

PEOPLE, COMMUNITIES AND PLACES

Housing Options (PREVENT1) Statistics in Scotland: 2020/21

Experimental Statistics: Data being developed

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Introduction

This statistics bulletin provides information on Housing Options services in Scotland in the period from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

It includes information on the number of approaches made, as well as details on the reasons for the approaches made, the activities undertaken, and the outcomes achieved.

The statistics in this publication are based on administrative data collected by local authorities in the course of providing Housing Options services that are available when households seek assistance for housing-related issues.

This bulletin focusses on data at a national level due to differences in how local authorities implement Housing Options. Local authority breakdowns are available in an Excel workbook, containing tables which can be downloaded: <https://www.gov.scot/collections/homelessness-statistics/>

A note on interpreting the figures

As local authority needs differ, it is appropriate to tailor service provision to the needs specific to each local authority. Therefore, the use and implementation of Housing Options varies greatly between local authorities.

For that reason, it is not appropriate to make direct comparisons between local authority Housing Options figures. Instead, local authority figures should be used to understand the delivery of Housing Options at an individual local authority level only.

A Quick Guide to Housing Options

Local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure advice and information is available free of charge about:

- (a) homelessness and the prevention of homelessness, and
- (b) any services which may assist a homeless person or assist in the prevention of homelessness

When households seek assistance for housing-related issues from their local authority, they may be presented with advice on a range of housing options, including the opportunity to make a homelessness application. This is known as Housing Options and began to be implemented from around 2009.

The aim of this approach is to make households better informed of their options for accommodation, and ensure they are able to make a more informed choice.

However, it is important to note that **Housing Options is not a statutory function**, but local authorities can use it in the delivery of their statutory duties.

Impact of coronavirus

This is the first annual PREVENT1 statistics release for which COVID-19 restrictions and changes in practices were in place for the full reporting period. Where it is believed that COVID-19 has had an impact on the data and trends shown in the publication, these have been highlighted with explanations where possible.

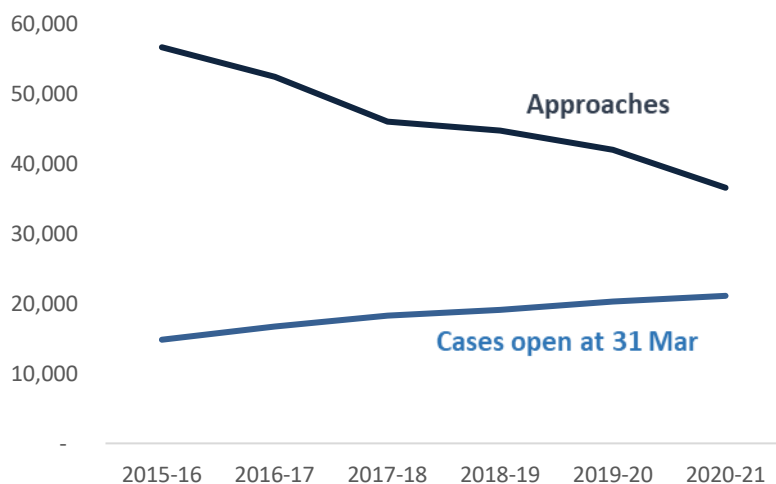
Help us improve this publication and its statistics:

Get in touch by email: homelessness_statistics_inbox@gov.scot

All tables and charts from this publication are available online at:
<https://www.gov.scot/collections/homelessness-statistics/>

Approaches for housing support

Housing options approaches



There were **36,514 approaches** (from 34,124 unique households) in 2020/21. This was a decrease of 13% from 41,936 compared to 2019/20, and of 35% since 2015/16.

In contrast, the number of **open cases** has been increasing over time, reaching **21,075** as at 31st March 2021, an increase of 4% from 20,235 as at 31st March 2020.

These trends are similar to those experienced for homelessness applications over the last year¹. Local authorities reported a reduction in homelessness applications as a result of remain at home COVID-19 guidelines, emergency coronavirus legislation temporarily extending eviction notice periods, the temporary ban on home repossessions and mortgage payment deferrals. The increase in open housing options cases could be due to COVID-19 restrictions limiting the ability to undertake necessary action to enable case closure, similar to the inability of LAs to move homeless households in to settled accommodation resulting in the increase in open homelessness applications.

Conversely, North Lanarkshire has experienced a sharp increase in housing options approaches with 1,524 in 2020/21 compared to 458 in 2019/20 (233%). This was due to an increased focus on prevention activity both by the creation of a centralised team to handle housing options approaches and to align with Rapid Rehousing Transition work.

Glasgow accounts for the largest share of approaches at 24% of the total, followed by Edinburgh with 11%. The national rate of approaches is 7.5 per 1,000 population, which varies in mainland local authorities from 47.3 in Edinburgh to 0.4 in Highland. These highly varying rates are likely to be reflective of the fact that different local authorities use a different approach to providing their statutory duties.

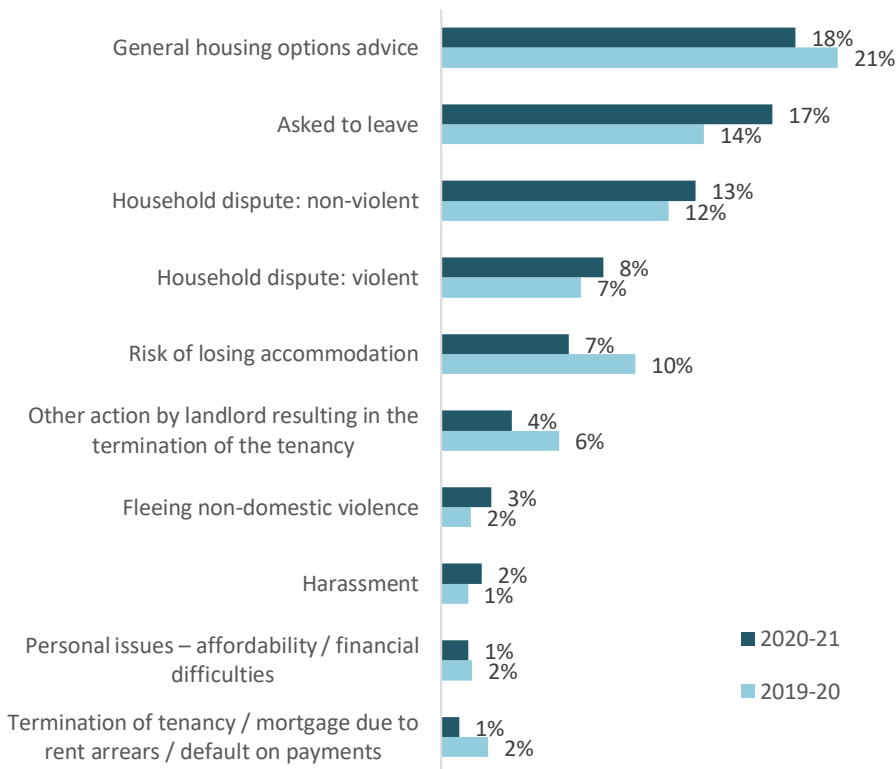
94% of households made one approach; with only 1% making three or more.

¹ There was a 9% decrease in homelessness applications between 2019/20 and 2020/21 compared to a 10% increase in live homelessness cases between March 2020 and March 2021. Source: [Homelessness in Scotland: 2020 to 2021](#)

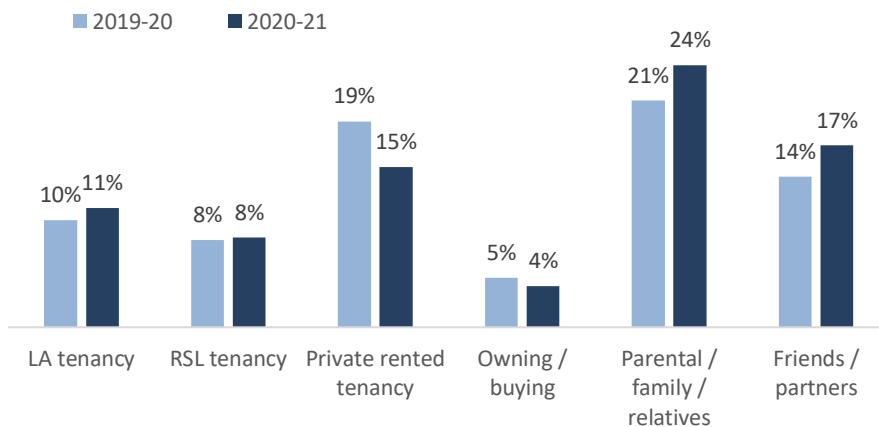
Household circumstances

The reasons for making a housing options approach and the property of the applicant are highly related. For example, the decreases in approaches from those in a private rented property and those owning and buying tie in with the decrease in reasons of 'termination of tenancy / mortgage' and 'other action by landlords'. Similarly, the increase in approaches from those staying with friends and family ties in with the rise in reasons of being 'asked to leave' and 'household disputes'.

Reason for approach



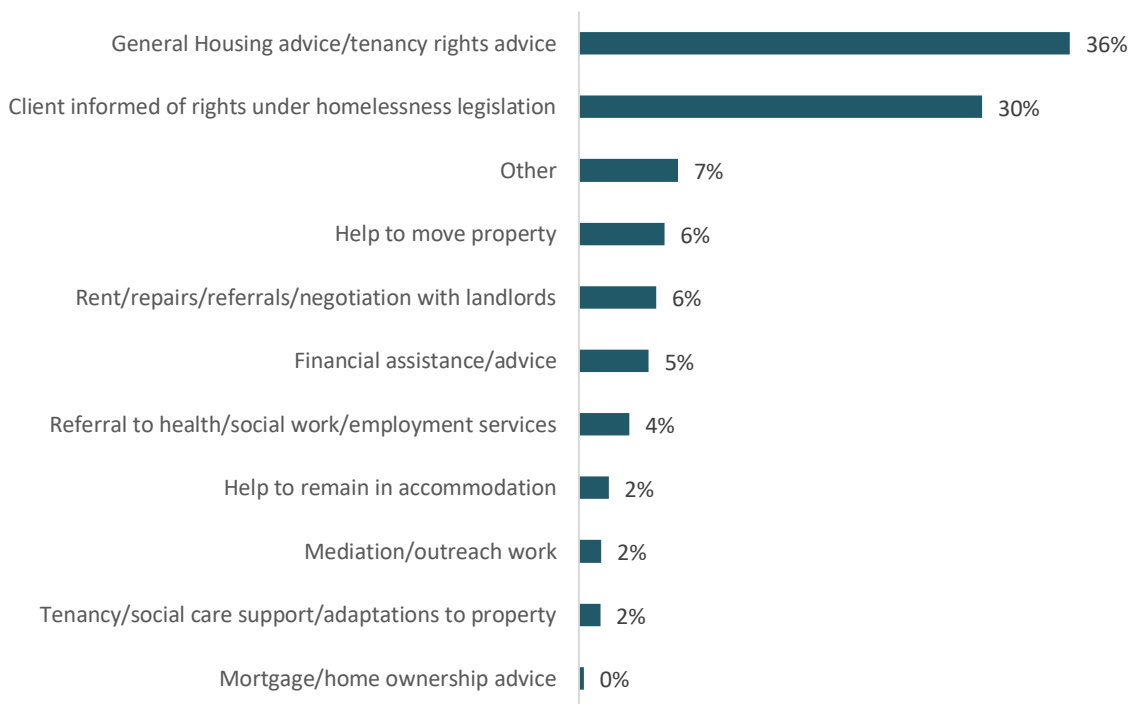
Approaches by property of applicant



Again, the trends in reasons and property are similar to those experienced for those assessed as homeless². Notably, the earlier mentioned emergency coronavirus legislation to temporarily extend eviction notice periods, the temporary ban on home repossessions and mortgage payment deferrals have all contributed to the decrease in approaches from the private rented sector and those owning/buying³.

Prevention activity

Most prevention activity carried out was general housing advice or informing clients of their rights under homeless legislation

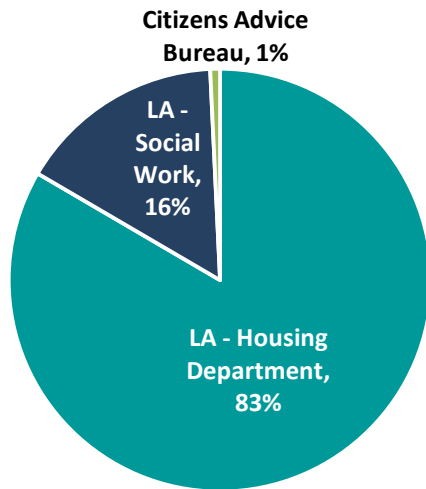


Again, there was large variation at local authority level with ‘financial assistance’, ‘negotiation with landlords’ and ‘help to move’ being relatively more common amongst a small number of local authorities.

² Between 2019/20 and 2020/21 there was: a 42% decrease in those homeless from a private rented tenancy; a 7% increase in those homeless from parents/family and a 6% increase from friends/partners.

³ [Mortgages and coronavirus: information for consumers | FCA](#)

Vast majority of activity undertaken by the local authority, particularly in the housing department



Maximum type of activity

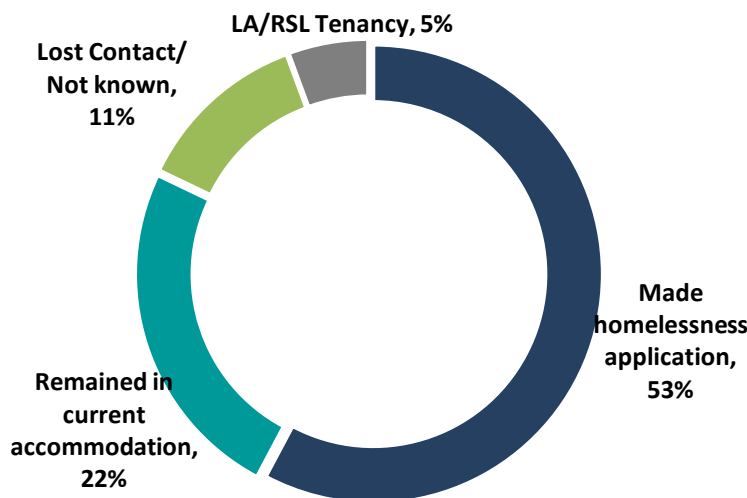
42% of activity involved providing active information, sign-posting or explanation only.

58% of prevention activity involved casework.

Very few local authorities report advocacy work, with Angus and East Lothian being highest with 6% and 4% of all activity, respectively.

Outcomes

Over half of approaches result in a homelessness application



Fife had a higher proportion than any other LA with an outcome of LA/RSL tenancy, 32% of outcomes compared to 5% across Scotland.

Note that while 5% had an LA/RSL tenancy as the outcome of their housing options approach, many of those who make a homeless application will also go on to a local authority or registered social landlord tenancy.

Across Scotland, it took an average of 159 days to close a housing options case. This has increased from 104 days in 2019/20, tying in with the increase in the number of open cases.

The time to close cases varied greatly by local authority with North Ayrshire taking 314 days on average and Dundee City taking 24 days on average. This may be reflective of the differences in housing options service provision between local authorities.

To note, that although North Lanarkshire⁴ had the highest average length of time at 846 days they have noted that this is due to a delay in closing cases and therefore not a true reflection of service provision.

⁴ North Lanarkshire are now reviewing cases monthly and staff briefings have been undertaken on the recording and reviewing of PREVENT1 cases.

Notes on Tables

All of the tables and charts in this publication are available in electronic format at: <https://www.gov.scot/collections/homelessness-statistics/>.

The statistics included in this publication are based on administrative data collected by local authorities in the course of carrying out their Housing Options duties. This data is collected from local authorities and quality assured by the Scottish Government on a quarterly basis. Details about the data we collect, our quality assurance process, and how we engage with users to improve our statistics are outlined in our quality assurance statement.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/data-protection-impact-assessment-and-quality-assurance-statement-for-hl1-hl2-hl3-and-prevent1-data-collections/>

The data specification for the Housing Options (PREVENT1) statistics is available at: <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/15257/1529/prevent1>

Known issues with data

South Lanarkshire were not able to provide case level data for 2019/20 or 2020/21 due to technical issues. Instead they provided aggregate level data tables accompanying this publication. As a result we have not been able to carry out our usual level of quality assurance checks for South Lanarkshire data.

In the 2020/21 data, there is a discrepancy of 260 between the number of approaches (973) and the number with 'maximum activity' (713) and we have been unable to confirm with South Lanarkshire which of these is the correct figure. Additionally, we cannot confirm whether the total activities (2,395) are related to the 973 or 713 figure. This uncertainty affects all tables within the publication.

Legislation

Local Authorities can use Housing Options as a means of delivering their duty under [section 2 of the Housing \(Scotland\) Act 2001](#).

To note: the provision of Housing Options services is not a statutory duty.

Guidance to help Local Authority officers to record information is available at: <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/15257/1529/introductionprevent1>

An Official Statistics publication for Scotland

Official and National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Both undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs and are produced free from any political interference.

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How to access background or source data

The data collected for this statistical bulletin:

- are available in more detail through Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics
- are available via an alternative route. Summary tables can be found at: <http://www.gov.scot/homelessstats>
- may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact homelessness_statistics_inbox@gov.scot for further information.
- cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.

Complaints and suggestions

If you are not satisfied with our service or have any comments or suggestions, please write to the Chief Statistician, 3WR, St Andrews House, Edinburgh, EH1 3DG, Telephone: (0131) 244 0302, e-mail statistics.enquiries@scotland.gsi.gov.uk.

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