

Agenda Item	7.
Report No	CLH 05/18

## HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** Care, Learning and Housing

**Date:** 30 May 2018

**Report Title:** Children Living in Temporary Accommodation

**Report By:** Joint report by Director of Community Services and Director of Care and Learning

### **1. Purpose/Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This report provides a summary of recent trends in relation to homelessness amongst families with children and highlights some of the issues involved for this client group. The report also summarises the actions that the Council takes to minimise the impact of homelessness on families with children.

### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the report.

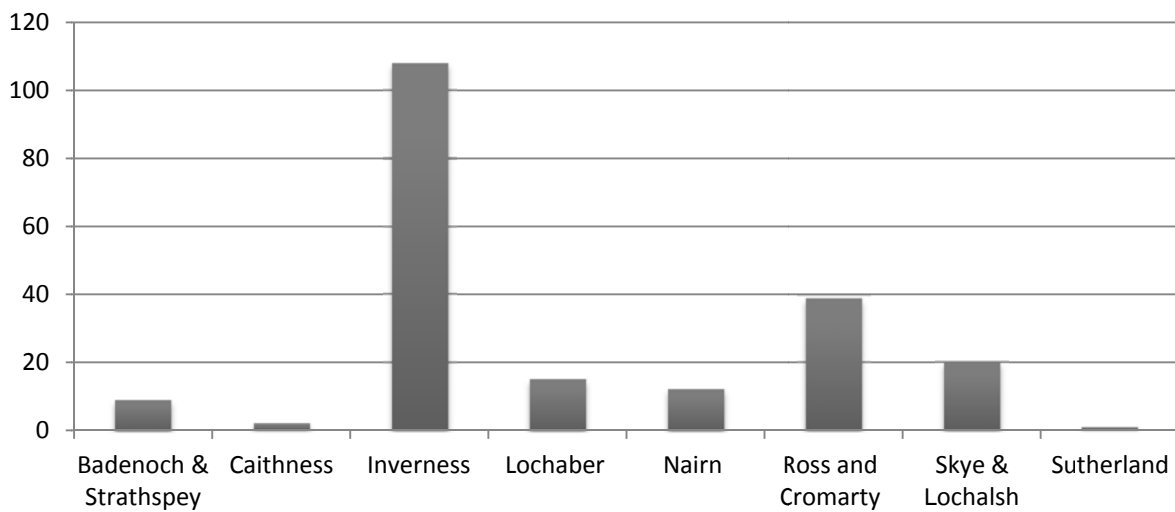
### **3. Introduction**

- 3.1 Local authorities must have regard to the best interests of the children of homeless applicants. This corporate responsibility involves all relevant Council services including Housing and Care and Learning.
- 3.2 A secure nurturing environment is key to the wellbeing of families, children and others. The negative effects of homelessness in terms of health and wellbeing are well evidenced. Preventing homelessness will always be the best option if this can be achieved. If prevention is not possible then we aim to minimise the duration of homelessness and provide suitable temporary accommodation.
- 3.3 The Council has a clear homelessness policy based on legislation and the statutory Code of Guidance on Homelessness. We have staff guidance and procedures to support joint working and sharing responsibility between Housing and Care and Learning. There are a number of ways in which family teams can assist in preventing and resolving homelessness. For example by:-
- Providing family support (without the right support, tenancies can break down);
  - Helping families with particular needs engage with the specialist services they need;
  - Helping prepare for independent living by helping young people develop life and resilience skills. This is particularly critical for care experienced children and young people;
  - Identifying families, children and young people at risk of homelessness, putting in place prevention pathways and helping them to engage with the services they need.
- 3.4 Research shows that early childhood trauma is often at the root of multiple and complex homelessness in adulthood. Care and Learning Services have a role in recognising this as an early sign of future homelessness and working creatively and constructively with families, children and young people to develop resilience and engage with the services that can assist.
- 3.5 There is an increased focus nationally on reducing the use of temporary accommodation and ending homelessness. It is anticipated that local authorities and their partners will be expected to implement actions arising from the recommendations of the recent Local Government Committee Report into homelessness and the Homeless and Rough Sleeping Action Group.

### **4. Use of Temporary Accommodation**

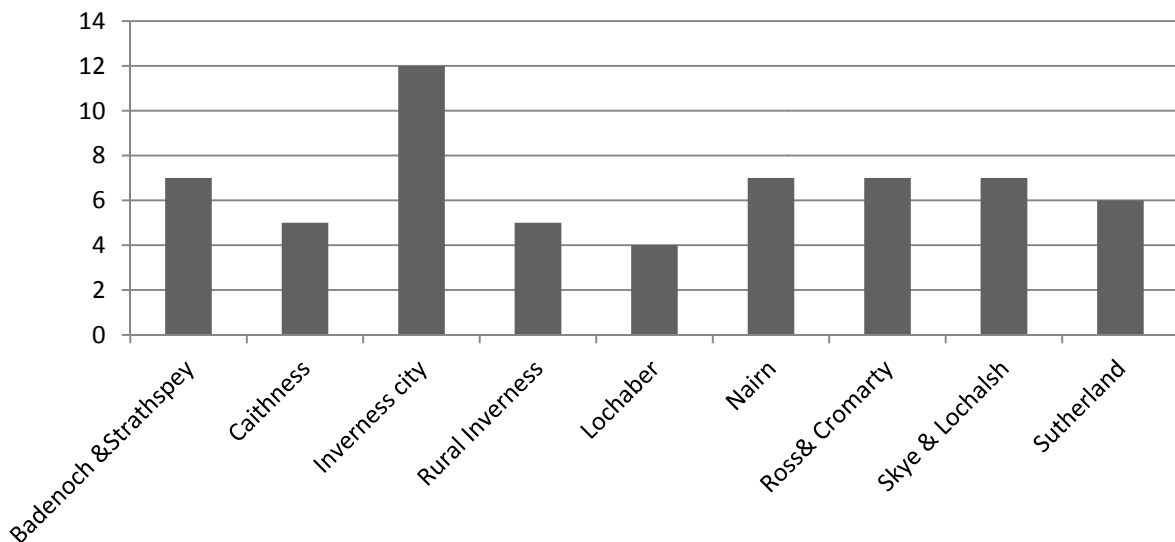
- 4.1 In terms of current legislation homeless households are entitled to temporary accommodation while the Council assesses their application or while awaiting the offer of a permanent let. Intentionally homeless households may be in temporary accommodation as the outcome of their application.

4.2 The chart below shows the number of homeless households with children with a right to permanent accommodation who are currently waiting for an offer of housing.



4.3 The chart shows that there are large numbers of families with children living in temporary accommodation waiting for an offer of permanent housing. Half of these families are in Inverness. Despite high levels of housing allocations to homeless households it can take some time for a house to become available in some areas. For example in 2017/18 in Inverness 61% of all Highland Housing Register (HHR) housing allocations (80% of lets excluding transfer applicants) were to homeless households.

4.4 The chart 2 below shows the average number of months spent in temporary accommodation by families housed during 2017/18, by local office area.



4.5 Out-with Inverness City, families, on average, stay for 7 months in temporary accommodation. Within Inverness City the average stay for families is a year with many households staying for longer. This is a feature of the high housing demand in Inverness, and the difficulty in identifying property to offer as permanent accommodation within the City. Families generally spend less time in temporary accommodation than other homeless applicant households. Overall the average length of time in temporary accommodation is 9 months for families with children compared to

11 months for single person households and 10 months for couples. There has been little change in these figures since 2016/17.

- 4.6 The vast majority of homeless families with children who are living in temporary accommodation are in 'mainstream' type housing, either owned by the Council, a Housing Association or leased through a private landlord. Currently we use 237 council properties as temporary accommodation, with another 151 leased from other landlords/owners. Since April 2017 there has been a 40% increase in the number of Council properties used as temporary accommodation, and we are committed to continuing to increase this type of provision.
- 4.7 Bed and Breakfast accommodation (i.e. with shared facilities) should only be used in exceptional circumstances when temporarily housing families with children or pregnant women. There is a cap of one week on its use unless there are exceptional circumstances. This is a legal duty arising from the Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2004 (amended 2007). Order breaches are reported quarterly. There have been no breaches reported in Highland since 2016.
- 4.8 Being in temporary accommodation can be disruptive. Long periods in temporary accommodation can impact on a child's physical and mental health and their educational attainment. Households can feel unable to settle in and make the accommodation a home. In addition, the service charges to pay for temporary accommodation can increase the pressure on the family's income.
- 4.9 With the aim of helping households move out of homelessness as quickly as possible, Highland Housing Register (HHR) Allocation Policy provides households with homeless points, and an entitlement to 1 'reasonable offer' of permanent accommodation. A reasonable offer is one which meets any needs which they may have - but it may not be in the location or type of housing which they desire. We try to help families to have continuity of services such as schools, however in communities where there are severe housing shortages it is not always possible to make an offer within the household's preferred area of choice for housing.
- 4.10 It is important in such cases for there to be good communication with the family and between services so that there is a good understanding of the issues and implications. It may be, for example, that the household is supported to take up an alternative option such as private or 'mid-market' rented housing as these are the only feasible options for settled accommodation available to them in their desired location.

## **5 The role of services for children**

- 5.1 The Care and Learning service works in an integrated way to proactively ensure that children and young people of families either made homeless or at risk of becoming homeless are supported.
- 5.2 Through the Highland practice model, all children are supported by a named person who is the key contact for services if a family of a child is either made homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. This person is either a health visitor for children in the early years or a head teacher or senior member of staff in a school for school aged children. If intervention is agreed that involves more than one agency then a lead professional is agreed and a child's plan is put in place. This plan assesses the individual needs of a child or young person and targets resources towards the child or their family which meets their needs.

- 5.3 The Care and Learning Service is designed around family teams which are made up of service partners from education, health and social care. These partners work collaboratively to ensure that the best advice and support is offered to children, young people and their families. This support is individualised for each young person affected by homelessness or the threat of homelessness. The support offered can range from income maximisation and budgeting support for families through to support for children and young people who may be required to move from one school to another to secure permanent accommodation.
- 5.4 The educational needs of children and young people are considered a priority when children are required to move to another school. Highland schools have effective systems and procedures designed to ensure that the impact of changing school is minimised. Each child is supported in school by a unique record which details their attendance rates, educational attainment and achievement. This record is transferred with the child or young person when they transition to another school. This is integral to the processes of named person handover. In addition to record transfer named person handover processes ensure that key members of school staff discuss the needs of individual youngsters with the receiving school.
- 5.5 When children and young people move into temporary accommodation, family teams and schools work collaboratively to, where possible, ensure that they can remain in the same school until such time that permanent accommodation can be secured.
- 5.6 There are similar processes for named person handover for health visitors where a new health visitor is identified and health records passed over.
- 5.7 In addition to the framework that supports care experienced young people, similar processes to those outlined above also support young people aged over sixteen who become homeless as a consequence of them no longer being able to live within their family home. Where young people are considered to be vulnerable, family teams work to support them to secure tenancies and develop the skills and competencies required for independent living. Again, such youngsters are supported by a lead professional and have their needs assessed and met through the child's plan processes.
- 5.8 Family teams, named persons and lead professionals work collaboratively with housing services to ensure that their housing needs are considered as integral to meeting any additional support needs arising from their housing status. In the last ten years housing officers have increasingly joined child's plan meetings and have often become formal partners to the child's plan.

## **6. Implications**

- 6.1 Resource  
There are no implications arising from this report
- 6.2 Legal  
The report outlines the legal duties involved in relation to temporary accommodation for households with children.
- 6.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)  
Effective prevention and the provision of suitable accommodation is key to minimising the negative impacts that homelessness may have on children. There can be greater difficulty obtaining suitable temporary accommodation within existing communities in

rural area.

- 6.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever  
There are no implications arising from the report.
- 6.5 Risk  
There are no implications arising from the report.
- 6.6 Gaelic  
There are no implications arising from the report.

Designation: Director of Community Services  
Director of Care and Learning

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