness on Orkney is significant. During financial year 2020/21, the number of households who were resident in temporary accommodation increased by over 50% to 69 households and there were significant challenges in being able to permanently rehouse the households concerned.

### **3.11.**

Therefore, in order to ensure that homelessness remains an area of focus, a Homelessness Strategy continues to be produced.

## **4. Development of the Homelessness Strategy**

### **4.1.**

The national context surrounding homelessness has continued to expand in recent years and the Scottish Government has published a range of key policy documents including its “Ending Homelessness Together” action plan which outline its ambition to end homelessness and its requirements for national and local government to work in partnership with third sector agencies in order to deliver.

### **4.2.**

The work of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group at a national level, has also been central to the Scottish Government’s targets in relation to homelessness.

### **4.3.**

The Homelessness Strategy remains central to the Council’s plans to ensure homelessness is addressed and partnership working is central to that aim. The Homelessness Strategy continues to support local outcome agreements which have been shown to be effective. Local outcome agreements are used to extend the advice, support, counselling and advocacy services available throughout Orkney.

### **4.4.**

Powers are delegated to the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee, to determine funding awards to relevant agencies in line with their roles relating to the Homelessness Strategy.

#### **4.5.**

In developing the Homelessness Strategy, consideration has been given to how its content differs to that of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan. There is certainly overlap but specifically the Homelessness Strategy and Profile of Homelessness which underpins it, look at the issues specific to Orkney and what the best means of addressing these are at a local level.

#### **4.6.**

The strategy highlights a range of challenging issues such as uncertainties in respect of future budgetary conditions, the increasing housing waiting list and additional challenges in relation to the ongoing provision of both permanent and temporary accommodation.

#### **4.7.**

The result is a Homelessness Strategy which remains fresh and includes an ongoing commitment to address homelessness, to continue to work jointly and to endeavour to improve service delivery in partnership with related services.

#### **4.8.**

It is now necessary to consult with a range of partner agencies regarding their views on the draft document. From there a final document will be developed and agreed.

### **5. Process of Consultation**

#### **5.1.**

Once the consultative draft of the Homelessness Strategy is approved, a consultation plan will be drafted in line with the Council's guidelines on consultation and engagement.

#### **5.2.**

The process of consultation will include some consultation events to include a range of stakeholders including the Integration Joint Board and a broad range of partner agencies, and the document being available online and underpinned by a survey. Paper copies will be available on request.

#### **5.3.**

Following a process of consultation, the revised Homelessness Strategy will be presented to the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee for approval.

### **6. Equalities Impact**

An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

## **7. Corporate Governance**

This report relates to the Council complying with governance and procedural issues and therefore does not directly support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Council Plan and the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan.

## **8. Financial Implications**

### **8.1.**

Expenditure on homelessness is charged to the Other Housing budget within the General Fund.

### **8.2.**

The net homelessness budget for 2020/21 was £806,400 with an actual net spend of £733,700 which gives an underspend for the financial year of £72,700.

### **8.3.**

The underspend position outlined above has arisen due to the sheer demand for temporary accommodation meaning that all properties are full and rent is being accrued, there is limited turnover in properties and therefore costs attributed to turning the properties over ahead of relet are minimised.

### **8.4.**

Inside the budget outlined above, there is a budget of £451,400 which is aligned with the Homelessness Strategy.

## **9. Legal Aspects**

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

## **10. Contact Officers**

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## **11. Appendices**

Appendix 1: Draft Homelessness Strategy 2021 to 2026.

Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment.



# **Orkney Islands Council**

## **Homelessness Strategy 2021-2026**

## Version Control

<b>Document Reference.</b>		<b>Rev.</b>	<b>Issue date.</b>	<b>Reason for issue.</b>	<b>Reviewer.</b>	<b>Sign.</b>
HD STRAT 135 (replaced 116).	Draft.	1.	2 August 2021.	New.	Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing.	

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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 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 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 relating to local connection be enacted. This would mean, that referrals between local authorities should be suspended and in the summer of 2020, the Scottish Government consulted on modifying the operation of local connection referrals. The Council has particular concerns about how any changes could 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.

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.

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 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> <b>Everyone has a home that meets their needs.</b> <b>Homelessness is ended.</b> <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.
- Secure access for all to national services.

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

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

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.	£37,424.
Employability Orkney.	Support for Co-Ordinator's post covering umbrella organisation including supported employment project and furniture store.	£15,758.
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).	£149,358.
Advocacy Services.	To provide funding to ensure there is access to an advocacy service (CAB).	£15,157.
Drug and Alcohol and Counselling Advisory Service.	To support the service to assist those with drug and alcohol issues (currently under development).	£7,350.
Women's Aid Orkney and MARAC.	To support the service to assist women and their children who have experienced domestic abuse.	£12,864. £2,060.
Employability Orkney -Restart Orkney.	To support the furniture reuse project.	£7,277.
Starter Packs Orkney.	To support the starter packs project.	£2,185.
Relationships Scotland.	To provide counselling and mediation to endeavour to prevent homelessness.	£1,967.
Ypeople.	To provide housing support inside the Young Persons' Supported Accommodation Projects.	£200,000.
<b>Total:</b>		<b>£451,400.</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 a training programme with partners in the public and third sectors to enable their services to participate in a broad range of preventative approaches/activities.
- 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.
- 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.
- Revisit housing education and develop/access to suitable materials to be used in schools/college.

## **4. Homelessness in Orkney**

### **Applications**

In 2020/21, the Council received 136 homeless applications, 18 more than in 2019/20 - a rise of 15%. This was, however, against a fall in 2019/20 of 16 homeless applications (12%).

At the end of July 2021 there were 51 homeless applications, which compares with 37 applications received at the same time in 2019/20.

**Table 1: Homeless applications and homeless assessments 2015-16 to 2019-20.**

<b>Reason.</b>	<b>2016/17.</b>	<b>2017/18.</b>	<b>2018/19.</b>	<b>2019/20.</b>	<b>2020/21.</b>
Homeless applications.	125.	118.	134.	119.	136.
Assessed as homeless.	98.	97.	107.	93.	108.
% assessed as homeless.	78%.	82%.	80%.	78%.	79%.

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

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 marginally increased in 2020/21 from 23 days to 23.5 days. This was due to largely external factors, for example, where contact was made with the applicant whilst they were not in Orkney.

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

<b>2016/17.</b>	<b>2017/18.</b>	<b>2018/19.</b>	<b>2019/20.</b>	<b>2020/21.</b>
120.	146.	114.	188.	194.

(OIC 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 - eight applicants in 2020/21 in comparison to 10 applicants for financial years 2019/20 and 2018/19.

There were three applicants who were roofless the night before presenting in 2020/21, in comparison with five applicants in 2019/20, half the number of those presenting in 2018/19.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/homelessness-scotland-2019-2020/>

**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>
2016/17.	10.	5.
2017/18.	15.	10.
2018/19.	10.	10.
2019/20.	10.	5.
2020/21.	8.	3.

(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.

**Table 4: Reasons for applying as homeless in Orkney, 2016/17 to 2020/21.**

<b>Reason.</b>	<b>2016/17.</b>	<b>2017/18.</b>	<b>2018/19.</b>	<b>2019/20.</b>	<b>2020/21.</b>
Dispute within household / relationship breakdown: non-violent.	30.	37.	58.	52.	46.
Dispute within household: violent or abusive.	15.	6.	18.	13.	13.
Asked to leave.	25.	20.	31.	19.	38.
Harassment/abuse outwith the home.	8.	13.	5.	7.	7.
Mortgage default / rent arrears.	3.	3.	1.	2.	1.
Other action by landlord.	5.	5.	3.	3.	4.
Secure accommodation given up.	8.	3.	5.	3.	3.
Loss of service / tied accommodation.	1.	1.	0.	2.	4.



<b>Reason.</b>	<b>2016/17.</b>	<b>2017/18.</b>	<b>2018/19.</b>	<b>2019/20.</b>	<b>2020/21.</b>
Discharge from prison / hospital / care / other institution.	7.	1.	2.	0.	1.
Emergency (fire, flood, etc).	1.	0.	0.	1.	1.
Forced division and sale of matrimonial home.	1.	0.	1.	2.	1.
Overcrowding.	0.	1.	1.	1.	4.
Other reason.	23.	29.	9.	13.	13.
<b>Total.</b>	<b>127.</b>	<b>119.</b>	<b>134.</b>	<b>118.</b>	<b>136.</b>

(OIC figures).

People subject to of harassment or abuse from outwith their home was the fourth most common reason for applying to the Council.

## Households

Single households remain the predominate group of people presenting as homeless, 79% of applicants in 2020/21, just slightly lower than the previous year - 79% of applicants.

In 2020/21:

- Male single households were the largest group, making up just over half of all applicants at 49%.
- Single female applicants stood at 29% and 14% of applicants were single parents (94.4% of which were women).
- Nineteen percent of households contained children, the vast majority in single parent households.

**Table 5: Household type of homeless applicants in Orkney, 2016/17 to 2020/21.**

<b>Household.</b>	<b>2016/17.</b>	<b>2017/18.</b>	<b>2018/19.</b>	<b>2019/20.</b>	<b>2020/21.</b>
Single male 16-24.	22.	13.	19.	11.	23.
Single male 25-64.	44.	46.	42.	46.	43.
Single male 65+.	2.	1.	3.	3.	1.
Single males.	68.	60.	64.	60.	67.
Single female 16-24.	15.	16.	14.	13.	12.
Single female 25-64.	11.	7.	25.	19.	21.
Single male 65+.	3.	2.	1.	2.	7.
Single females.	29.	25.	40.	34.	40.

Household.	2016/17.	2017/18.	2018/19.	2019/20.	2020/21.
Couple.	4.	7.	5.	3.	6.
Couple with children.	3.	3.	0.	1.	1.
Single female parent.	16.	20.	17.	19.	18.
Single male parent.	2.	2.	4.	0.	1.
Other.	5.	2.	4.	1.	3.
<b>Total.</b>	<b>127.</b>	<b>119.</b>	<b>134.</b>	<b>118.</b>	<b>136.</b>

(OIC figures).

In 2020/21, young single people made up 26% of applications which is higher than the previous year where they made up 20% of applications. 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 require to go through the homeless route to access housing.

## Ethnicity

In the three years from 2018/19 to 2020/21 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.**

Ethnicity.	2018/19.	2019/20.	2020/21.
White Scottish.	42%.	44%.	66.9%.
White Other British.	26%.	27.5%	20.6%
White Irish.	0.7%.	0.8%	1.5%
White Polish.	0.7%.	0.8%.	-
White Other.	0.7%.	3%.	-

<b>Ethnicity.</b>	<b>2018/19.</b>	<b>2019/20.</b>	<b>2020/21.</b>
Other Ethnic Group.	1.5%.	-	1.5%.
Not Known or Refused.	28%.	23%.	9.5%.

(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>

## **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, 4 shared tenancies within 2 properties in Kirkwall.
- 3 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.

More people moved into temporary accommodation (114) than moved out in 2020/21 (56). The rate of households leaving temporary accommodation was higher in 2019/20 than in 2018/19 where there was a net difference of twenty one (21). The COVID-19 impact of 2020/21 led to households remaining in temporary accommodation as they were unable to move on, predominantly due to a smaller number of properties becoming available for relet and a need to ensure there was sufficient temporary accommodation to meet demand.

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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>
2018/19.	106.	85.	21.
2019/20.	91.	89.	2.
2020/21.	114.	56.	58.

(HL1 figure).

Single person households and other households without children had the longest wait for rehousing.

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.

There was a decrease in the use of B&B in 2020/21 but an increase in the number of nights spent in B&B. This was a result of there being insufficient temporary accommodation. There was no breach of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order regulations.

**Table 8: Number of nights and average time spent in B&B 2016/17 to 2020/21.**

<b>Year.</b>	<b>Number of nights.</b>	<b>Average duration – nights.</b>
2020 to 2021.	55.	6.1.
2019 to 2020.	149.	4.8.
2018 to 2019.	21.	2.1.
2017 to 2018.	52.	3.25.
2016 to 2017.	61.	6.1.

(OIC figures).

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

The time spent in temporary accommodation was higher in 2020/21 and 2019/20 than was the case for the two years before, reflecting the decrease in the supply of houses to let; and the rate at which homeless households left temporary accommodation in 2020/21 was lower than in 2019/20.

**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.

(HL1 figures).

As at 31 March 2021, 69 households were accommodated in temporary accommodation. This was a significantly higher number of households than in 2019/20 which was 45 households.

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

Year – as of:	Number of households:
31 March 2021.	69 households.
31 March 2020.	45 households.
31 March 2019.	45 households.
31 March 2018.	28 households.
31 March 2017.	37 households.

(OIC figures).

By June 2021, 62 households were in temporary accommodation. In addition to this, 16 households were staying with either friends or family awaiting temporary accommodation and 2 households who are assessed as “homeless at home” and therefore do not require temporary accommodation. In effect this equates to 80 households in temporary accommodation representing an increase of 180% 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 2020/21 in comparison to one property in 2019/20 i.e. 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.

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. During financial year 2020/21, no type II (case work) housing options cases existed predominantly due to the suspension of evictions. As such staff did not require to undertake casework to prevent homelessness in the usual manner.

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

Year.	2016/17.	2017/18.	2018/19.	2019/20.	2020/21.
Number.	50.	58.	31.	19.	22.

(OIC figures).

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. The Council supports also both Orkney Housing Association Ltd and Orkney CAB in maintaining their accreditations.

In 2019/20 the most common information provided was on housing options across tenures this was generally at Type I level. Homelessness and security of tenure issues were the next most common areas of information and advice provided.

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 re their potential role in preventing homelessness, for example by identifying and responding to any issues that could led to future homelessness.

In the three years from 2018/19 to 2020/21 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.

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

Year.	2018-19.			2019-20.			2020-21.		
Age.	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.
Male.	4.	20.	1.	4.	9.	-	6.	20.	-
Total male and female.	38.			27.			47.		
% of all applicants.	28%.			23%.			34%.		

(OIC figures).

Across the three 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 34% of applicants in 2018/19 to 52% in 2019/20 and dropped to 42% in 2020/21.

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%.

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

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

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

Women, who are homeless, are more likely to have registered on the housing list both in overall numbers and proportionately. Over the three years, 71 women were registered on the housing list in comparison to 59 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 quarter of overall applicants for 2017/18 to 2020/21.

**Table 14: Applicants who were registered on the housing list and not living in settled accommodation 2018/19 to 2020/21.**

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

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 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 1.5% in the same year.



**Table 15: Repeat homelessness 2018/19 to 2020/21.**

<b>Year.</b>	<b>Number of cases of repeat homelessness.</b>
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>

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.

### **Support/Supported Accommodation**

The support needs most commonly identified were assistance with housing management tasks /independent living skills and those with mental health problems. Mental health as an issue for homeless households was the most prominent form of support needs recorded in 2019/20 which stood at 16% of applicants, this compares with the Scottish average of 12% (Scottish Government HL1 figures).

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<sup>6</sup> Orkney Islands Council Annual Return on the Charter 2018-19.

**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.
<b>Couple with child.</b>	0.	0.	0.	0.	0.	0.	0.	0.	0.	0.	0.	0.
<b>Over 65.</b>												
<b>Single person.</b>	0.	0.	0.	0.	2.	1.	0.	0.	0.	0.	0.	0.
<b>Single parent.</b>	0.	0.	0.	0.	0.	0.	0.	0.	0.	0.	0.	0.
<b>Couple without child.</b>	0.	0.	0.	0.	0.	0.	0.	0.	0.	0.	0.	0.
<b>Couple with child.</b>	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.

(OIC figures).

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.

The 2018 figures estimated that the private rented sector made up 11% of the housing stock in Orkney compared to 14% in Scotland as a whole and the social sector comprised 19% of the stock compared to 23% of Scottish housing<sup>7</sup>.

**Table 17: Homeless households waiting time by size of property, 2016/17 to 2020/21.**

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.
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.
2016/17.	4.8 months.	31.	3.0 months.	16.	4.9 months.	7.

(OIC figures).

The number of OIC properties available to let have been decreasing. This impacts on the number of lets available to homeless households and their length of stay in temporary accommodation, as does the area and size of the accommodation which becomes available.

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

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

(From OIC Annual Housing Report 2019/20).

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. The majority of homeless households are waiting for a one bed roomed property in Kirkwall. Last year 11 one bed roomed properties became available and 8 were allocated to homeless households, this equates to 73%.

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).

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

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

<b>Year:</b>	<b>2017/18.</b>	<b>2018/19.</b>	<b>2019/20.</b>	<b>2020/21.</b>
Homeless households.	31.2%.	28.7%.	30.6%.	35.7%.
Waiting list applicants.	54.7%.	56.4%.	48.6%.	48.6%.
Transfer applicants.	14.1%.	12.8%.	20.8%.	15.7%.
Other.	-	2.1%.	-	-

(From OIC Annual Housing Report 2019/20).

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>8</sup>. In 2018/19 OHAL let 104 properties and let 30 to homeless households (29% of lets).

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

	<b>2018/19.</b>	<b>2019/20.</b>	<b>2020/21.</b>
LA tenancy.	30.	25.	27.
RSL tenancy.	30.	35.	36.
Private rented tenancy.	0.	5.	12.
Returned to previous/present accommodation.	10.	5.	14.
Moved in with friends/relatives.	5.	10.	10.
Other – known.	0.	5.	6.
Not known – contact maintained.	0.	10.	10.
All outcomes.	75.	100.	115.

(HL1 figures).

The greatest number of lets to homeless households was in Kirkwall with 52% of Council lets. Care needs to be taken with these figures as the ability to house homeless households is affected by the size and area of vacancies which arise. The predominant need is for one bedroom properties and insufficient vacancies of this size arise. Currently 30 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.

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

As with other homeless households young people are predominately housed in settled accommodation in the social sector - 60% of those housed.

**Table 21: Outcomes for young households assessed unintentionally homeless and contact maintained 2019/20 and 2020/21<sup>9</sup>.**

Year.	LA tenancy.	Private rented tenancy.	Moved-in with friends/ relatives.	RSL.	All.
2020/21.	1.	2.	2.	4.	9.
2019/20.	5.	5.	5.	10.	25.

(HL1 figures).

The two lets in the private sector (detailed in table 13) in 2020/21 and five lets in 2019/20 are likely to have been to young people (aged between 16 and 24 years old).

The Council wishes to see some increase in the proportion of social housing being let to homeless households. We are to review the proportion of our lets made to homeless households and also review, 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.

While the demand for housing does not match that on Orkney mainland, in particular Kirkwall, there is a growing demand for housing in the Isles, which may in part be driven by the increased feasibility of working from home. The provision of affordable housing can mean that the housing needs of those who would choose to remain or move to the Isles if there was access to affordable housing can be met. This could lead to more sustainable communities and lessen potential demand on mainland Orkney, especially Kirkwall.

COVID-19 delayed the start of and completion of some developments in Orkney. There are now some new build social housing scheduled to come on stream in the summer of 2021 including 32 one and two bedroom properties. It is hoped that this will assist in addressing the need of a number of those homeless households waiting to be rehoused.

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<sup>9</sup> Scottish Government figures; <https://www.gov.scot/publications/youth-homelessness-statistics-2019-to-2020/>

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.

### **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 Ypeople 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.
- Ypeople'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.
- Relationship Scotland Orkney which offers for example relationship and individual counselling, family mediation and substance misuse counselling.

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 are being undertaken.

Mental health is 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 meet the demand for their services.

### **Temporary Accommodation**

One of our main challenges which relates, in part at least, to the supply of affordable housing is to minimise the time spent by homeless households in temporary accommodation. The Council is aware of the cost of renting temporary accommodation, has frozen the rents and hopes to continue this policy.

There has been increased pressure on temporary accommodation 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.

There was a marked increase in the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation in 2019/20. This was as a result, at times, of insufficient temporary accommodation being available. The number of nights spent in B&B increased from 21 nights in 2018/19 to 149 nights in 2019/20. Also, the average length of stay in B&B went up from 2.1 nights to 4.8 nights. The Council, however, has not breached the Unsuited Accommodation Order regulations.

We are aware that there could be difficulties in 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.

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

The Council flipped four properties in 2020/21 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 881 in July 2021, and, the greatest demand - from 482 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 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%.

There are, however, four Council housing projects currently under development with the majority, at least, due to come on stream in the summer of 2021. This should assist in housing homeless households currently 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 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.

### **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 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.

If it is evident during a Housing Options interview that the person is homeless or threatened with homeless 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 the development of a Domestic Abuse Policy and Procedures to include possible ways of safely preventing homelessness for those who have experienced domestic abuse taking account of forthcoming legislative changes<sup>10</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.

**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.

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>11</sup>, which would 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

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<sup>10</sup> Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Bill 2020.

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

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).**

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:

- Interagency training for example awareness training to agencies throughout Orkney assisting them to identify not only those threatened with homelessness/the need for early intervention and possible sources of assistance.
- 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.
- Training relating to developing trauma informed practice.

Ensuring 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 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.

**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.

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.



## Equality Impact Assessment

The purpose of an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is to improve the work of Orkney Islands Council by making sure it promotes equality and does not discriminate. This assessment records the likely impact of any changes to a function, policy or plan by anticipating the consequences, and making sure that any negative impacts are eliminated or minimised and positive impacts are maximised.

<b>1. Identification of Function, Policy or Plan</b>	
Name of function / policy / plan to be assessed.	Homelessness Strategy
Service / service area responsible.	Housing Services
Name of person carrying out the assessment and contact details.	Frances Troup, Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing Ext 2177 E-mail <a href="mailto:frances.troup@orkney.gov.uk">frances.troup@orkney.gov.uk</a>
Date of assessment.	6 August 2021
Is the function / policy / plan new or existing? (Please indicate also if the service is to be deleted, reduced or changed significantly).	Substantial review for 2021
<b>2. Initial Screening</b>	
What are the intended outcomes of the function / policy / plan?	The Council is required by law to have a Homelessness Strategy (though this can now be part of the Local Housing Strategy). The intention is to outline the processes by which, the Council will prevent homelessness and to address homelessness wherever it occurs.
Is the function / policy / plan strategically important?	Yes. It links to the Scottish Government's priority to end homelessness. The Homelessness Strategy is a statutory requirement and outlines the Council's response to homelessness as outlined above. It is important locally as there is significantly less research into homelessness in a remote and rural area.

<p>State who is, or may be affected by this function / policy / plan, and how.</p>	<p>Anyone who is at risk of homelessness or who may become at risk of homelessness in the future.</p>
<p>How have stakeholders been involved in the development of this function / policy / plan?</p>	<p>This document represents the consultative draft so, providing the draft Homelessness Strategy is approved, a process of consultation will now follow.</p> <p>A range of agencies across the statutory and third sectors were involved in the development of the initial Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan which is closely aligned with the Homelessness Strategy. The consultation process for the Local Housing Strategy links quite closely to that of the Homelessness Strategy.</p> <p>Views of service users and tenants (a proportion of whom have experienced homelessness) are collected routinely on a range of matters which interlink with the Homelessness Strategy. These include the wholesale tenant satisfaction survey, which although required every three years, is undertaken every two years by the Council to ensure it remains reflective of the tenant base. This was last undertaken during summer 2020.</p> <p>A detailed range of surveys are used including entry and exit questionnaires.</p>
<p>Is there any existing data and / or research relating to equalities issues in this policy area? Please summarise. E.g. consultations, national surveys, performance data, complaints, service user feedback, academic / consultants' reports, benchmarking (see equalities resources on OIC information portal).</p>	<p>There is significant research in this policy area.</p> <p>Ending homelessness is a priority area of the Scottish Government and accordingly the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG) has published a significant amount of research in recent years.</p> <p>The Scottish Social Housing Charter has an outcome on homelessness which states that “Local Councils perform their duties on homelessness so that homeless people get prompt and easy access to help and advice; are provided with suitable, good quality temporary or emergency accommodation when this is needed; and are offered continuing support to help them get and keep the home they are entitled to”.</p> <p>The Scottish Government publishes a statutory</p>

	<p>Code of Guidance on Homelessness, which Councils must regard when carrying out their duties.</p> <p>Currently research is underway nationally around housing and homelessness equality and specifically whether housing is a human right.</p>
<p>Is there any existing evidence relating to socio-economic disadvantage and inequalities of outcome in this policy area? Please summarise.</p> <p>E.g. For people living in poverty or for people of low income. See <a href="#">The Fairer Scotland Duty Interim Guidance for Public Bodies</a> for further information.</p>	<p>There is significant research indicating that homeless households suffer socio-economic disadvantage and this is intensified if they are rough sleepers. The provision of housing or lack of it is recognised as being intrinsically linked to a range of indicators related to health, wealth and educational achievement.</p> <p>The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has produced a range of research focussing on poverty and disadvantage and the links between this and housing and homelessness. Research such as this relates directly to the introduction of the Fairer Scotland Duty.</p>
<p>Could the function / policy have a differential impact on any of the following equality strands?</p>	<p>(Please provide any evidence – positive impacts / benefits, negative impacts and reasons).</p>
<p>1. Race: this includes ethnic or national groups, colour and nationality.</p>	<p>No specific impact identified.</p>
<p>2. Sex: a man or a woman.</p>	<p>No specific impact identified. Single males are statistically more likely to become homeless than single females. The Homelessness Strategy and related local outcome agreements seek to provide preventative and responsive services to assist.</p>
<p>3. Sexual Orientation: whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes.</p>	<p>No specific impact identified. Relationship / family breakdown of a variety of types can be a contributory factor in homelessness. The Homelessness Strategy and related local outcome agreements seek to provide preventative and responsive services to assist</p>
<p>4. Gender Reassignment: the process of transitioning from one gender to another.</p>	<p>No specific impact identified. Relationship / family breakdown of a variety of types can be a contributory factor in homelessness. The Homelessness Strategy and related local outcome agreements seek to provide preventative and responsive services to assist</p>

5. Pregnancy and maternity.	No specific impact identified. Relationship / family breakdown of a variety of types can be a contributory factor in homelessness. The Homelessness Strategy and related local outcome agreements seek to provide preventative and responsive services to assist
6. Age: people of different ages.	Homelessness can happen at any age, but younger people can be at greater risk. The Homelessness Strategy and related local outcome agreements seek to provide preventative and responsive services to assist.
7. Religion or beliefs or none (atheists).	No specific impacts identified.
8. Caring responsibilities.	No specific impact identified.
9. Care experienced.	It is recognised that care experienced young people may be at risk of homelessness. A separate protocol on housing and young people leaving care is in place to prevent care experienced young people from having to present as homeless, and therefore acquire an additional “label” in order to obtain housing.
10. Marriage and Civil Partnerships.	Relationship breakdown of a variety of types can be a contributory factor in homelessness. The Homelessness Strategy and related local outcome agreements seek to provide preventative and responsive services to assist.
11. Disability: people with disabilities (whether registered or not).	No specific impact identified.
12. Socio-economic disadvantage.	Socio-economic disadvantage can be a contributory factor in homelessness and in turn homelessness can intensify socio-economic disadvantage. The Homelessness Strategy and related local outcome agreements seek to provide preventative and responsive services to assist.
13. Isles-proofing.	No specific impact identified.

<b>3. Impact Assessment</b>	
Does the analysis above identify any differential impacts which need to be addressed?	Yes, there is a potential greater impact identified as a result of sex, age, care experience, marriage / civil partnership and socio-economic disadvantage. These have been addressed throughout the EqlA.
How could you minimise or remove any potential negative impacts?	The Homelessness Strategy and related local outcome agreements seek to provide preventative and responsive services to assist with homelessness wherever it should occur and irrespective of the reason for that homelessness. We monitor homelessness to ensure our strategies cover as diverse a range of people as possible.
Do you have enough information to make a judgement? If no, what information do you require?	Yes

<b>4. Conclusions and Planned Action</b>	
Is further work required?	<b>No.</b>
What action is to be taken?	N/A
Who will undertake it?	N/A
When will it be done?	N/A
How will it be monitored? (e.g. through service plans).	N/A

Signature: 

Date 6 August 2021

Name: Frances Troup

(BLOCK CAPITALS).

Please sign and date this form, keep one copy and send a copy to HR and Performance. A Word version should also be emailed to HR and Performance at [hrsupport@orkney.gov.uk](mailto:hrsupport@orkney.gov.uk)