The Highland Council	Agenda Item	18

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Community Services Committee
4 June 2015

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Report No	COM 31/15

Annual Monitoring Report: Housing Allocations Policy

Report by the Director of Community Services

Summary

This report provides annual monitoring information on the operation of the Highland Housing Register (HHR) allocations policy for 2014/2015. It highlights key issues in relation to the supply and demand for social rented housing in Highland.

1.   Background

1.1   The Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 as amended by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 sets out the main legal duties regarding access to housing registers and the allocations of social rented housing.

1.2   The Highland Council and the five main registered social landlords in Highland implemented a common housing register with a single allocations policy in 2008. The Highland Housing Register (HHR) is subject to ongoing monitoring with an annual report to the Community Services Committee and to the Boards of partner organisations. The annual HHR allocations monitoring report for 2014/15 is set out in **Appendix 1.**

2.   Allocations Monitoring

2.1   The number of applicants on the register has reduced by 213 (8%) in the last year, and stood at 7,638 on 31 March 2015. This is the second year we have seen a reduction in the number of applicants. This is due mainly to more efficient management of the register through better annual reviews and reassessment of circumstances. These changes help to ensure that the housing register is as up to date as possible. Despite the reduction in the number of applicants overall there are still significant levels of unmet housing need in most parts of the Highlands.

2.2   There were a total of 2,156 offers of housing made by all partners in the year as a result of which 1,747 applicants were housed. This means that approximately 1.2 offers were made for each property let and for every property let there were 4.4 people on the register. The number of applications with homeless priority points remained fairly static at 513. There was a total of 26 applications suspended due to refusing 2 reasonable offers of housing.

2.3   The annual monitoring report demonstrates that generally speaking the

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housing allocation policy is meeting its objectives in relation to meeting housing needs. Chart 10 in **Appendix 1** provides a summary of the proportion of applicants in each category of need and the proportion of applicants with those needs being housed. This shows that these are fairly well balanced. Only 2 categories (insecure tenure and under-occupation) have a lower proportion of applicants housed than those in the category.

2.4 The Annual Monitoring Report also contains information on the number of housing applications and the outcomes for applicants from different ethnic groups. We are dealing with low numbers of applications from ethnic minorities. The annual monitoring report shows we have housed people from a range of ethnicities and does not suggest that the policy is adversely affecting people from particular groups.

3. Need to Reside

3.1 Need to Reside points reflect the need for an applicant to be housed in a particular community because they either already live there, work there, or have a care and support need to be there. Members have raised the importance of local connection in housing allocations. In order to strengthen this aspect of the policy it is recommended that in the case of existing residents we should only apply these points where applicants can prove that they have been resident in the community for at least 12 months (at the point of the offer of housing). Making this change will help to reinforce the aim of the policy.

4. Low Demand Caithness

4.1 Choice Based Lettings was introduced in Caithness on 16 February 2015 to try and address issues of low demand. The early indications are that the approach is more effective than the normal arrangements, however we need to allow more time to undertake a full evaluation.

5. Armed Forces

5.1 We have been collecting data about applications from members of the Armed Forces on new Highland Housing Register applications since February 2014 and on our re-registration forms since July 2014. It will take some time before we have full data on this group of applicants.

6. Mutual Exchanges

6.1 A difference in practice has emerged between the Council and Housing Associations in relation to mutual exchanges. In order to create a more consistent approach it is recommended that the Council amends its policy so that we would not normally agree to a mutual exchange unless there were no outstanding tenancy debts.

7. Online Application Form and Housing Options Website

7.1 We have been working with our HHR partners and Highland Council's Corporate Improvement team on creating an online housing application form for the Highland Housing Register.

7.2 We hope to have our form "live" later in the year. Applicants will be able to access the on-line form through the Council website.

7.3 Alongside this we have also been working on a Housing Options website. This will become an on-line resource for the public and staff to use for all housing options across Highland. There will also be a self-assessment tool which will be used to identify housing options that may be available for individual customers to consider.

8. Implications

8.1 **Resources**: There may be resource implications associated with developing and implementing the housing options website. These will be contained within the current Highland Housing Register budget.

8.2 **Legal**: The current housing allocation policy is considered to meet current legal requirements and none of the recommendations in the report would have legal implications.

8.3 **Equalities:** One of the main aims of the allocation policy is to allow equal access to housing based on housing need.

8.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever:** There are no specific implications arising from this report.

8.5 **Gaelic:** Housing applications and related published material about access to housing meet the Council's standards in relation to Gaelic.

8.6 **Risk:** There are no specific implications arising from this report.

8.7 **Rural:** There are specific issues in relation to housing allocations in small rural communities. The current policy seeks to address these through the award of priority for people with a need to reside within a particular community. Competing pressures for available housing can be more acute in small communities with limited housing stock and turnover.

Recommendations

Members are invited to:

(i) Note the information contained in the Annual Monitoring Report on housing allocations;

(ii) Agree that to be awarded Need to Reside points for living in the community applicants must have been resident for at least 12 months prior to the date of offer;

(iii) Agree to change our mutual exchange policy so that an exchange would not normally be agreed where there were outstanding tenancy debts; and

(iv) Note the ongoing work on an online HHR application form and Housing Options website and that further updates will be given at a later date

Designation: Director of Community Services

Date: 21 May 2015

Author: Claire Mckay, Housing Policy Officer

Background Papers:

Highland Housing Register

Allocations Monitoring Report 2014/15

## 1. Introduction

1.1 The Highland Housing Register Allocations Policy sets out details for annual performance monitoring.

1.2 This report relates to the period 1 April 2014 – 31 March 2015. It contains monitoring information and commentary summarising how the housing allocations policy has operated over the last year.

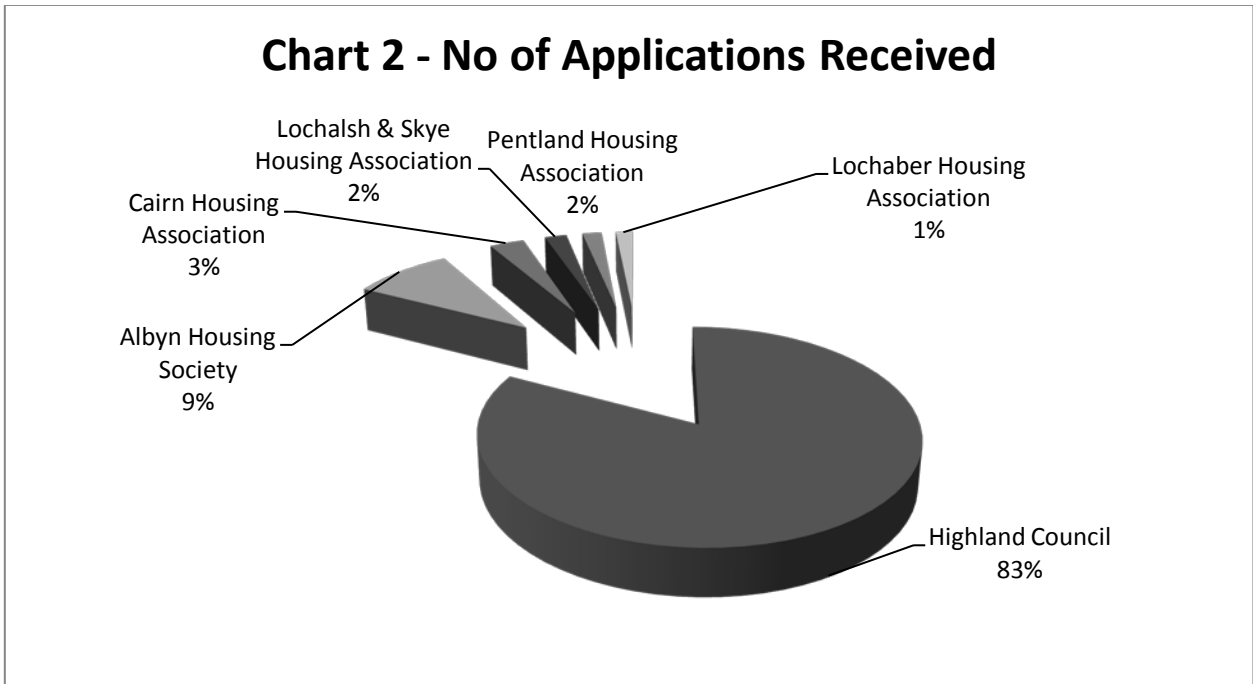1.3 The figures are for all the Highland Housing Register Partners and not just the Highland Council.

2. Monitoring Information

2.1 Applications

2.1.1 There were a total of 7,638 housing applications held at 31 March 2015, compared to 7,851 at 31 March 2014, a reduction of 213. This is the second year where we have seen a reduction in the number of applicants. This is due to more efficient management of the register through better annual reviews and reassessment of circumstances. Despite the reduction in the number of applicants overall there are still significant levels of unmet housing need in most parts of the Highlands.

2.1.2 Chart 1 shows the percentage of all Highland Housing Register applications broken down by those seeking a social rented tenancy from an HHR partner (Housing List: 5,589 applicants) and those from existing tenants seeking to transfer to another property: (Transfer List: 2,049 applicants). The proportions last year were 5,819 (74%) Housing List and 2,032 (26%) Transfer List.

Chart 1 - HHR Waiting List
Transfer 27%
Housing 73%
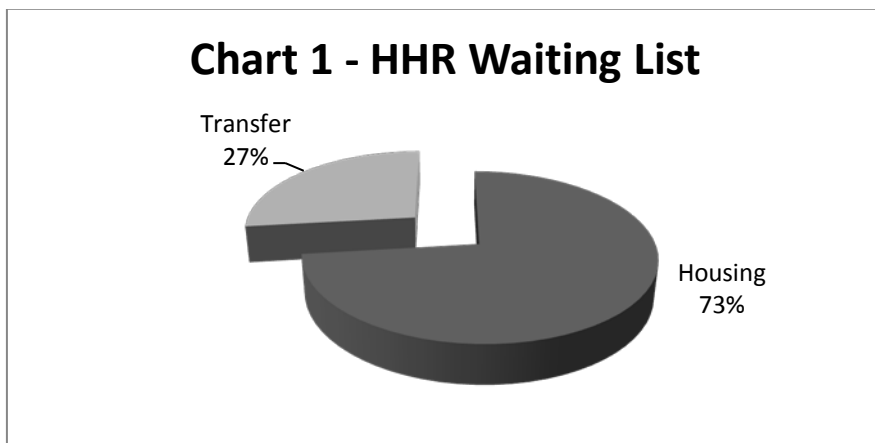
2.1.3   Chart 2 shows the number of applications each partner received. There were a total of 4,628 new applications received last year. The vast majority of completed housing applications are held by Highland Council.

Chart 2 - No of Applications Received

Lochalsh & Skye Housing Association 2%

Pentland Housing Association 2%

Lochaber Housing Association 1%

Cairn Housing Association 3%

Albyn Housing Society 9%

Highland Council 83%

2.1.4   Chart 3 shows the total number of applicants broken down by age group. It shows that the largest group continues to be 26 - 59 year olds, which has increased by 1% to 65% of all applicants. The 60+ age group has remained the same at 20% and the 16 - 25 age group has dropped by 1% for the 2nd year running to 15%.

Chart 3 - Age Group

60 + 20%

16 - 25 15%

26 - 59 65%
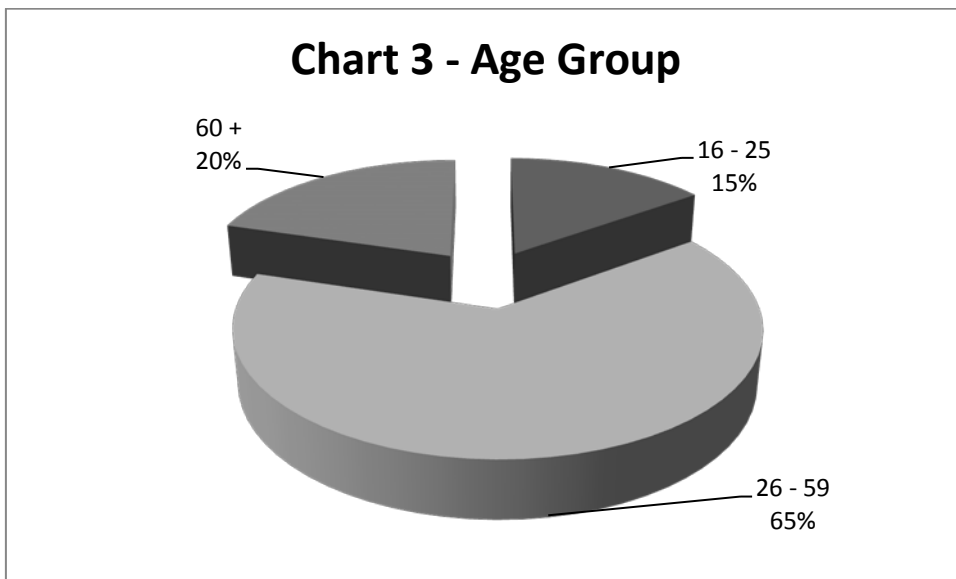
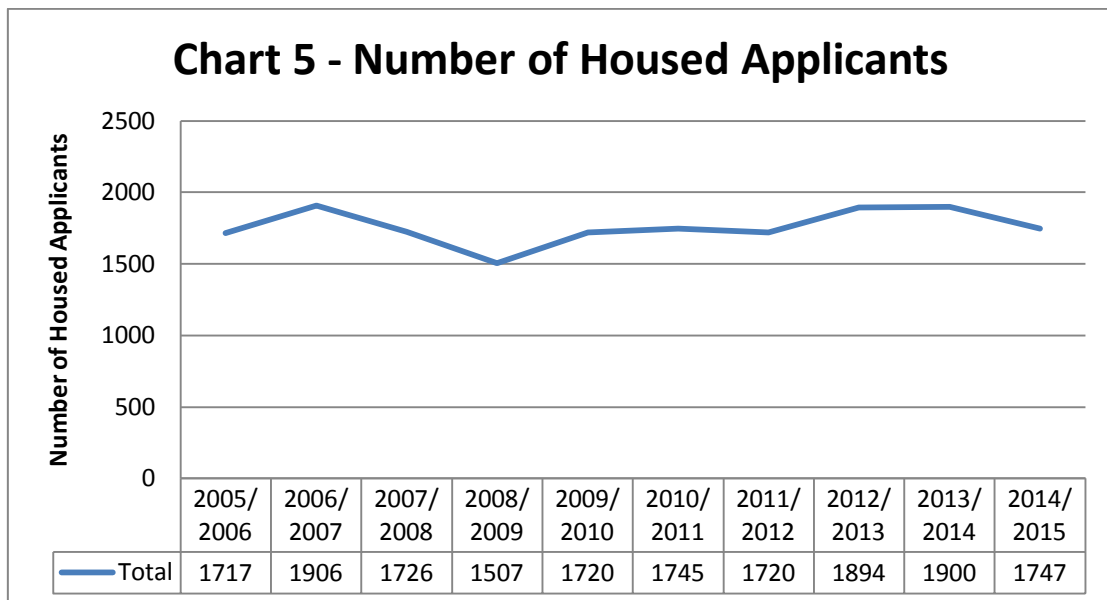2.1.5 Chart 4 shows the number of applications by household type. It shows that the largest group continues to be single applicants (49%); with applications from couples at 11% and applications from families at 40%. The relative proportions are the same as those reported last year.

Chart 4 - Household Type

Families
40%

Single
49%

Couple
11%
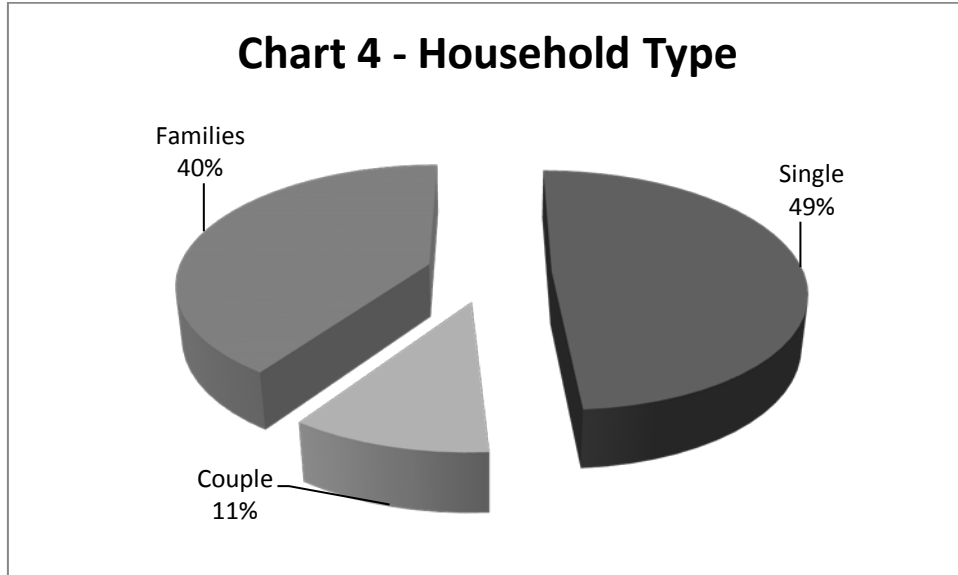
2.2 Allocations

2.2.1 Chart 5 shows that 1,747 applicants were housed in 2014/15, and shows the trend in applicants housed over time. It shows there has been a small decrease in the number of applicants housed in the last year.

Chart 5 - Number of Housed Applicants

	2005/ 2006	2006/ 2007	2007/ 2008	2008/ 2009	2009/ 2010	2010/ 2011	2011/ 2012	2012/ 2013	2013/ 2014	2014/ 2015
Total	1717	1906	1726	1507	1720	1745	1720	1894	1900	1747

2.2.2 Of the applicants housed last year 1,316 (75%) were from the Housing List which is a 1% increase and 431 (25%) were from the Transfer List. Allocations to Highland Council

property accounted for 1,233 (71%) of applicants housed which is a 1% increase and those to Housing Association houses 514 (29%).

2.2.3 Chart 6 shows the proportion of applicants housed in the year by individual HHR Partners. There have been no significant changes in these proportions.
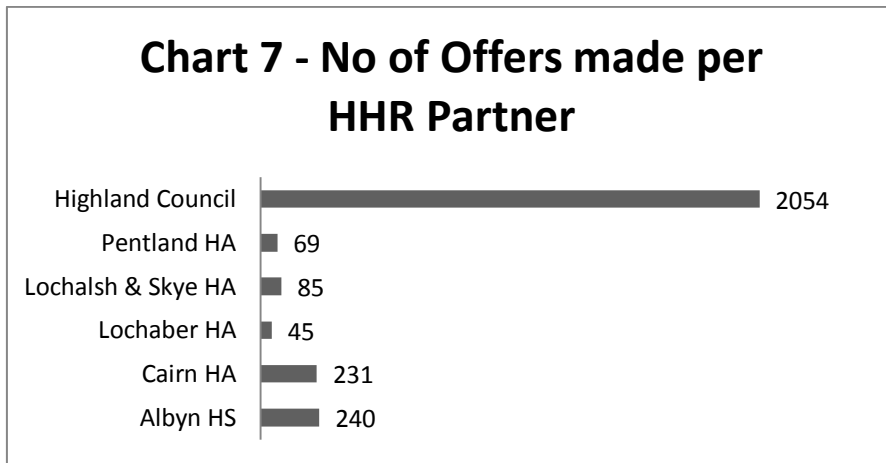
Chart 6 - No of Allocations by HHR Partner

- Highland Council 71%
- Albyn HS 14%
- Cairn HA 8%
- Lochaber HA 2%
- Lochalsh & Skye HA 3%
- Pentland HA 2%
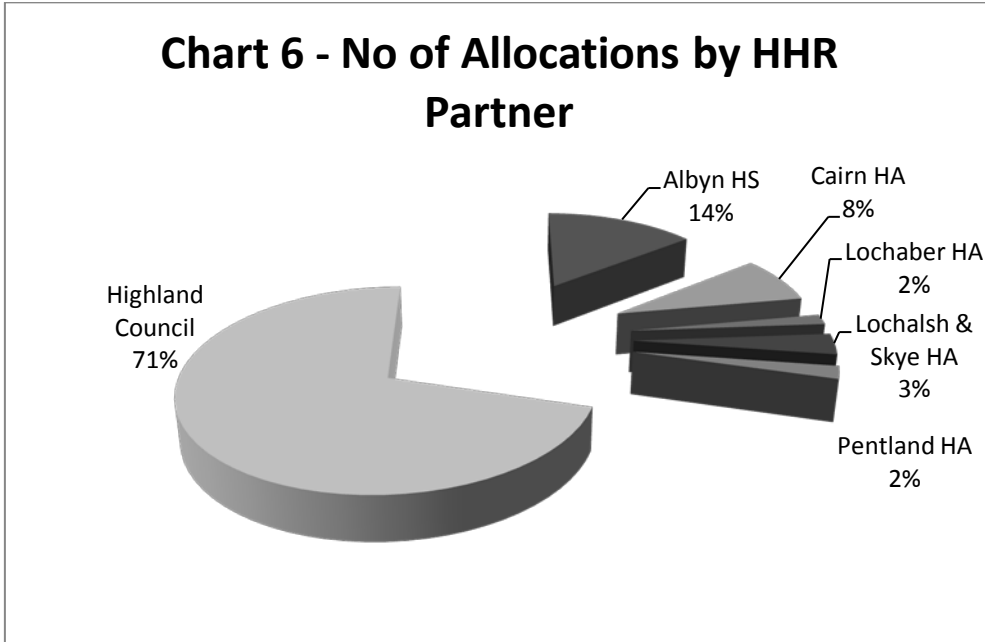
2.2.4 The Chart 7 below shows how many offers each partner made.

Chart 7 - No of Offers made per HHR Partner

Partner	No of Offers
Highland Council	2054
Pentland HA	69
Lochalsh & Skye HA	85
Lochaber HA	45
Cairn HA	231
Albyn HS	240

2.2.5 Comparing the number of offers made with the number of people housed shows that for every applicant housed there were 1.2 offers made. This is a slight reduction to last year.

2.3   Allocations – Ethnic Origins for Applicants & Housed Applicants

2.3.1   This section of the HHR application form is not compulsory therefore the figures reported are not fully representative of all applicants. There has also been a reduction in the volume of new monitoring forms returned this year. This may be due to the fact the equalities monitoring form is currently separate to the housing application therefore fewer people are completing and returning them.

2.3.2   Chart 8 shows that the largest group of those who completed the form describe themselves as Scottish: 2,867 (80%) applicants and 521 (80%) housed applicants. British and Other White applicants are the next largest groups. Other ethnic minority groups account for a very much lower proportion of the overall housing register, however there is evidence that these groups are receiving housing outcomes through the policy.

Chart 8 – Applicants by Ethnic Origin

Ethnic Origin	Number of Applications	Number Housed
White Scottish	2867	521
White Other British	402	74
White Irish	14	6
White Gypsy/Traveller	4	1
White Polish	65	14
White Other	174	23
Mixed or Multiple Ethnic	7	1
Indian	3	-
Pakistani	1	1
Bangladeshi	6	1
Chinese	3	-
Other Asian	3	1
Caribbean	2	-
African	5	1
Arab	-	-
Other Black	3	1
Other Ethnic	7	4
Unknown	1	1
TOTAL	**3567**	**650**

2.3.3   The data we hold on ethnicity has been reducing year on year with a reduction of 871 this year. We currently have our Equal Opportunity form separated to our HHR form which we feel may be contributing to this reduction. It is intended to change the way we seek this information in future in order to build up a clearer picture of housing applicants' ethnicity.

2.4 Allocations – Letting Zones & Homeless Demand

2.4.1 Chart 9 (below) shows the number of houses in each letting area; the number of applicants where the letting area is one of their choices for housing; and the number and percentage of applicants housed last year in each area, as well as the number and percentage of applicants with homeless priority.

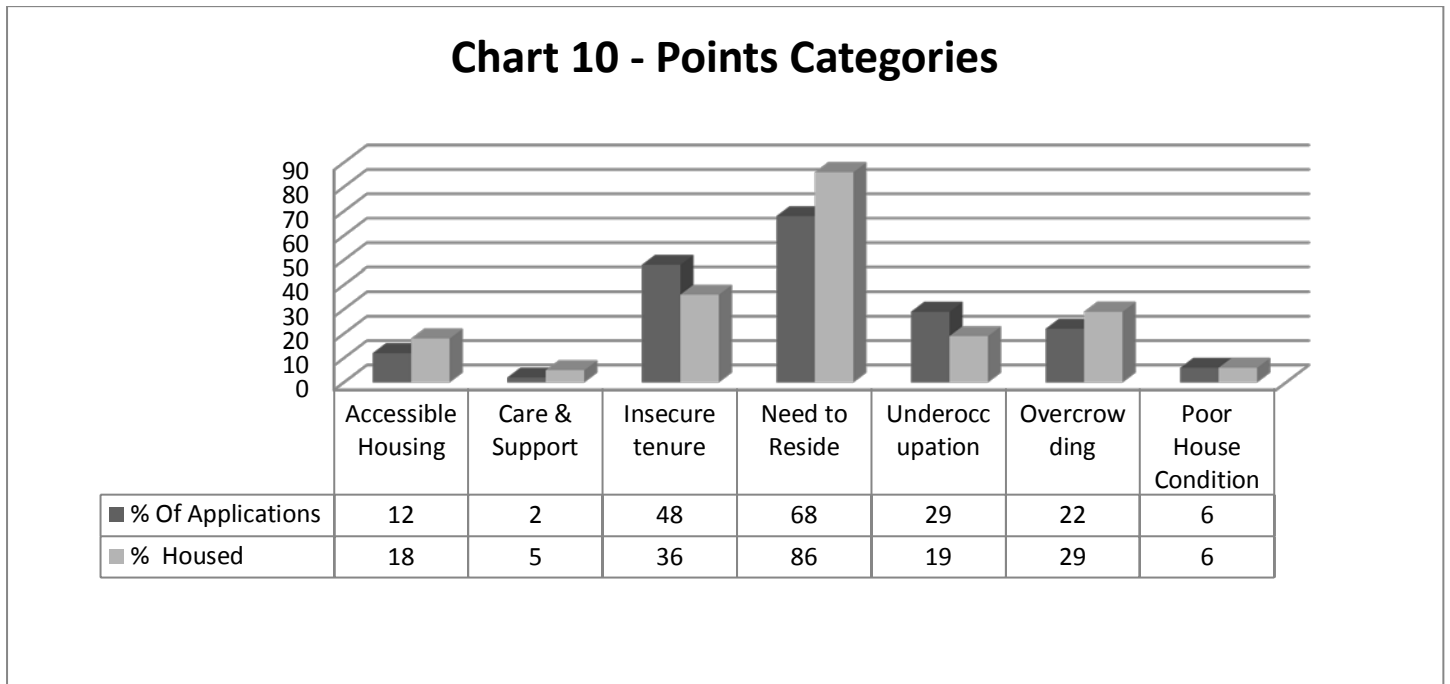**Chart 9: Housing Supply Demand and Numbers Housed including Homeless Priority**

Area	Total Stock	Total Demand	Homeless Demand	Total Housed	% Housed of Demand	Total Homeless Housed	% Of Homeless Housed of Total
Alness/Invergordon	2006	407	28	172	42%	82	48%
Ardersier	994	783	65	89	11%	27	30%
Aviemore	475	261	7	42	16%	24	57%
Beauly	251	146	5	21	14%	6	29%
Black Isle	440	221	8	20	9%	4	20%
Central Lochaber	1213	501	39	68	14%	43	63%
East Caithness	1440	188	7	174	93%	12	7%
East Sutherland	870	186	4	92	49%	6	7%
Gairloch	137	37	1	13	35%	2	15%
Grantown	232	94	2	19	20%	4	21%
Inverness City	4365	2075	227	359	17%	223	62%
Kingussie	170	71	-	23	32%	5	22%
Lochalsh	238	93	10	16	17%	9	56%
Lochcarron	114	47	1	15	32%	1	7%
LochNess	194	107	3	14	13%	3	21%
Mid Ross	1361	482	40	101	21%	54	53%
Nairn	821	299	17	70	23%	22	31%
North East Lochaber	89	32	1	8	25%	0	0%
North Skye	608	247	21	73	30%	34	47%
North West Sutherland	243	43	-	26	60%	0	0%
Peninsula	151	38	-	7	18%	0	0%
Rural Nairn	93	47	1	3	6%	1	33%
South Lochaber	293	102	-	34	33%	5	15%
South Skye	243	84	7	17	20%	7	41%
Tain	785	184	5	74	40%	22	30%
Tomatin	26	26	1	0	0%	0	0%
Ullapool	183	110	5	21	19%	5	24%
West Caithness	1426	252	7	135	54%	15	11%
West Lochaber	172	58	1	41	71%	1	2%
TOTAL	**19633**	**7221**	**513**	**1747**	**24%**	**617**	**35%**

2.4.2 This gives an overall view of relative housing supply / demand and pressure. It shows that in most areas of Highland demand for housing far exceeds supply. A low percentage of people housed in comparison to the number of people seeking housing in an area is an indicator of housing pressure. The table shows a number of areas where these percentages are extremely low. East Caithness continues to be an area of low demand.

2.4.3 The table above shows continued homeless pressure in Aviemore, Central Lochaber Inverness City, Lochalsh and Mid Ross..

2.5 Allocations – Points Category

2.5.1 Chart 10 shows the percentage of applicants who have been awarded points for housing need categories contained in the Allocations Policy compared to the percentage of applicants housed with these categories of points. Details for those with Homeless Priority can be seen in Chart 8 above.

Chart 10 - Points Categories

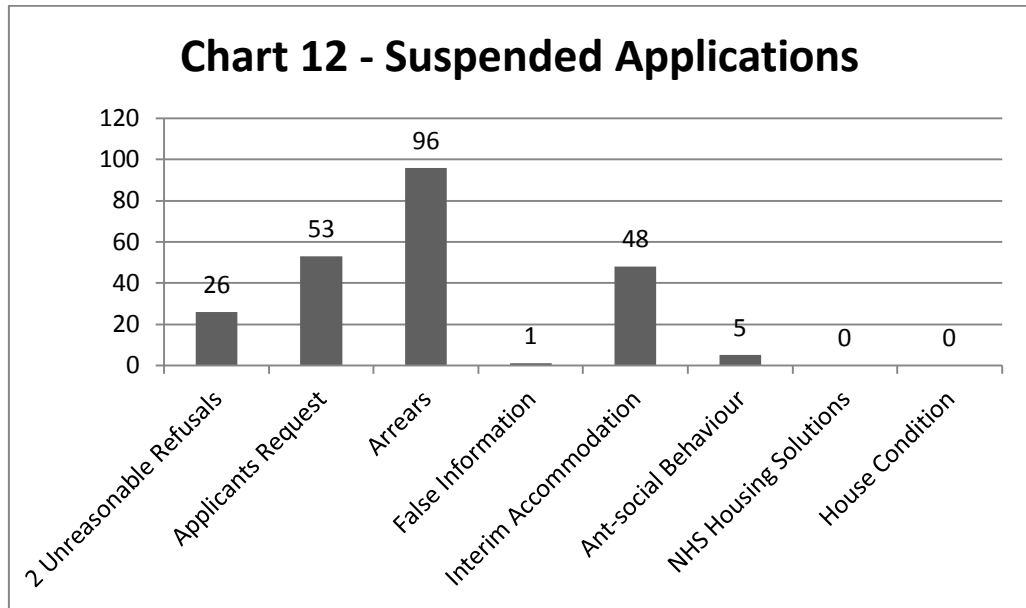|	Accessible Housing	Care & Support	Insecure tenure	Need to Reside	Underocc upation	Overcrow ding	Poor House Condition
■ % Of Applications	12	2	48	68	29	22	6
▨ % Housed	18	5	36	86	19	29	6

2.5.2 This graph shows the percentage of applicants and the percentage of those who have been housed in the year with points for different types of housing need.

2.5.2 This shows that with the exception of people with insecure tenure points and people who are under-occupying their current home a higher proportion of applicants were housed in each category than the proportion of overall applicants in that category.

2.5.3 Included in the under-occupancy figures 10% of applicants have points as a result of being affected by Welfare Reform changes.

2.7   Suspended Applications

2.7.1   Chart 12 shows the breakdown of the 248 applications which were suspended from receiving offers at 31 March 2014.   The total number of applicants suspended accounts for 3.2% of all applicants, which is a slight increase from last year.   Most suspensions result from people being in rent arrears (78) followed closely by those in interim accommodation: 74.   This is the first time that rent arrears has been the most common reason for applicants being suspended.   51 Applicants are suspended following refusal of 2 reasonable offers of housing, which is a reduction from 57 last year.

Chart 12 - Suspended Applications

Category	Value
2 Unreasonable Refusals	26
Applicants Request	53
Arrears	96
False Information	1
Interim Accommodation	48
Ant-social Behaviour	5
NHS Housing Solutions	0
House Condition	0

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Date: 20 May 2015