

Agenda Item	9.
Report No	CLH 31/19

## HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** Care, Learning & Housing

**Date:** 29 May 2019

**Report Title:** Annual Monitoring Report: Housing Allocations Policy

**Report By:** Director of Community Services

### 1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides annual monitoring information on the operation of the Highland Housing Register (HHR) allocations policy for 2018-2019. It highlights key issues in relation to the supply and demand for social rented housing in Highland. The report also identifies areas for further policy review.

### 2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are invited to:

- **note** the information contained in the Annual Monitoring Report on housing allocations and that the policy is achieving its objectives in relation to meeting housing needs; and
- **note** that a policy review is in process and that Members will be invited to a Policy Development Group in Autumn 2019.

### **3 Background**

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 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 Care, Learning and Housing Committee and to the Boards of partner organisations. The annual HHR allocations monitoring report for 2018-19 is set out in **Appendix 1**.

### **4 Allocations Monitoring**

- 4.1 The number of applicants on the register was 7,890 applications as of 31 March 2019. This is the same figure as at 31 March 2018. Chart 8 in **Appendix 1** provides details at a landlord level on the number of new applications, the number of cancelled applications and also the number of applicants housed during 2018-19.
- 4.2 There were a total of 2,516 offers of housing made by all the partners in 2018-19. As a result of these, 1,804 applicants were housed. This equates to approximately 1.4 offers made for each property let.
- 4.3 The number of applications with homeless priority points increased by 1% to 750 applications, which equates to 10% of all applications held.
- 4.4 At year end 31 March 2019, there were a total of 171 applications suspended, with the most common reason being rent arrears in 67 of the applications.
- 4.5 The annual monitoring report demonstrates that the housing allocations policy is largely 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.
- 4.6 The Annual Monitoring Report also contains information on the number of housing applications and the outcomes for applicants from different ethnic groups. As from 1 March 2017, the Equal Opportunities Form has been incorporated as a separate sheet in the main application form and it is anticipated that in future we will be able to achieve a higher level of return of equalities information from applicants.

### **5 Need to Reside**

- 5.1 Need to Reside points reflect a need for an applicant to be in a community whether they live or work there or have a care and support need to be there. Points are awarded where applicants can prove that they been resident in a community for at least 12 months (at the point of the offer of housing). This policy was adopted in early 2016 and 83% of all applicants housed during the period 2018-2019 had a need to reside as defined in the policy.

### **6 Armed Forces**

- 6.1 Data about the Armed Forces has been captured on our Highland Housing Register application forms since February 2014 and on our re-registration forms since July

2014.

- 6.2 There were 18 serving members and 28 previous members of the Armed Forces on the register at 31 March 2019. Ten former armed forces households were re-housed in 2018-19 which makes up 1% of all applicants looking for rehousing in Highland.
- 6.3 We continue to work closely with the Armed Forces Covenant to address any issues for applicants who may be finding it difficult to access housing services.

## **7 Online Form and Housing Options Website**

- 7.1 An online HHR application form was introduced in November 2015. Applicants can use the Highland Council website to apply using the My Account function. During the 2018-19 a total of 342 new online applications were made which means that 1,553 applications held have been submitted on-line.
- 7.2 The Highland Council's website allows applicants to look at demand and supply of accommodation throughout Highland, giving applicants a better understanding of their prospects when applying for social housing.  
[http://www.highland.gov.uk/info/925/council\\_housing/244/apply\\_for\\_a\\_house/5](http://www.highland.gov.uk/info/925/council_housing/244/apply_for_a_house/5)
- 7.3 Applicants can filter on zones or property size to ascertain the number of HHR houses available and last year's lets. Applicants are encouraged to investigate their housing options and have realistic expectations as to whether the HHR can meet their housing aspirations.

## **8 Future Policy Review/Change**

- 8.1 Provisions in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 intended to increase landlord flexibility in making the best use of social housing available to them came into effect on 1 May 2019.
- 8.2 When allocating houses, social landlords have to give "reasonable preference" to people with particular needs. Under the 2014 Act this has been amended and social landlords now have to give reasonable preference to:
- people who are homeless or are threatened with homelessness;
  - people who live in unsatisfactory conditions and have unmet housing need; and
  - social housing tenants who are considered to be under-occupying their homes.
- 8.3 The first phase of the HHR policy review has concluded that the current HHR policy is compliant with the Act.
- 8.4 The 2014 Act also allows social landlords to take the ownership or value of a property owned by an applicant into account. The guidance associated with the Act indicates that there may be exceptional circumstances (such as domestic abuse or uninhabitable conditions) when this cannot be considered.
- 8.5 The second phase of the HHR policy review has commenced and partners are working closely together to assess what aspects of policy require to be amended to ensure that the HHR meets housing needs in the future. Initial findings have highlighted the need for further policy analysis into the following topics.

- 8.6 Domestic abuse – currently housing officers interview applicants experiencing domestic abuse, so they can be provided with appropriate advice and assistance. However, there is no specific priority award recognised in the current policy and this means officers have to use different points categories (depending on circumstances) to maximise the potential for allocations to these applicants. The introduction of a separate points category has been encouraged by the Violence Against Women Partnership as part of Highland’s good practice approach to tackling the issue.
- 8.7 Need to reside – the provisions of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 prevent a landlord from taking into account whether an applicant lives in its area and it is necessary to ensure that the HHR policy complies with this legislation. Any proposed changes to this category will need to clearly detail the anticipated outcomes for applicants.
- 8.8 Points weighting - currently applicants can ‘build up’ points through various categories which do not demonstrate the most serious forms of housing need such as homelessness or extreme overcrowding. A modelling exercise will take place to ensure that the HHR can identify that the best use of stock is being met.
- 8.9 Accessible housing – the current process is for NHS Highland to evaluate applicants for accessible housing points through a desktop assessment. The review will assess whether those applicants with the greatest priority have appropriately weighted points for their application.
- 8.10 Choice Based Lettings – this was introduced in Caithness in 2015 to address issues of low demand. Introduced initially in the Wick area, the approach has been extended to include Thurso and now all properties (with the exception of sheltered units) in Caithness. The review will consider the effectiveness of the approach and whether it should be extended or adapted for use in other areas.
- 8.11 Key worker status – this is currently not specifically recognised in the policy. Our current mechanism for prioritising key workers is through Need to Reside Points described in Section 5 of this report. The review will consider whether a specific policy is needed and if so how we might work towards a definition of a ‘key worker’ and what type of accommodation we would aim to provide.
- 8.12 Access to children – this is recognised in the points system but there are concerns that the weighting of points to allow a parent to accommodate his or her children for part of the week may not be the most appropriate use of housing stock in a pressurised housing market.
- 8.13 The policy review is anticipated to continue for the majority of 2019. Members will be invited to a Member Policy Development Group in Autumn 2019 ahead of a future report to this Committee setting out any recommendations for change.
- 8.14 It should be noted that the national changes in terms of homelessness practice and legislation will have a significant impact on the HHR policy review. These changes are detailed in the Homelessness Update to this Committee.
- 8.15 A full Equality Impact Assessment will be prepared as part of the HHR policy review.

## **9 Consultation with Service Users**

- 9.1 One of the requirements of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 is a legal duty on social landlords to consult with service users on proposed amendments to allocations

policies. As part of the current HHR policy review, tenants and applicants will be consulted on any potential policy changes ahead of Committee approval.

## **10 Implications**

- 10.1 Resource - There are no specific implications arising from this report.
- 10.2 Legal - The current housing allocation policy is considered to meet current legal requirements. Any future policy changes would require legal advice.
- 10.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) - One of the main aims of the allocation policy is to allow access to housing based on housing need. 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 community. Competing pressures for available housing can be more acute in small communities with limited housing stock and turnover.
- 10.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever - There are no specific implications arising from this report.
- 10.5 Risk - There are no specific implications arising from this report.
- 10.6 Gaelic - Housing applications and related published material about access to housing meet the Council's standards in relation to Gaelic.

Designation: Director of Community Services

Date: 20 May 2019

Author: Lyndsey Greene, Housing Policy Officer

## Highland Housing Register

### Allocations Monitoring Report 2018/2019

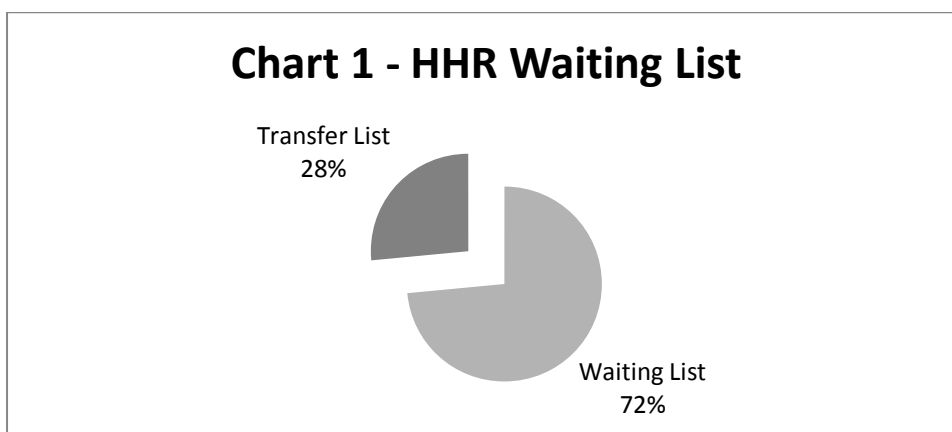
#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Highland Housing Register Allocations Policy sets out details for annual performance monitoring. The Aims of the Policy are:
- to provide housing to those in the greatest need, dependant on individual circumstances;
  - to help to prevent and deal with homelessness;
  - to help create and maintain strong and economically viable communities;
  - to work with our partner HHR landlords to provide suitable housing for those with special needs;
  - to make the best use of the housing available;
  - to give applicants a range of choices of housing;
  - to help applicants move within the Highland area, and from other parts of the UK;
  - to inform the Highland Council's planning processes.
- 1.2 This report relates to the period 1 April 2018 – 31 March 2019. 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.

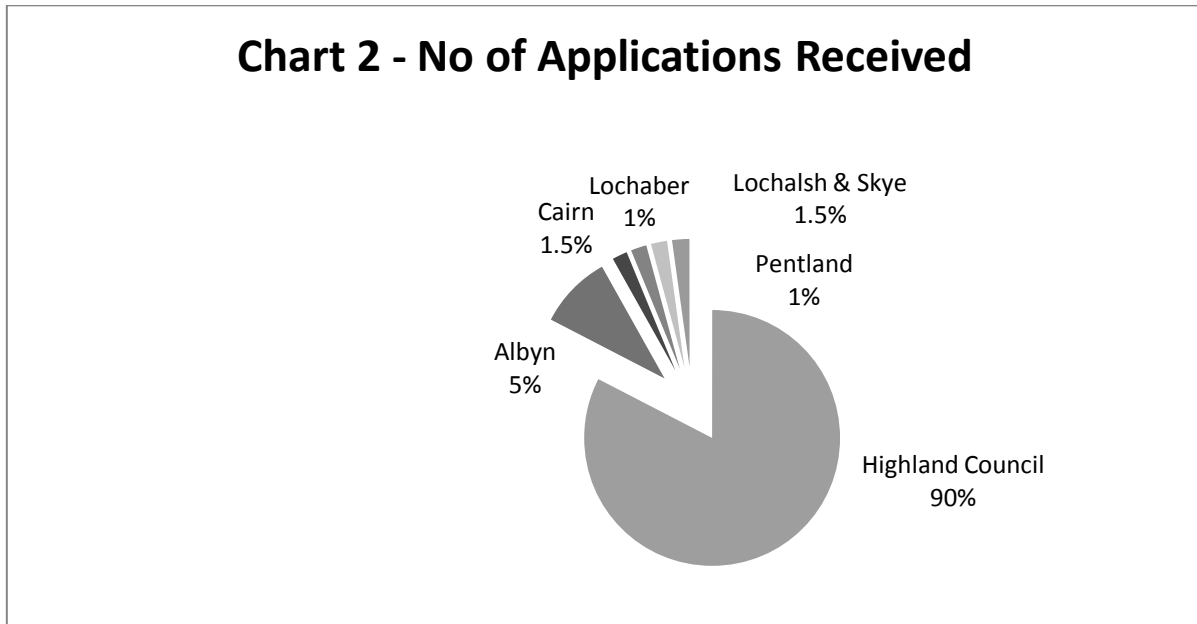
#### 2. Monitoring Information

##### 2.1 Applications

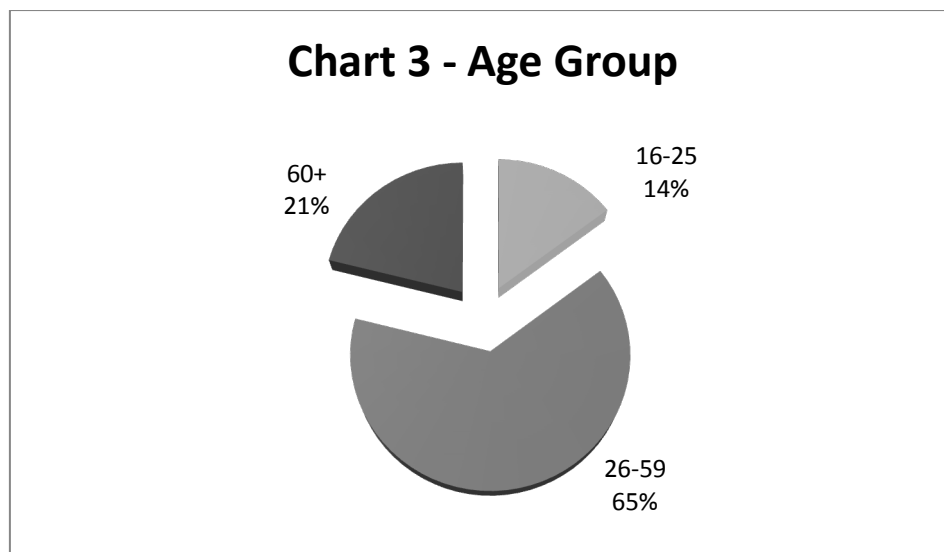
- 2.1.1 There were a total of 7,890 applications at 31 March 2019. This is the same figure as at 31 March 2018.
- 2.1.2 Chart 1 shows the percentage of all Highland Housing Register applications broken down by those seeking a social rented tenancy from an HHR partner (Housing List: 5,648 applicants) and those from existing tenants seeking to transfer to another property: (Transfer List: 2,242 applicants). The proportions last year were 5,757 (72%) Housing List and 2,133 (28%) Transfer List. This figure has been fairly static in recent years.



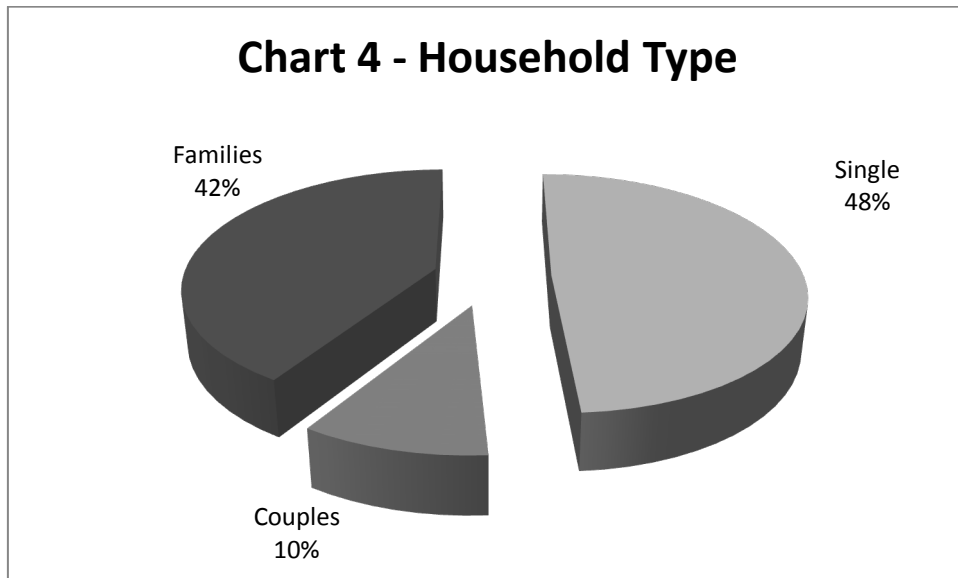
2.1.3 Chart 2 shows the number of applications each partner received. There were a total of 5,041 applications received last year. The partner who received the most applications was The Highland Council with 4,525. Albyn Housing had 242 applications, Cairn Housing Association and Lochalsh & Skye Housing Association had 77 applications each, Lochaber Housing association had 64 applications and Pentland Housing Association had 56 applications. The numbers of applications received in recent years has been fairly static.



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 which has increased slightly to 65% of all applicants. The 60+ group has increased by 1% to 21%, the 16-25 groups has decreased by 2% to 14% compared to 2017-18.

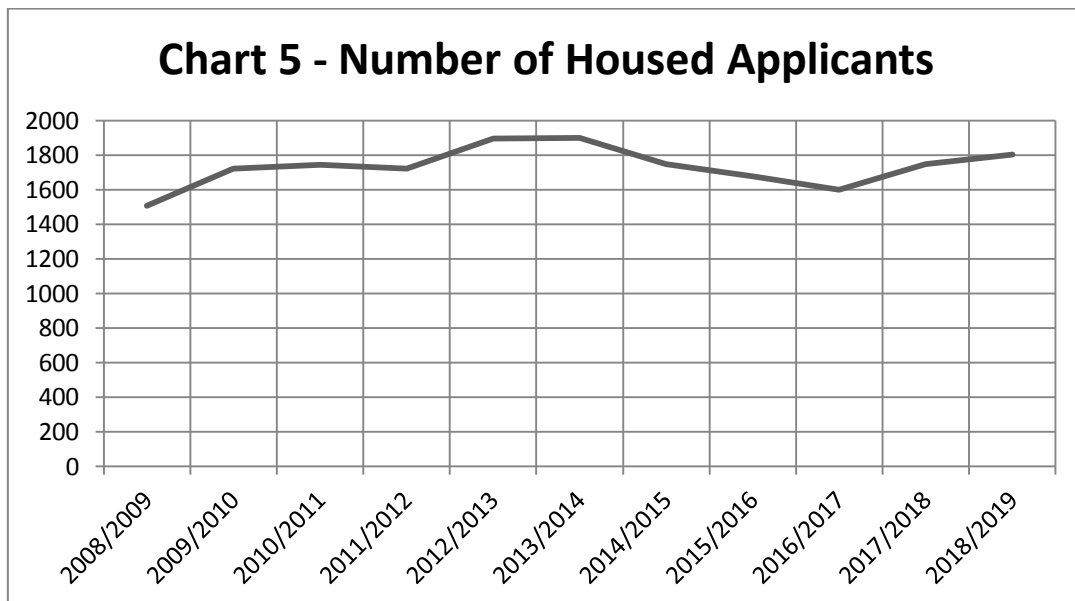


2.1.5 Chart 4 shows the number of applications by household type. It shows that the largest group continues to be single applicants (48%), with applications from couples at 10% and applications from families at 42%. The relative proportions are broadly similar to those reported for the last 2 years.



## 2.2 Allocations

2.2.1 Chart 5 shows that 1,804 applicants were housed in 2018-19 and shows the trend in applicants housed over time. It shows there has been a slight increase in the numbers housed in the last year.

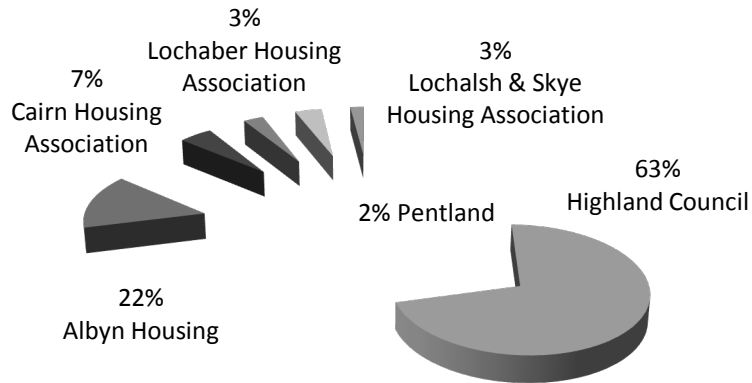


2.2.2 Of the 1,804 applicants housed in 2018-19, 1,322 (73%) were from the Housing List and 482 (27%) were from the Transfer List. Allocations to Highland Council houses accounted for 1,138 (63%) of all applicants housed which is a 1% decrease on the previous year.

2.2.3 Chart 6 shows the breakdown of the proportion of applicants housed by individual HHR Partners. Albyn Housing (388) and Cairn Housing (127) has risen by 2%; Pentland Housing Association has remained static at 2%; and Lochalsh & Skye Housing Association (53), Lochaber Housing Association (51) and Highland Council (1,138) decreased by 1% overall.

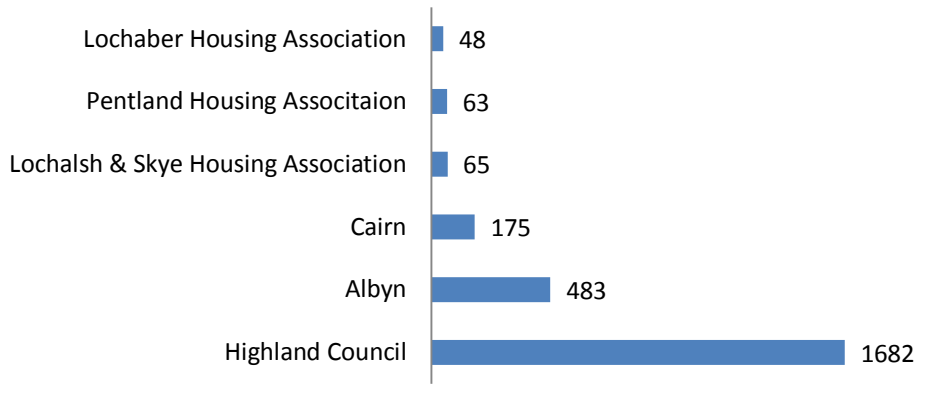


**Chart 6 - Allocation by HHR Partner**



2.2.4 Chart 7 below shows how many offers each partner made.

**Chart 7 - No of Offers Made (including withdrawals/refusals)**



2.2.5 The table below shows the comparison over the last 2 years in respect of all received, housed, cancelled and total applications held by each area office. This does not include re-instated applications within the reporting period or those housed by mutual exchange or through our participating landlords (Trust Housing Association, Key Housing etc.)

## Chart 8 – Applications held by area office

Area Office	Total Apps held at 31/03/19	Total Housed to 31/03/19	Total Cancelled to 31/03/19	New Apps Received to 31/03/19	Total Apps Held at 31/03/18
Albyn HS	474	388	142	242	534
Cairn HA	229	127	70	77	258
Lochaber HA	118	51	49	64	123
Lochalsh & Skye HA	133	53	57	77	142
Pentland HA	66	47	35	56	69
Highland Council	6,870	1,138	2,797	4,525	6,764
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,890</b>	<b>1,804</b>	<b>3,152</b>	<b>5,041</b>	<b>7,890</b>

### 2.3 Allocations – Ethnic Origins for Applicants & Housed Applicants

2.3.1 This section of the HHR application form is not compulsory and therefore the figures reported may not be fully representative of all applicants. Since March 2017 the equal opportunities form has been incorporated into the main application form and it is hoped that this will provide us with better qualitative data in future.

2.3.2 Chart 9 shows that the largest group of those who completed the form describe themselves as Scottish: 2,729 (77%) applicants and 554 (79%) 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 9 – Applicants by Ethnic Origin

Ethnic Origin	Number of Applications	Number Housed
White Scottish	2729	554
White Other British	431	95
White Irish	14	5
White Gypsy/Traveller	6	1
White Polish	123	27
White Other	173	20
Mixed or Multiple Ethnic	9	1
Indian	5	2
Pakistani	4	1
Bangladeshi	7	1
Chinese	-	1
Other Asian	5	2
Caribbean	4	-
African	4	-
Other Black	9	-
Arab	2	-
Other Ethnic / Unknown	10	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,535</b>	<b>712</b>

## 2.4 Allocations – Letting Zones & Homeless Demand

2.4.1 Chart 10 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 10: Housing Supply Demand and Numbers Housed including Homeless Priority**

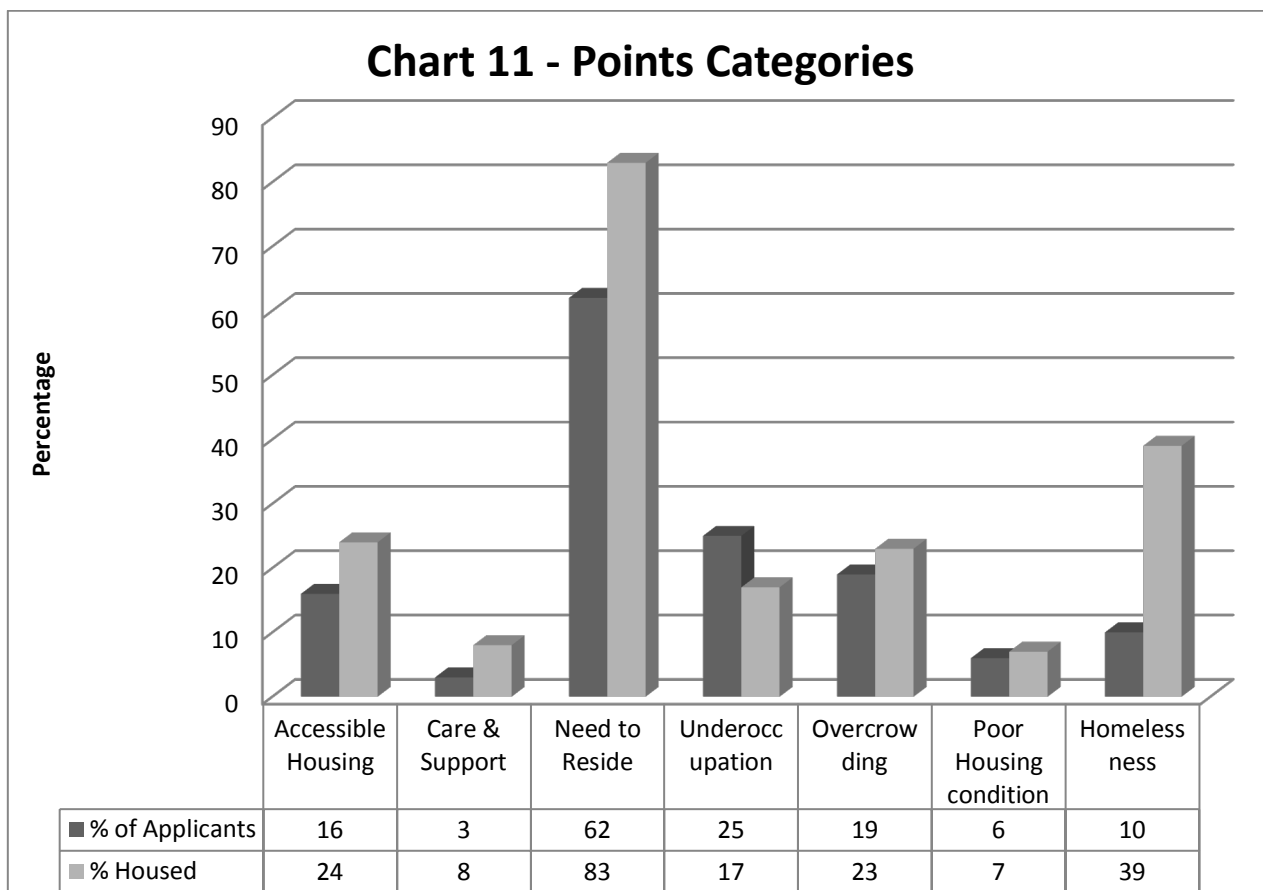
ZONE	Total Stock	Total Demand	Homeless Demand	Total Housed	% Housed of Demand	Total Home Housed	% of Homeless Housed of Total
Alness/Invergordon	2067	412	35	176	43%	66	38%
Ardersier	1093	831	81	78	9%	37	47%
Aviemore	491	310	24	25	8%	10	40%
Beauly	291	178	16	45	25%	19	42%
Black Isle	450	203	12	39	19%	23	59%
Central Lochaber	1289	571	54	82	14%	52	63%
East Caithness	1396	232	2	172	74%	19	11%
East Sutherland	866	219	3	90	41%	13	14%
Gairloch	136	34	1	9	26%	3	33%
Grantown	231	119	12	26	22%	6	23%
Inverness City	4564	2008	318	344	17%	221	64%
Kingussie	165	82	5	13	16%	5	38%
Lochalsh	197	86	8	17	20%	7	41%
Lochcarron	252	42	1	16	38%	3	19%
LochNess	113	117	1	24	21%	6	25%
Mid Ross	1415	464	69	146	31%	78	53%
Nairn	856	345	24	70	20%	30	43%
North East Lochaber	86	28	0	6	21%	2	33%
North Skye	609	230	43	29	13%	21	72%
N/West Sutherland	232	37	0	27	73%	2	7%
Peninsula	136	43	1	14	33%	1	7%
Rural Nairn	93	44	1	6	14%	2	33%
South Lochaber	294	106	3	35	33%	9	26%
South Skye	260	100	7	40	40%	19	48%
Tain	769	174	15	63	36%	24	38%
Tomatin	25	18	0	0	0%	0	0%
Ullapool	190	108	8	10	9%	6	60%
West Caithness	1409	272	3	193	71%	24	12%
West Lochaber	167	74	3	9	12%	3	33%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>20,142</b>	<b>7,847</b>	<b>750</b>	<b>1,804</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>711</b>	<b>39%</b>

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.

2.4.3 The proportion of homeless applicants housed has increased in 2018-2019 to 711 homeless applicants housed compared to 658 in 2017-18. The proportion of applicants with homeless status has risen by 60 to 750 in 2018-19. The proportions of lets to homeless households tends to reflect the general pattern of housing pressure, with a higher proportion of lets to homeless people in areas of greatest housing pressure.

## 2.5 Allocations – Points Category

2.5.1 Chart 11 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.



2.5.2 This graph shows that in most cases applicants with the greatest housing needs are more likely to be housed.

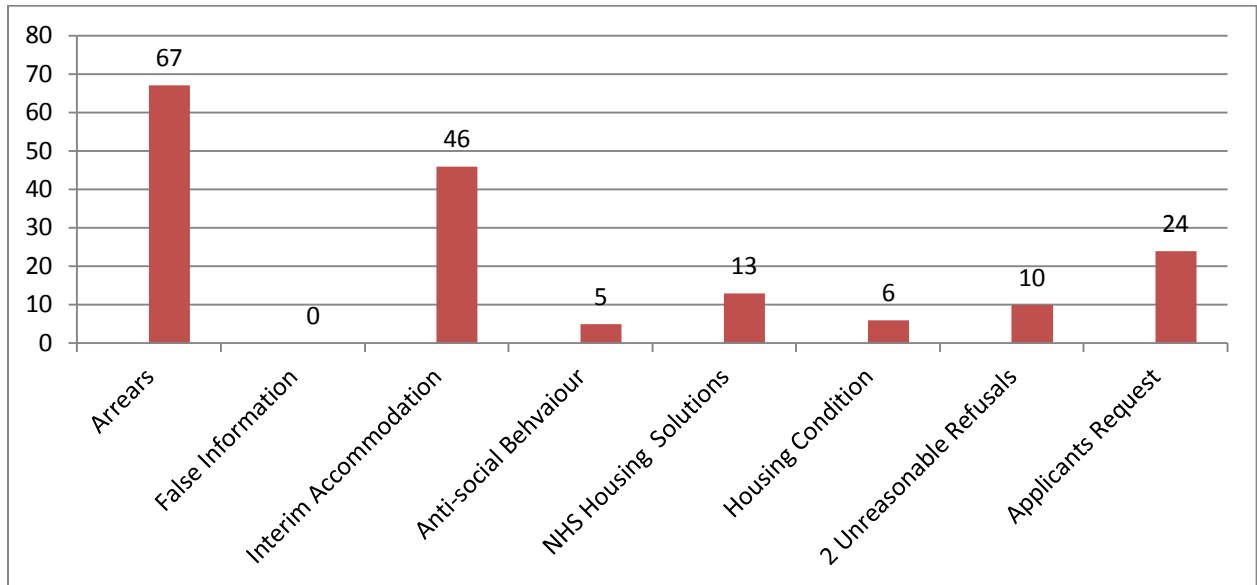
## 2.6 Suspended Applications

2.6.1 Chart 12 shows the breakdown by reason for the 171 applications which were suspended from receiving offers at 31 March 2019. The total number of applicants suspended accounts for 2% of all applicants, which is a slight decrease from 174 last year. Most suspensions result from people being in rent arrears (67) followed by those with an interim homeless accommodation decision (46) who have been assessed as not being able to sustain a tenancy at this time even with Housing Support.

2.6.2 This is the sixth consecutive year that rent arrears have been the most common reason for applicants being suspended which is related to the introduction of Universal Credit in Highland. 10 Applicants were suspended following refusal of 2 reasonable offers of housing, which is the fifth consecutive year we have seen a reduction in this total. This is

attributed to more robust Housing Options conversations taking place at an early stage and regular liaison with applicants throughout the process.

### Chart 12 – Suspended applications



Author: Lyndsey Greene, Housing Policy Officer  
Date: 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2019