



Falkirk Council
Corporate & Neighbourhood Services

Annual Homeless Statement 2013-14

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1. BACKGROUND

This year's Annual Homelessness Statement has been prepared as a supporting document to Falkirk Council's Local Housing Strategy (LHS) which covers the period 2011–16. The LHS is now the sole strategic document on housing, homelessness and support issues and looks to integrate homelessness with wider issues of housing supply and quality. The monitoring of the Homeless activity is incorporated within the wider monitoring framework for the LHS. However, it is considered useful to continue to prepare an Annual Homelessness Statement that brings together the main issues relating to homelessness and housing advice in a format that is accessible to key stakeholders.

This report addresses the issues of homelessness and housing advice in the Falkirk Council area during the period 2013–14. It sets out the progress that has been made and looks at the current nature and extent of homelessness in the area in the context of the wider Local Housing Strategy.

The Statement covers four key issues:

- **Trends in Homelessness** – Section 2 of this Statement provides information on local trends in homelessness over the past five years to provide a context that will help local people and other stakeholders understand the causes of homelessness in the area, who is most affected by it and the problems that they face,
- **Performance Indicators** – Section 3 provides an overview of performance in meeting a range of targets associated with the delivery of services and provision of housing to homeless people. Work on the development of a robust Performance Management Framework that complements the recently introduced Housing Charter has been a key priority for the service over the past year and good progress has been made since the last Statement was published.

- **Homelessness and Equalities** – Section 4 looks at how different groups in the local population are affected by homelessness so that any issues with regard to inequality can be identified and corrective action taken.
- **Challenges for 2014–2015** – Section 5 looks at the challenges to be faced in the coming year ranging from changes to the welfare system to the way we deal with our clients.

2. TRENDS IN HOMELESSNESS

This section of the 2013–14 Annual Homelessness Statement assesses homeless trends in both the Falkirk Council area and Scotland as a whole over the period 2008–14. The key issues to note are:

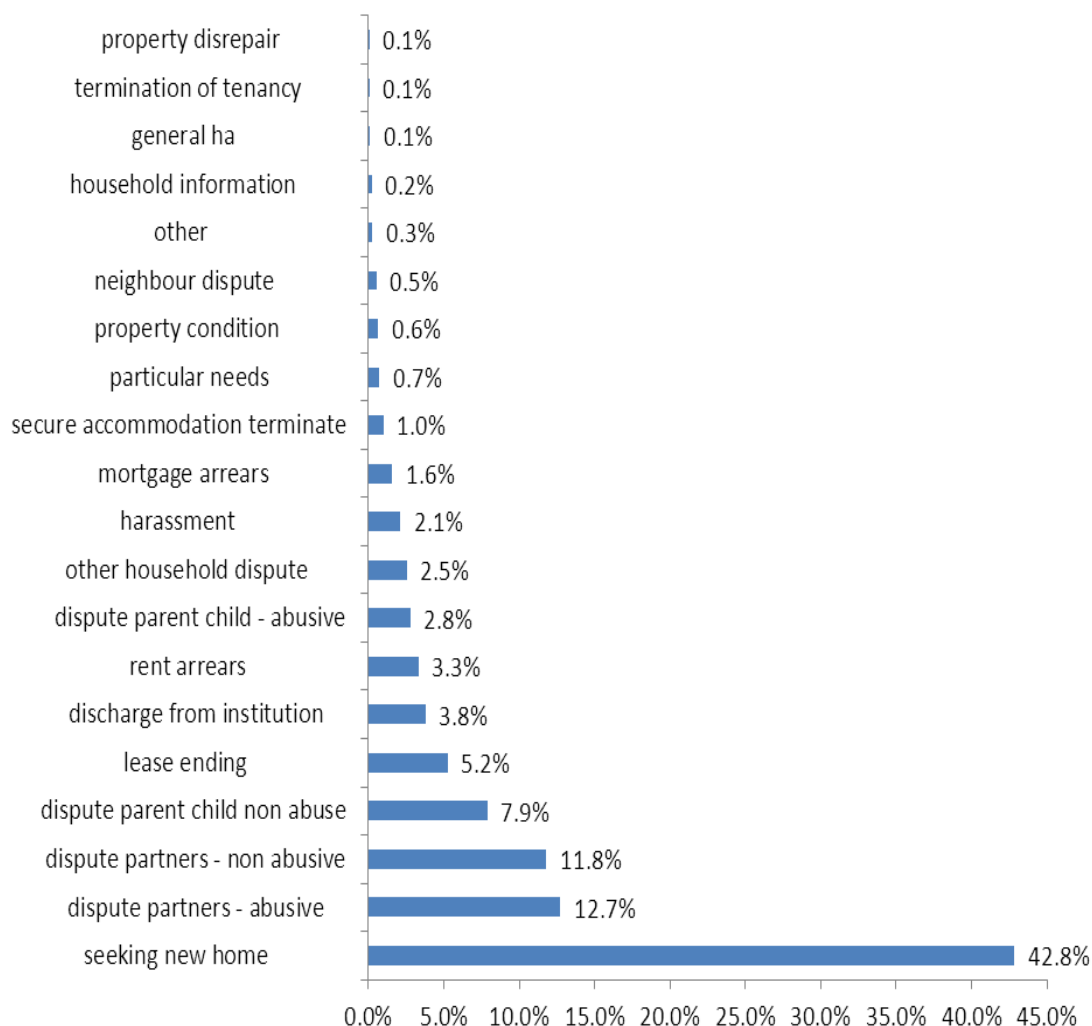
- A 4.2% decrease in homeless presentations between 2012–13 and 2013–14. Presentations in 2013–14 were at their lowest for the last five years.
- The majority of housing advice cases (62.5%) led to the client being referred for a homeless assessment.
- Among those assessed as homeless, the vast majority of clients were classed as unintentional (87%) rather than intentional. However, this trend has continued to narrow over the past five years.
- Household dispute is the most commonly cited reason for a homeless presentation (63%).
- Most homeless applicants in 2013–14 were single, whether they were a single person (63%) or single parents (26%).

The information displayed below illustrates key trends in homelessness in the Falkirk Council area and, where there is a relationship, to trends across other Scottish Authorities.

Primary reason for housing advice enquiry

Since April 2011 the authority has offered housing advice interviews to every applicant who has approached the Access to Housing (ATH) service. This is intended to provide an in-depth discussion and advice regarding clients housing options. As seen in Chart 1, the most common reason for clients making an enquiry to the service in 2013–14 was ‘seeking a new home’ (42.8%). Other principle reasons commonly cited were: abusive partner dispute (12.7%); non-abusive partner dispute (11.8%); non-abusive parent child dispute (7.9%); and the conclusion of a lease (5.2%). The remaining categories can be viewed in chart 1.

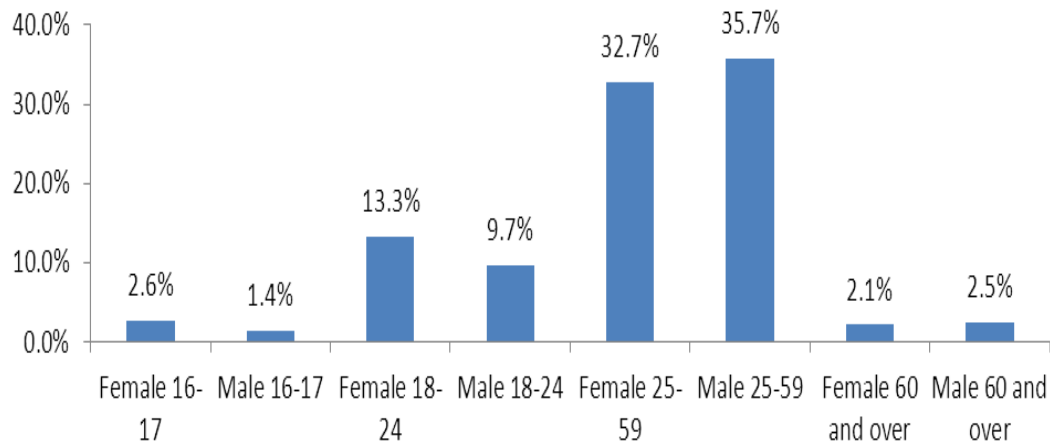
Chart 1: Primary reason for housing advice enquiry (Falkirk Council area) 2013-14



Source: Falkirk Council Housing Management System

Household type of housing enquiry

**Chart 2: Applicant type in housing advice cases (Falkirk Council area)
2013-14**



Source: Falkirk Council Housing Management System

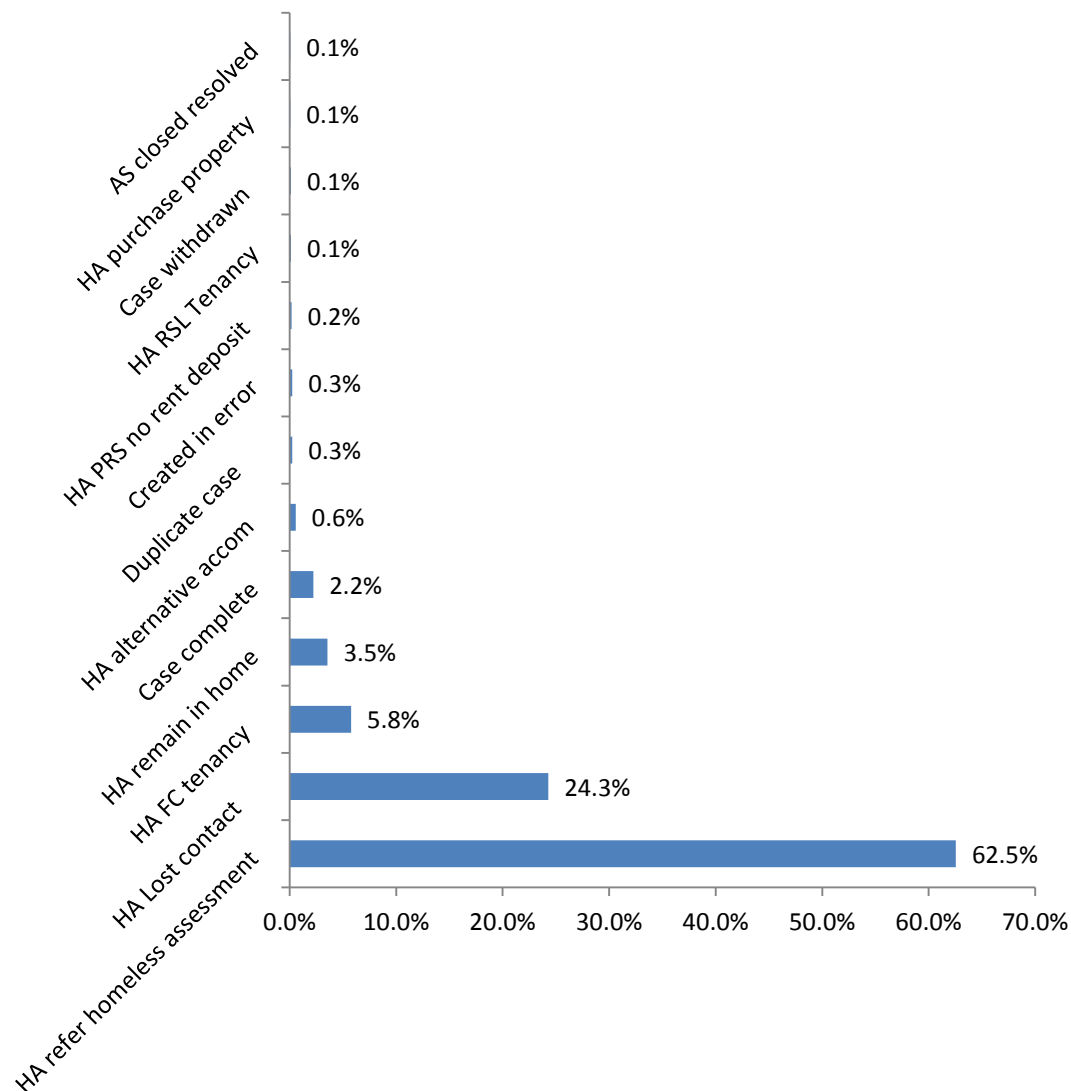
Housing advice is predominantly provided to 25–59 year olds (68.4%). Males and females are similarly represented within that age group (35.7% males and 32.7% females). This was distantly followed by 18–24 year olds who accounted for 23% of the 2013–14 housing advice cases. Females within this age group were more common than males. Females are again most highly represented in the 16–17 year old group with 2.6%, compared to males 1.4%.

Although there are only minor differences between male and female housing advice cases, the figures suggest that younger females, between 16 and 24, were more likely to receive housing advice than males. This trend was reversed for males over 24 years old.

Trends show that for 25–59 year old females the most common advice sought related to: seeking new home (38.1%); abusive partner dispute (24.4%); non-abusive partner dispute (9.2%); lease ending (8.1%) and rent arrears (4.8%). Amongst males aged 25–59 the most common categories were: seeking new home (44%); non-abusive partner dispute (18%); discharge from institution (8.2%); and abusive partner dispute (6.7%).

Outcomes for housing advice cases

**Chart 3: Outcomes of housing advice cases (Falkirk Council area)
2013-14**



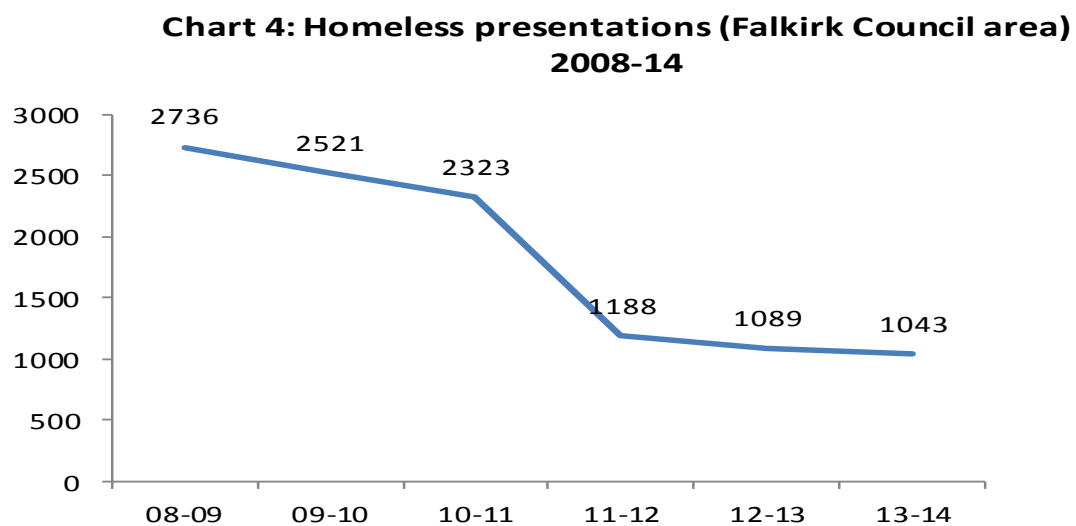
Source: Falkirk Council Housing Management System

Chart 3 above indicates that the majority of housing advice cases within the Falkirk Council area in 2013-14 led to a referral for homeless assessment (62.5%). This represents a 1.3% increase from 2012-13. Losing contact with clients was also a prominent outcome of housing options interviews (24.3%). This is a decrease of 2.2% from 2012-13. It should be noted, however, that this will also include cases where the client's issues have been resolved but we have been unable

to regain contact with the client to verify this. Actions have been identified that can further improve the retention of client contact and these will be enacted going forward in the 2014–15 period.

Of the advice cases we have assessed during 2013–2014, 591 of the 1578 cases (37.5%) did not lead to a homeless application. In 2012–13, 584 of the 1506 advice cases (38.8%) did not lead to a homeless assessment.

Homeless presentations

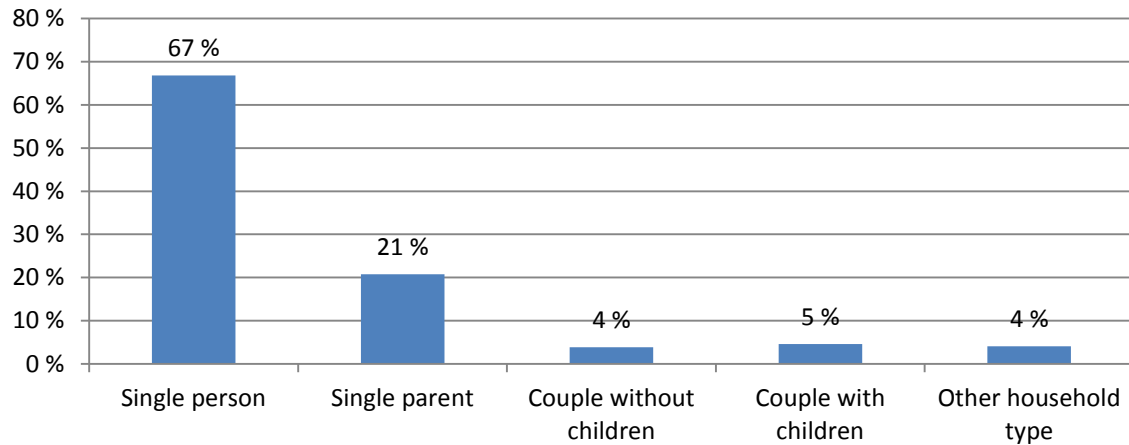


Source: Falkirk Council Housing Management System

The above chart illustrates that homeless presentations in the Falkirk Council area are continuing to fall; a trend persisting over the last six years. The 4% (46 cases) reduction in presentations between 2012–13 and 2013–14 represents continued and sustained improvement in reducing the levels of homelessness through prevention measures

Homeless applications by household type

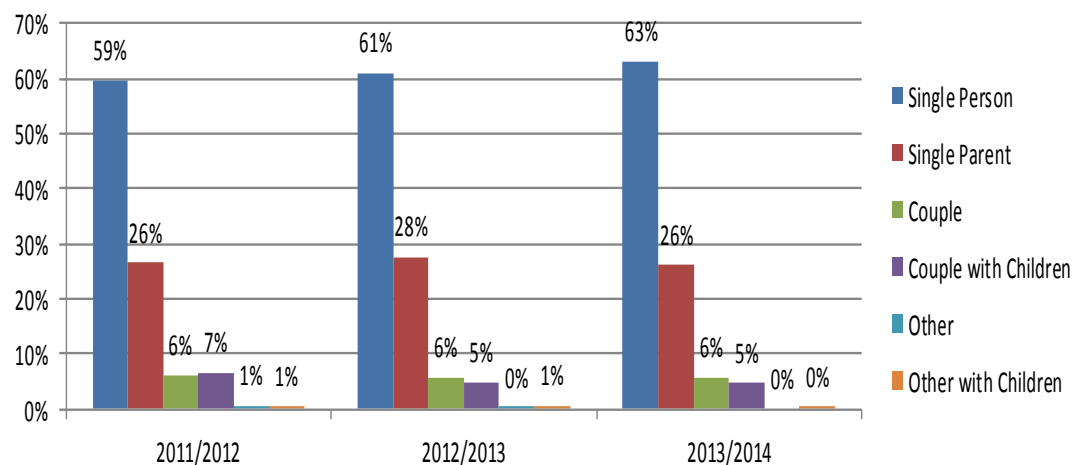
Chart 5: Homeless applications by household type (Scotland) 2013-14



Source: Operation of the Homeless Persons Legislation in Scotland: 2013–14.

As Chart 5 shows, the majority of homeless applicants in Scotland are single persons (67%) followed by single parents (21%). However, couples with children (5%), couples without children (4%) and other household types (4%) were lowly represented.

Chart 6: Homeless applications by household type (Falkirk Council area) 2011-14



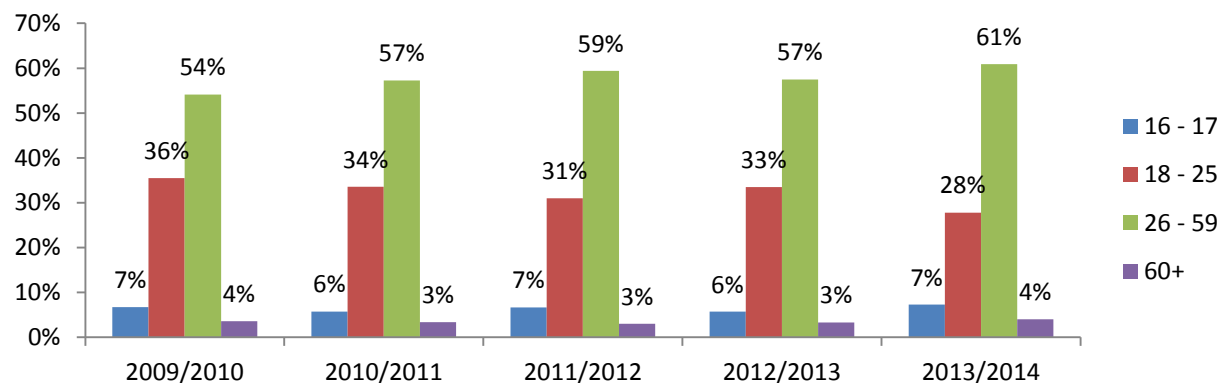
Source: Scottish Government Annual Report

As chart 6 illustrates, there has been little variation over the past three financial years regarding the proportions of household types making homeless applications in Falkirk. One notable trend is the slight annual increase in applications by single persons, with a 3 year high in 2013–14 with 63%. This represents a 2% increase on the previous financial year.

For reference, single parents accounted for 26% of total applicants. However, only 6% were couples and 5% were couples with children.

Age of main applicant

Chart 7: Age of main homeless applicant (Falkirk Council area) 2009-14



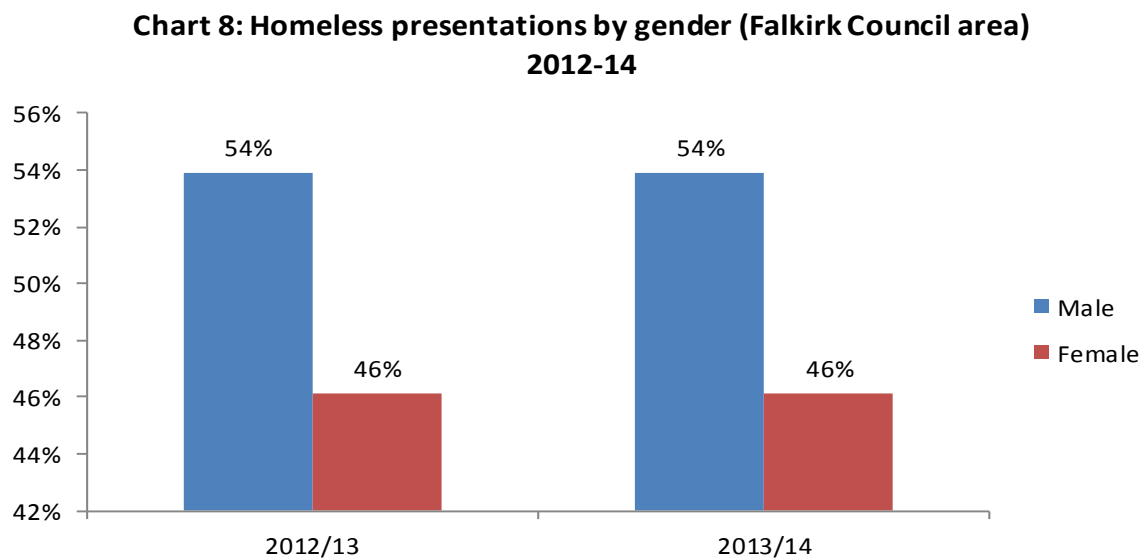
Source: Scottish Government Annual Report

Chart 7 shows that there is little change over time amongst the rates of main homeless applicants aged 16–17 and 60 plus. Both groups are by far the lowest represented amongst homeless applicants, with only 7% and 4% respectively in 2013–14. Nonetheless, the 1% rise since 2012–13 for each group should be recognised.

The 26–59 year old group has been the majority group in the past five financial years however their numbers have increased in 2013–14 from 57% to 61%. This 4% increase in 26–59 years olds from the past financial year was accompanied with a 5% decrease in 18–25 year old applicants from 2012–2014 – a five year low.

Potentially 18–25 year olds are staying at home with their relatives longer given that benefit entitlements and housing options for this age group are limited and cost prohibitive.

Homeless presentations by gender

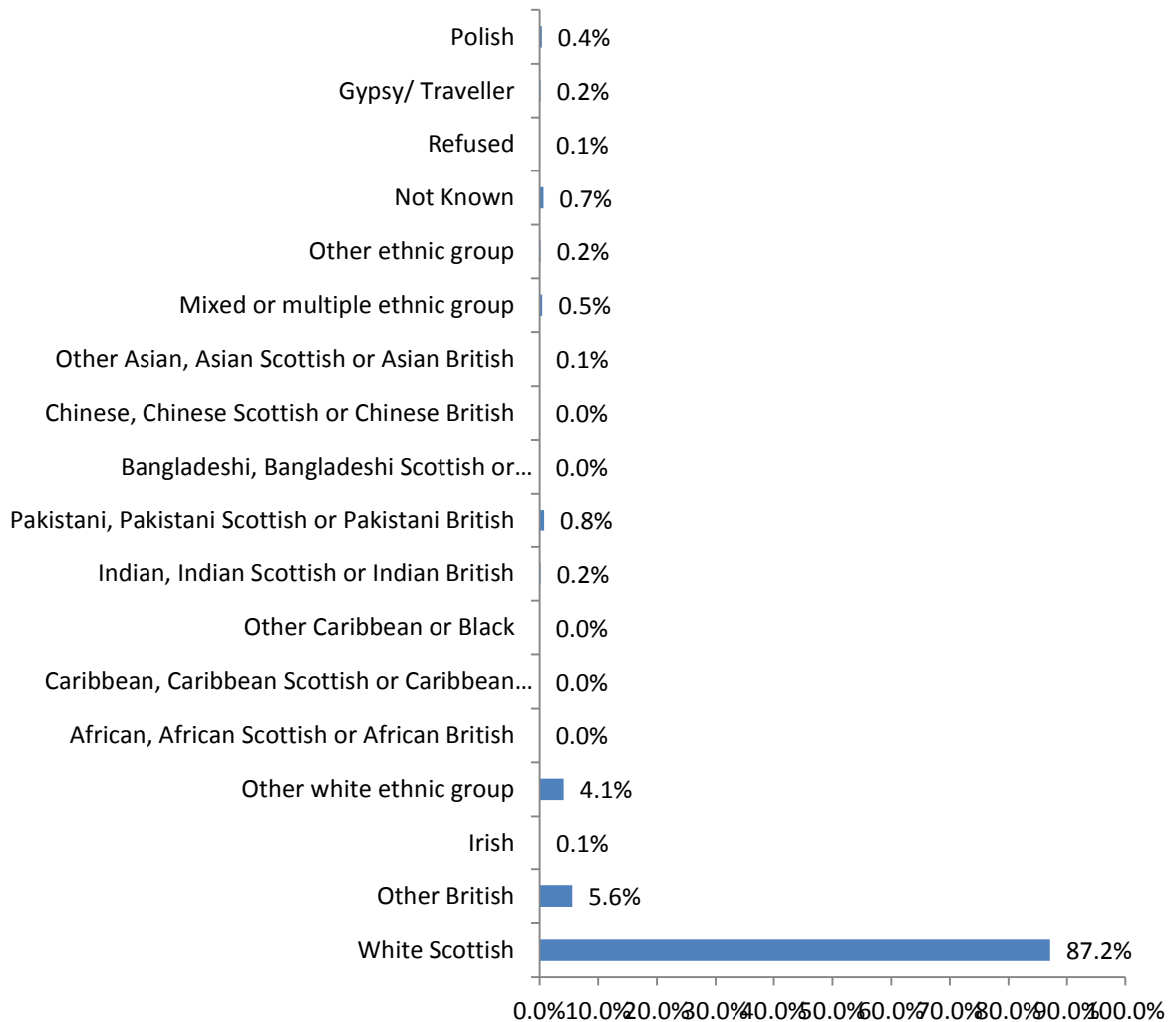


Source: Scottish Government Annual Report

Chart 8 illustrates that there was no difference between homeless presentations by gender in 2012–13 and 2013–14. However, males accounted for the majority of homeless applications in that period (54%).

Homeless presentations by ethnicity

**Chart 9: Presentations by ethnicity
(Falkirk Council area) 2013/14**

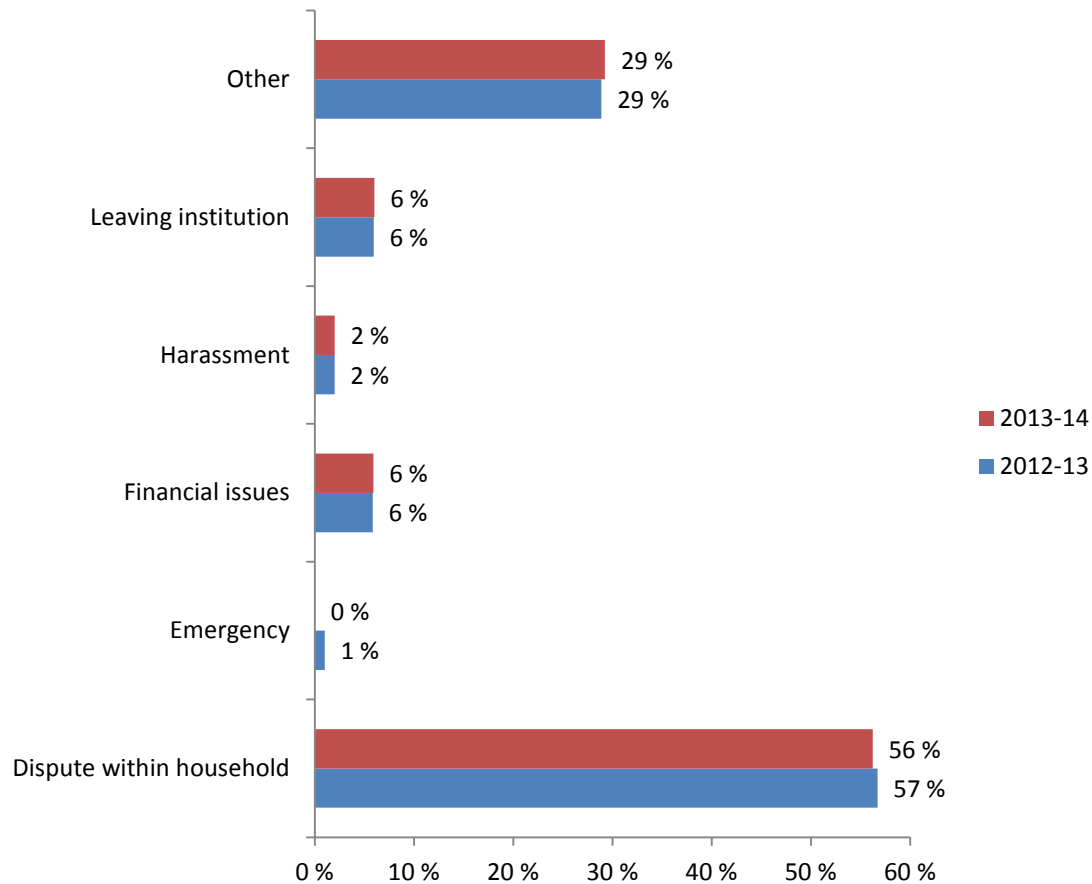


Source: Scottish Government Annual Report

The above chart indicates that the number of homeless presentations by 'White Scottish' applicants has dropped by 1.1% since 2012–13. Nonetheless this group still accounts for the vast majority of Falkirk Council homeless applicants. 'Other White ethnic group' applicants show the most notable increase of 0.9% in that period. Moreover, Polish applicants (0.0% to 0.4%) and 'Mixed or multiple ethnic group' (0.1% to 0.5%) have seen increases over this time. There are very few other changes since last year.

Reason for homeless presentations

Chart 10: Main reason for applying as homeless (Scotland) 2012-14

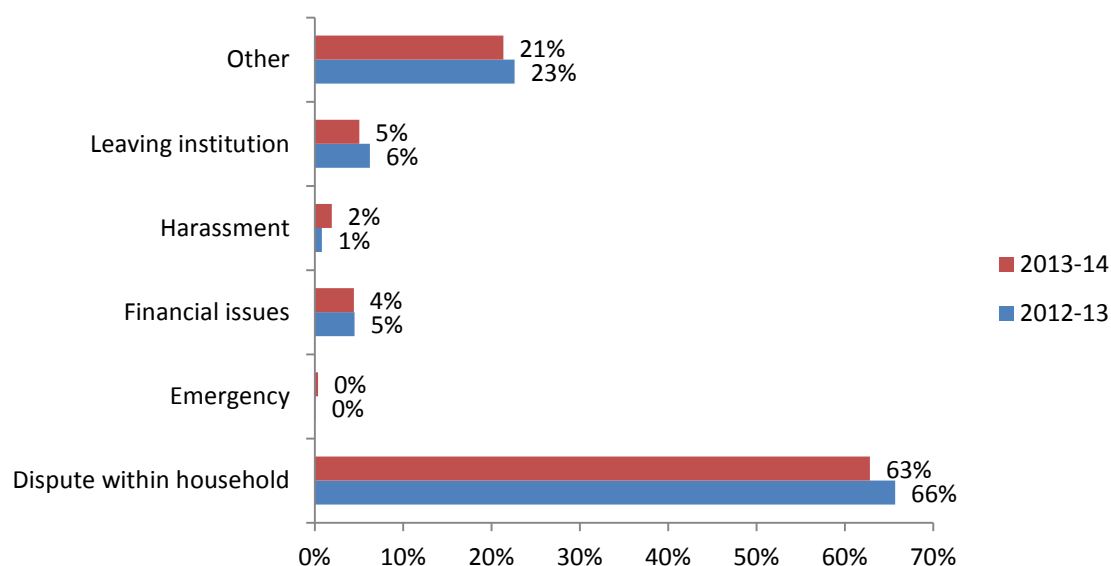


Source: Operation of the Homeless Persons Legislation in Scotland: 2013–14.

Chart 10 above presents how household dispute is the most common reason for a homeless application in Scotland during 2013–14 (56%). Other reasons accounted for 29% during this period, with financial issues (6%) and leaving institution (6%) figuring to a lesser extent.

It is also notable that there were almost no changes in the proportions of all listed reasons cited above between 2012–13 and 2013–14.

Chart11: Homeless application reason (Falkirk Council area) 2012-14



Source: Scottish Government Annual Report

Chart 11 indicates that in line with other Scottish Authorities the majority of homeless applications within the Falkirk Council area cited household dispute as the primary application reason in 2013–14 (63%). Other reasons accounted for 21%. However, leaving institution was only 5%, financial issues were 4% and harassment was 2%.

It is notable that there was only small differences in the 2012–13 and 2013–14 percentages. The main changes were that household dispute fell by 3% and ‘other reasons’ dropped by 2%. Harassment rose by 1%, while discharge from institution and financial issues dropped by 1%.

In contrast to Scotland, Falkirk had 7% more household dispute related presentations in 2013–14 even though it remained the dominant trend in Falkirk and Scotland as a whole. ‘Other reasons’ were 8% lower in Falkirk than in Scotland overall for this period. Financial issues were 2% higher in Scotland than in Falkirk for 2013–14. Moreover, there were very few changes in these categories when compared to the prior 2012–13 financial year.

Further analysis was conducted in relation to presentation reason and the age categories where increased presentations have been identified (see Chart 7). Those were the 16–17 and 26–59 year olds. Figures were drawn from the Falkirk Council Housing Management system.

For 16–17 year olds, there was an increase in presentations from 1 in 2012–13 to 29 in 2013–14. Within the latter figure, 62% were asked to leave, 31% cited a violent dispute and 7% were involved in non-violent dispute. Family mediation has been introduced in Falkirk Council to assist with this group of applicants.

Another group who had displayed an increased presentation rate were the 26–59 year old group. In 2013–14 27% were involved in violent dispute, 17% in non-violent dispute and 15% were asked to leave. These figures were almost identical to those in 2012–13, albeit ‘asked to leave’ fell by 2% in 2013–14 and the other two increased by 1% in the period.

Analysis of clients that lost contact with the service from the assessment stage of the application process showed that their presentation reasons were either a non-violent dispute (35%) or ‘asked to leave’ (26%). Single males aged 18–24 (13%) and 25–59 (30%) were the most common household types among the lost contact group. These figures are closely matched to the overall group of assessed applicants, who included 11% and 29% for these respective household types.

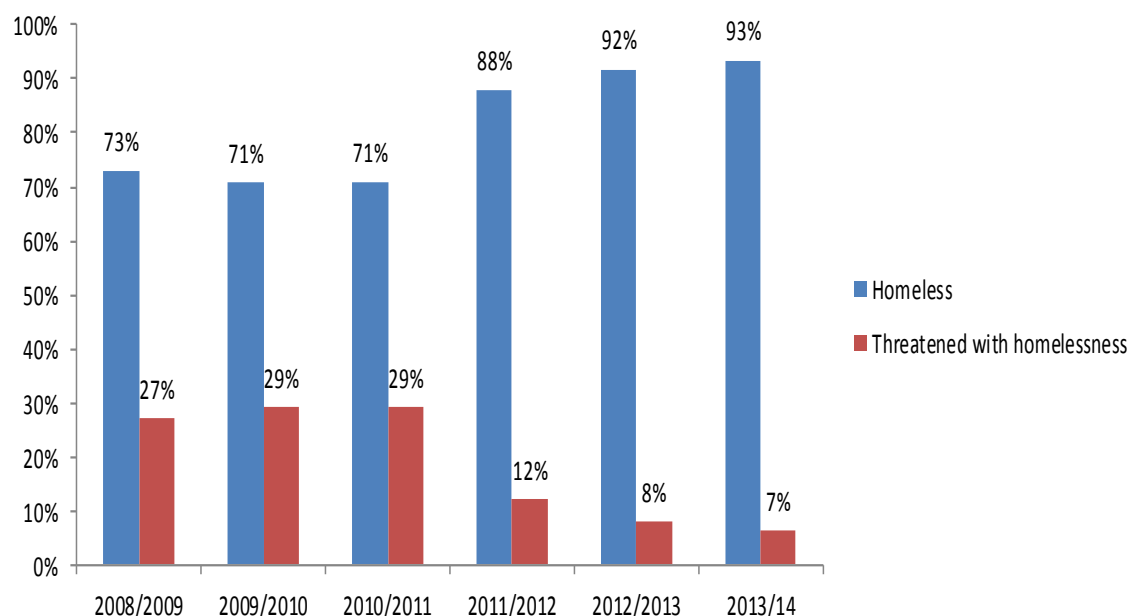
Homelessness assessments

Not all homelessness applicants will meet the criteria to be assessed as homeless by the authority. The conclusion of the assessment process will identify whether the applicant is:

- (a) Homeless
- (b) Intentionally or unintentionally homeless

Information which addresses both issues is presented in Chart 12 and 13 below.

Chart12: Homeless vs. Threatened With Homelessness cases (Falkirk Council area) 2008-14



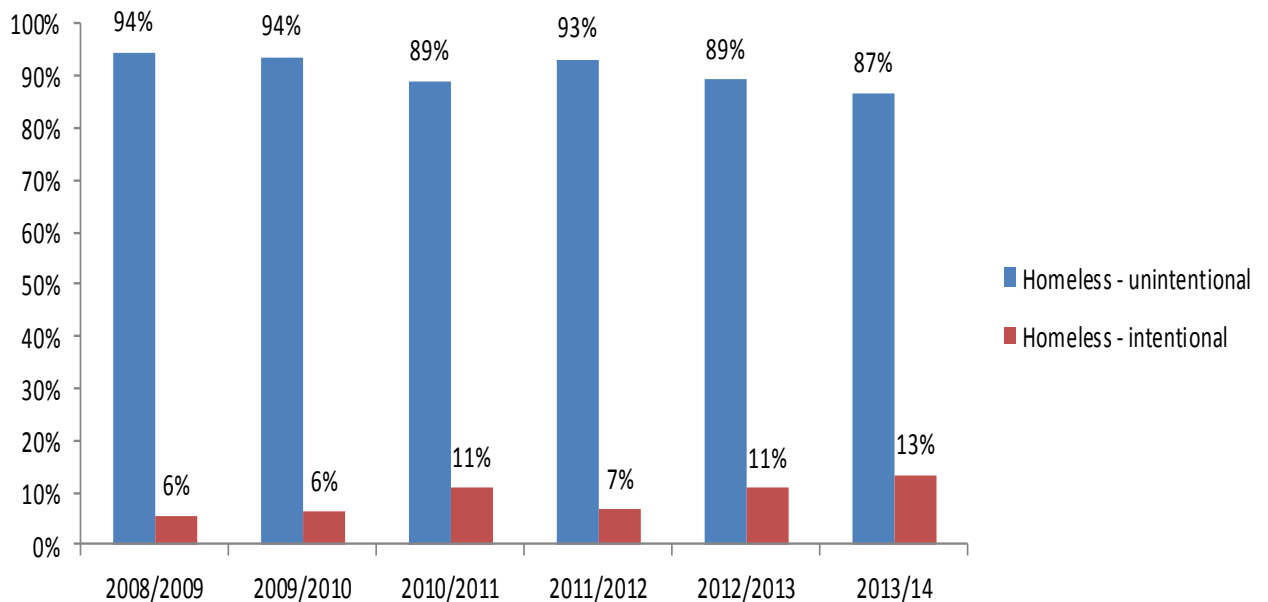
Source: Scottish Government Annual Report

As the above chart indicates, the vast majority of homeless applicants were assessed as homeless rather than threatened with homelessness which is similar to previous results. The figures highlight that the number of applicants found to be threatened with homelessness has reduced to 7% from a high of 29% between the years 2009–2012. Ultimately, this suggests that the service is applying the Housing Options system appropriately and assisting people to prevent becoming homeless. Clients who require a housing advice interview are not unnecessarily being referred for a homeless assessment; there

is a wider consideration of what housing options the client has and identifying the most appropriate steps forward for them.

Is the applicant intentionally homeless?

Chart 13: % of applicants assessed as intentionally and unintentionally homeless (Falkirk Council area) 2008-14



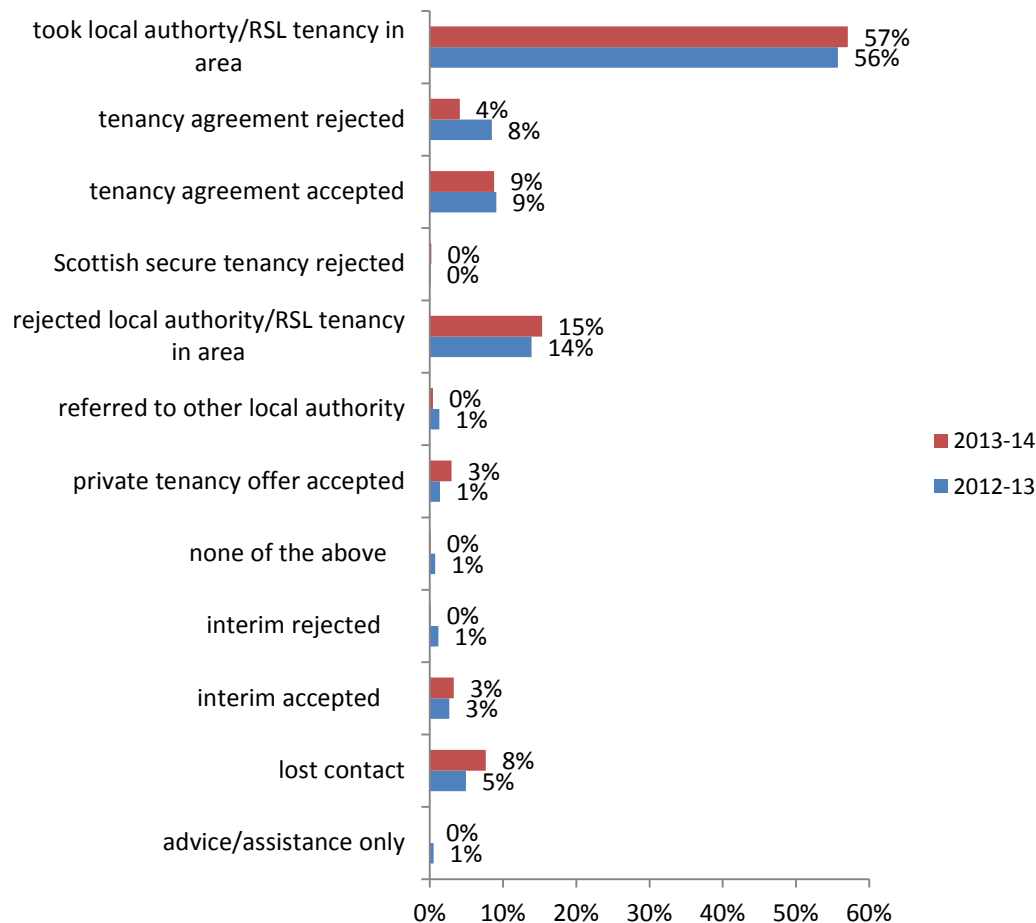
Source: Scottish Government Annual Report

Once the client has been identified as homeless through the assessment process, their intentionality must be assessed. Someone is classed as intentionally homeless if they have done – or not done – something which has directly caused them to become homeless.

The above chart illustrates that the vast majority of those assessed as homeless were unintentional. However, this was at a five year low in 2013–14 with 87%.

Rehousing outcomes

Chart 14: Rehousing outcomes (Falkirk Council area) 2012-14



Source: Falkirk Council Housing Management System

The above chart demonstrates that the majority of all applicants assessed homeless accepted a Falkirk Council or RSL tenancy. That number was broadly similar in 2012–13 (56%) and 2013–14 (57%). However, 15% rejected a Falkirk Council or RSL tenancy offer in 2013–14 (up 1% on 2012–13).

The remaining categories accounted for a low percentage of the overall group of homeless applicants and there was very little or no variation between 2012–13 and 2013–14. But, variances were notable for rejection of temporary accommodation (down 4%) and lost contacts (up 3%) over this period.

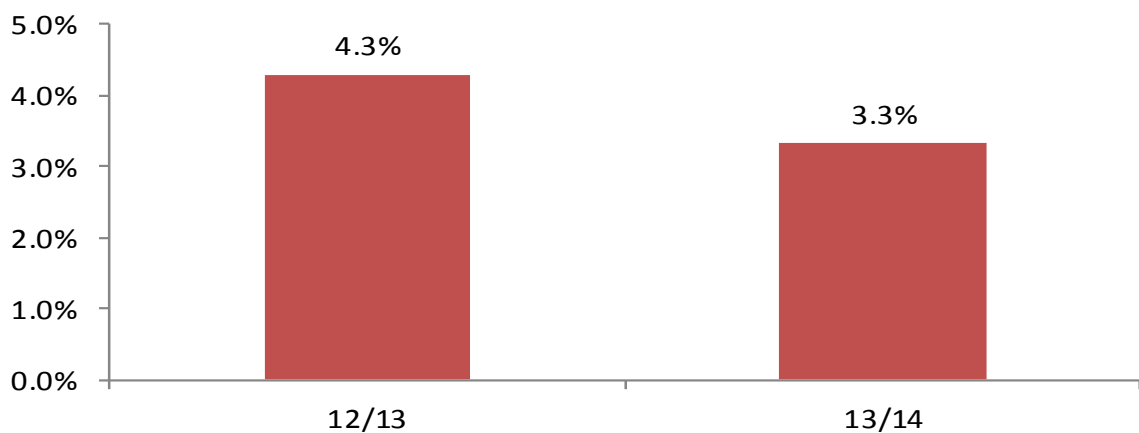
Lost contacts

Of those who lost contact with the authority after their assessment decision the average age was 33.4 years. The majority were in the 25–59 year old (68%). 27% of the lost contacts were aged 18–24, which was 2% higher than for applicants overall. The majority of lost contacts were also male (67%), which compares noticeably with 54% of males amongst applicants overall. This represents a 13% increased prevalence of males amongst the lost contact group.

The household composition of lost contacts primarily included: single male 25–59 (31%); single female 25–59 (13%); and single male 18–24 (12%).

Repeat homeless applications

Chart 15: % of cases reassessed as homeless (Falkirk Council area) 2012-14

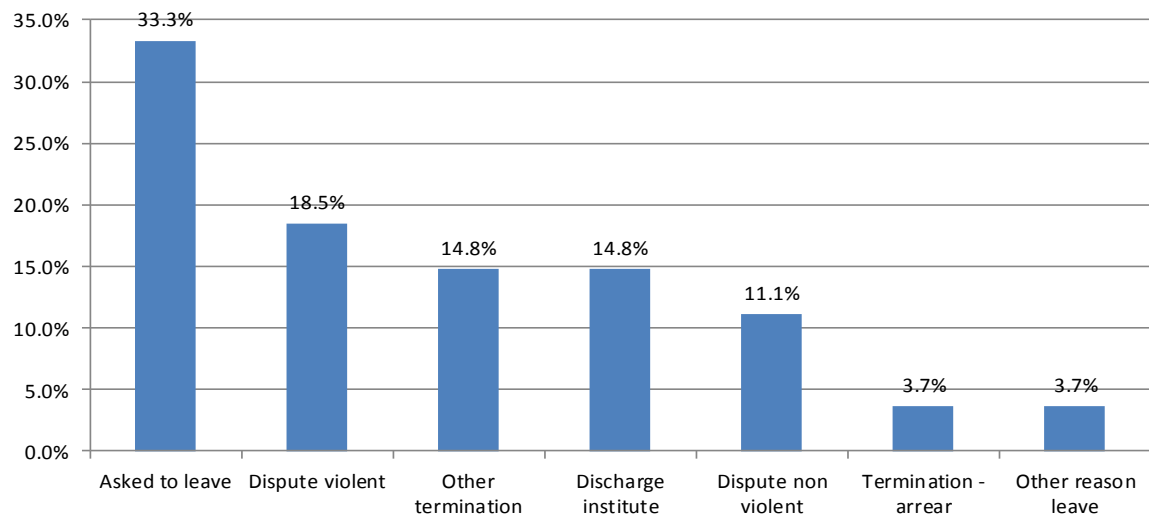


Source: Scottish Government Annual Report

Chart 15 illustrates that repeat homeless applications have decreased by 1% between 2012–13 and 2013–14. To an extent this reflects the continued reduction in the numbers of homeless applications over this period (see Chart 4).

Reason for repeat homelessness

Chart 16: Reason for repeat homelessness (Falkirk Council area) 2013-14

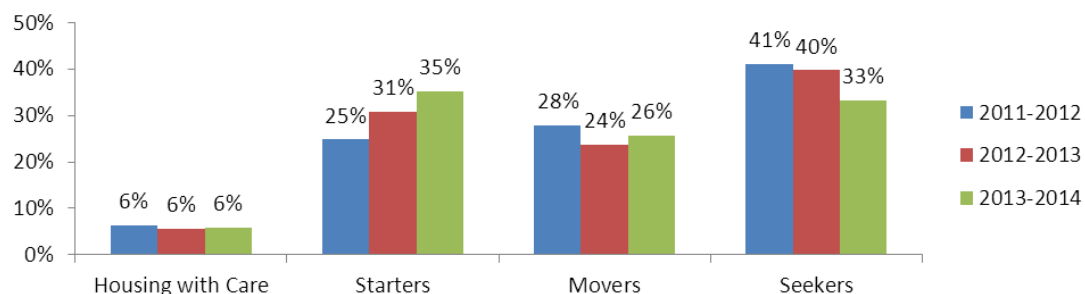


Source: Falkirk Council Housing Management System

Chart 16 illustrates that an array of reasons were cited by those involved in repeat homelessness cases within 2013-14. Being asked to leave was the most common (33.3%), with violent dispute (18.5%), 'other' reasons (14.8%) and release from institute (14.8%) as the other main reasons for repeat homelessness.

Acceptances by applicant type 2011-14

Chart 17: Acceptances by applicant type (Falkirk Council area) 2011-14



Source: Falkirk Council Housing Management System

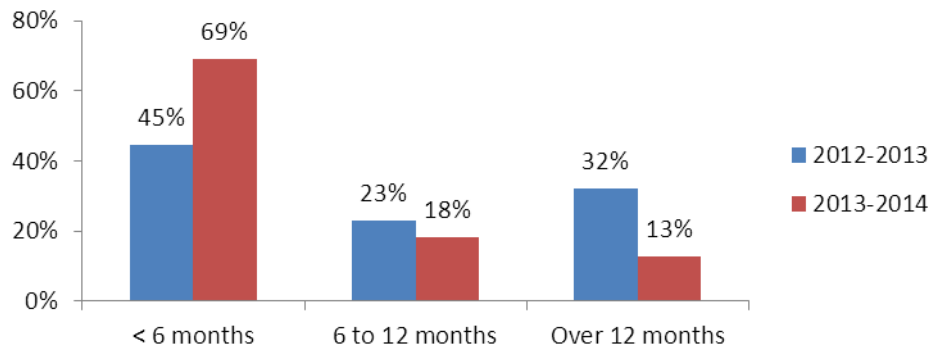
Housing applicants are split into four categories: Movers, Starters, Seekers and Housing with Care. The authority's policy is to allocate 50% of lets to Seekers (homeless), with Movers (transfer) and Starters (waiting list) receiving 25% each. Housing with Care is addressed on its own.

Chart 17 illustrates the percentage of lets accepted by applicant types across the Falkirk Council area. It indicates that the rate of acceptances by Seekers has decreased annually and is now at a three year low of just 33% (a 7% drop from 2012-13). This is far below the 50% quota that Seekers are expected to fulfil. It should be noted that Homeless applicants (Home Seekers) in line with all other applicants can refuse 2 offers before losing their priority therefore some applicants will have chosen not to take up the initial offer of housing.

At April 2014 there were only 300 Seekers currently registered with the authority compared to 768 in April 2012. Furthermore, 111 (37%) of those registered Seekers are *not* actively bidding on available properties. This situation is currently being assessed in the authority's allocations policy review and these quotas may be subject to change pending that review.

Time with homeless priority

**Chart 18: HomeSeekers time with
Seeker banding (Falkirk Council)
2012-14**



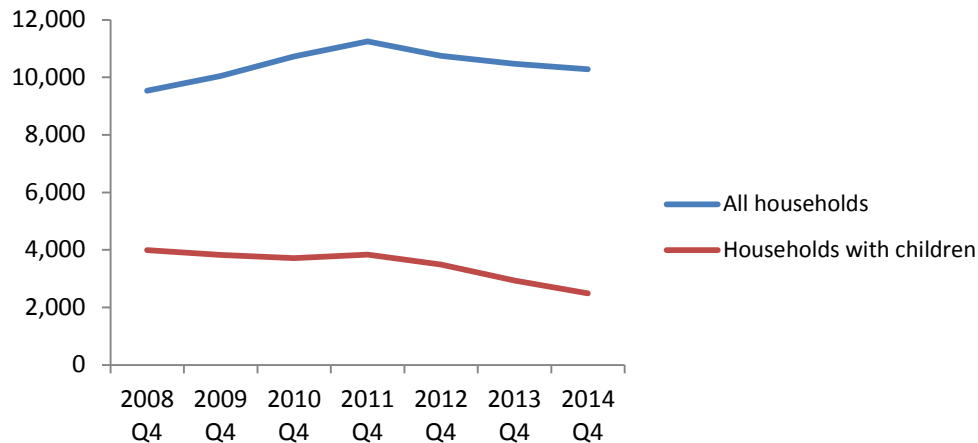
Source: Falkirk Council Housing Management System

Generally, due to the limited availability of suitable vacant accommodation, some homeless applicants have had to wait over six months to be housed. However, in the 2013-14 period a majority of Home Seekers (69.1%) were housed within 6 months. This is a notable improvement upon the 2012-13 ratio of 44.7%. As noted above, there are also some homeless applicants who are not actively bidding and this is having a detrimental effect on this indicator. Those applicants who are not actively bidding require to attend a meeting to discuss their situation and if required, in line with the allocations policy, they are directly matched to a suitable property.

Homeless Households in Temporary Accommodation

Since 2003 all local authorities have a duty to provide temporary accommodation to all homeless applicants. The charts below compare the local picture in the Falkirk Council area (Chart 20) against the national picture in Scotland (Chart 19).

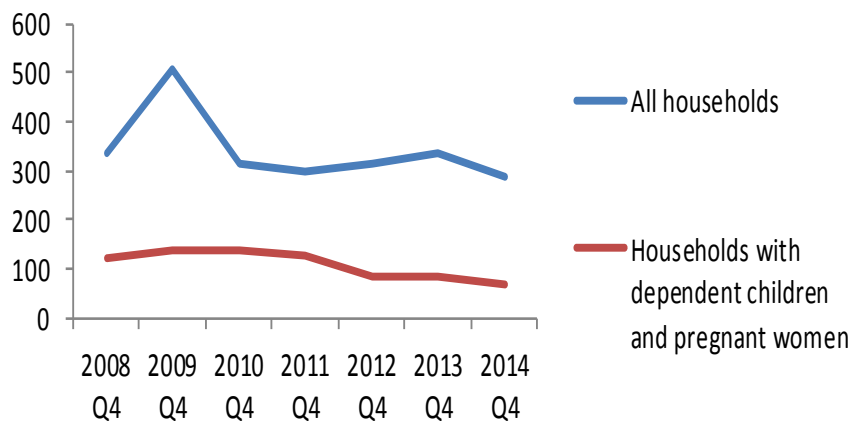
Chart 19: Homeless households in temporary accommodation (Scotland) at 31st of March 2008-14



Source: Operation of the homeless persons legislation in Scotland – Quarters ending 31st March

The figures for Scotland in Chart 19 indicate a continued decrease in both the number of households and households with children being placed into temporary accommodation. However, there was a notable increase for all households from 2008–11.

Chart 20: Homeless households in temporary accommodation (Falkirk Council area) at 31st of March 2008-14



Source: Scottish Government Annual Report

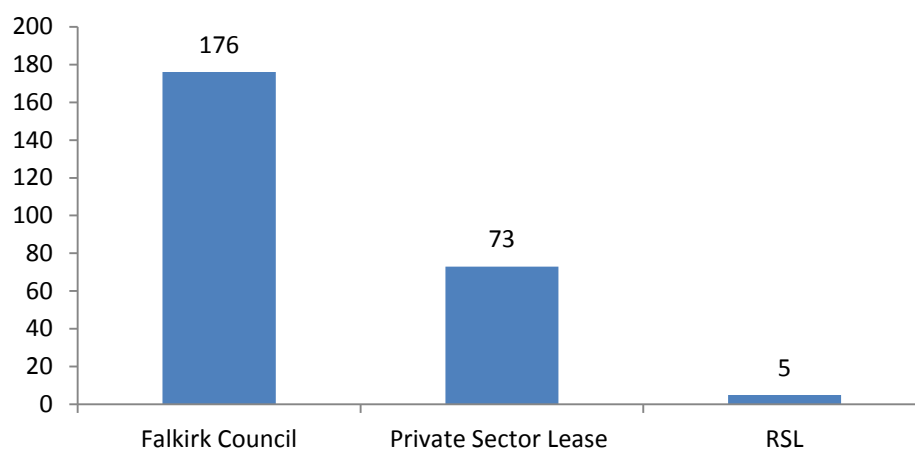
Much like the trend in Scotland, recent years have seen a steady decrease in both the number of households and households with children being placed into temporary accommodation within the Falkirk Council area (See Chart 20 above). This decrease is most pronounced for 'all households'.

Notably both indicators are at a six year low for Falkirk. That is a positive step and may highlight the impact of the housing options approach. This provides a holistic assessment of housing needs and options with clients, potentially preventing avoidable incidences of homelessness. In addition, this trend will also partly reflect the decreasing numbers of homeless applications over this period in general.

Number and types of temporary accommodation

At the end of the 2013–14 financial year, 254 properties were being used to provide temporary accommodation in the Falkirk Council area (see Chart 21). This figure included 176 Falkirk Council properties, 73 private sector leases and 5 from Registered Social Landlords. We have stopped the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation in the area therefore ensuring that clients have access to a self-contained property rather than shared Bed and Breakfast facilities.

**Chart 21: Number of temporary accommodation types
(Falkirk Council area) on 31st March 2014**



Source: Falkirk Council Housing Management System

Mortgage To Rent assistance

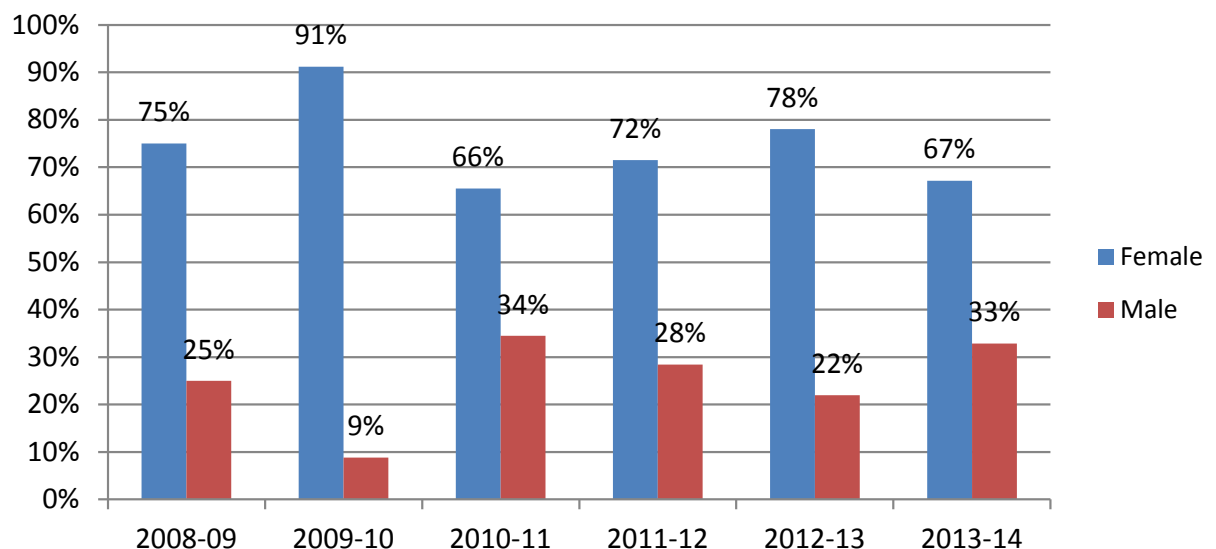
In the Falkirk Council area there were 30 applications to the Mortgage to Rent scheme made during 2013–14. 90% of those applications were successful, a ratio which is significantly higher than the national average.

Of those applications which were successful 14 properties were acquired by Falkirk Council (ex Council properties) and the remainder local RSL's.

Source: Scottish Government.

Unintentionally homeless cases fleeing domestic abuse, by gender

Chart 23: Unintentional homeless cases fleeing physical domestic abuse by gender (Falkirk Council area) 2008-14



Source: Falkirk Council Housing Management System

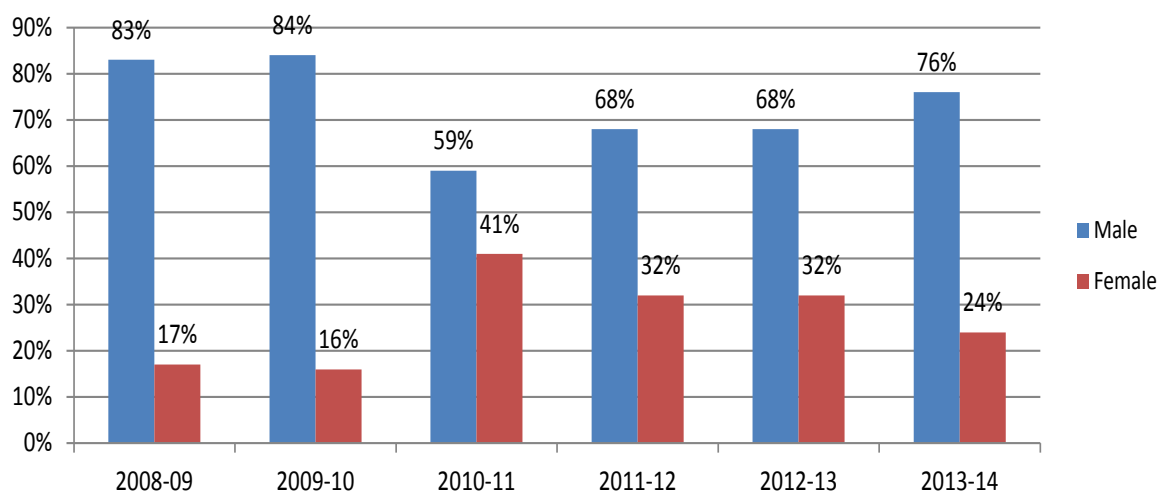
The above chart highlights that females accounted for the majority of unintentional homeless cases who stated that they were fleeing physical domestic abuse. That trend has remained over the past six financial years. However, the 2013–14 figures represented a three year low at 67% (an 11% reduction from 2012–13). Males assessed as

unintentionally homeless and citing this reason were conversely at a three year high of 33%.

Further analysis was conducted as regards the age and also the household complement of those unintentionally homeless clients who cited physical domestic abuse reasons for their 2013–14 application. 37% were 26–40, 31% were 41–60, 24% were 16–24 and 7% were over 60. Compared against homeless applicants overall in 2013–14 (see Chart 26) the 16–24 year old group were 11% less prone to cited violent dispute reasons, however 26–59 year olds were 7% more likely to cite those reasons.

Regarding household complement, the most prominent categories of unintentionally homeless clients citing violent dispute were: Single female 25–59 (23%); Lone female parent over 25 (21%); and single male 25–59 (17%). It should be noted that these three categories are the three most represented ones within homeless applications overall in 2013–14, thus these findings may not be particularly revealing. However, single females 25–59 were only 12% of all homeless applicants and lone female parent under 25 accounted for 13% overall. These groups are most clearly over-represented in unintentional homeless cases where physical domestic abuse was cited.

Chart 24: Unintentional homeless cases fleeing non-violent domestic abuse by gender (Falkirk Council area) 2008-14



Source: Falkirk Council Housing Management System

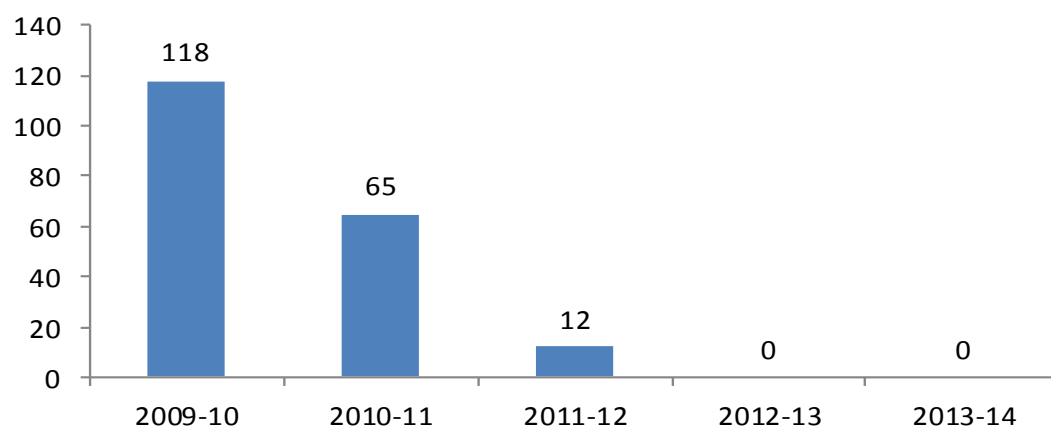
Of those unintentionally homeless clients in Falkirk fleeing non-violent domestic abuse, the majority over the past six financial years have been males (see Chart 23). In 2013-14 that figure was 76% (up 8% from 2012-13), which was a four year high but still below the peak figure of 84% in 2009-10.

This issue predominantly affected 26-40 year olds (49%) and those 41-60 (29%); only 18% were 16-25 and 3% were over 60. Single males (49%) and lone male parents over 24 (16%) are the most commonly represented categories here.

Overall, the gender pattern contrasts notably with the physical abuse cases – predominantly affecting females – as unintentionally homeless males were most likely to report non-physical domestic abuse.

Presentations rough sleeping

Chart 24: Clients sleeping rough the night before homeless presentation (Falkirk Council area) 2009-14



Source: Scottish Government

In the past two financial years there have been no homeless applicants who have reported sleeping rough the night before their presentation. This is an improvement on the prior years between 2009-12, particularly from the five year peak of 118 applicants in 2009-10.

3. PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

Whereas the information in Section 2 of this report notes trends in homelessness in the Council area, this section looks at how effectively and efficiently the Council has responded to those trends and covers our key performance information. Our key performance indicators for 2014/15 will include information that is gathered for the Scottish Housing Charter which was reported in August 2014 for the first time.

Performance in relation to services for homeless people is regularly monitored and improved services are now being delivered. This section of the Annual Homelessness Statement provides performance information for 2013–14.

% of homeless decision notifications issued within 28 days

- The percentage of homeless decision notifications issued within 28 days for 2013–14 was 92.3%, dropping beneath the target of 95%. This was in part due to high levels of absence within the team, however, this is being closely monitored and there has been an improvement in performance.

Number of households reassessed as homeless or potentially homeless

- 28 cases were re-assessed as homeless, or potentially homeless, within 12 months of the previous case being completed. This fell within the target of 50 such cases annually and is a significant improvement on previous years

% new tenancies sustained for 12 months

- 89.6% of new tenancies were sustained for at least 12 months. This dropped just below the 90% target. The Scottish average for 2013/14 was 87.7% and our performance was above this. This performance includes all terminations regardless of the reason. The majority of our tenancies ending within 12 months end for positive reasons however our improvement work is focussing on the tenancies that end for negative reasons. The indicator does

not measure tenancies ending for negative reasons only which would be a more accurate reflection of performance

% of Mainstream sequenced and advertised properties accepted by HomeSeeker category

- Within 2013–14, Home Seekers accepted 39.4% of mainstream sequenced and advertised properties. This was 10.6% below the 50% target for this period. As per our allocations policy, 50% of the properties were advertised for HomeSeekers however, due to changes in housing benefit in relation to spare room subsidy, many applicants are unwilling to bid for or accept properties which are too big for their family needs. Given that the overall number of homeless applicants has reduced, this quota will be reviewed as part of the Allocations Policy Review during 2014/15.

% Customer Satisfaction – Homelessness Service

- The rate of customer satisfaction for the service during the 2013–14 period was 93.1%. This exceeded the department's target of 90%. In addition to this, further analysis of client dissatisfaction has occurred throughout the year and a number of actions were identified which will help to develop service delivery.

% of homeless applicants in temporary accommodation who are in B&B accommodation

- Only 0.3% of homeless applicants were placed within B&B accommodation, which equates to 4 instances. This was significantly below the 6% target for the 2013–14 term. Moreover, the ratio of B&B usage was a 3.9% decrease from 2012–13.

Total number of applicants with homeless priority permanently rehoused in 0–6 months

- Within the 2013–14 financial year there was a total of 6672 Home Seekers rehoused.

- 2983 happened within 0–6 months of their application, which equates to 44.7%.
- 2643 happened within 7–12 months of their application, which equates to 39.6%.
- 1046 happened over 12 months after their application, which equates to 15.7%.

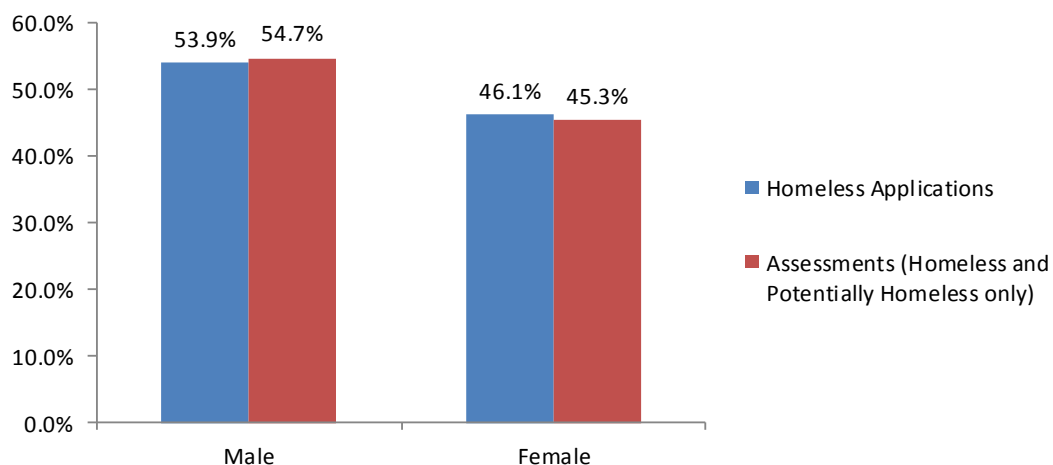
4. HOMELESSNESS AND EQUALITIES

This section of the report shall present information regarding the demographic characteristics of those undertaking the homeless assessment process in 2013–14.

1043 people presented as homeless during this time and 1047 assessments were completed. The data for this period has been considered in respect of the three key equalities strands – gender, age and ethnicity.

Gender

Chart 25: % of applicants by gender and those assessed as homeless or potentially homeless (Falkirk Council area) 2013-14



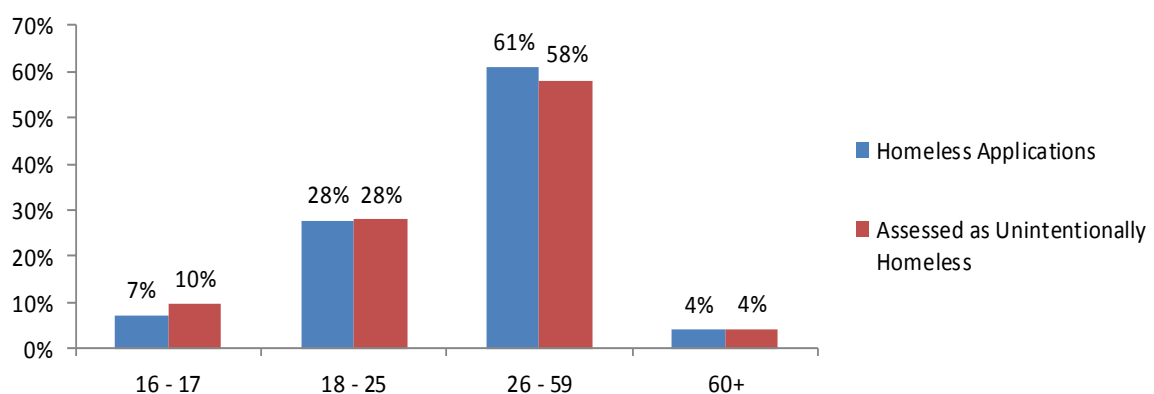
Source: Scottish Government Annual Report.

The above chart indicates that males had a 7.8% higher incidence of homeless applications than females during 2013–14 (53.9% to 46.1%). Moreover, there was only a slight difference to that trend when considering whether the applicant was deemed unintentionally homeless by the authority. That increase was of 0.8% for male applicants (females therefore dropped by 0.8%).

In summary, these results indicate that there is a close correlation between the applicant gender and them being assessed as homeless or potentially homeless.

Age

Chart 26: Age of homeless presentations compared against those assessed as unintentionally homeless (Falkirk Council area) 2013-14



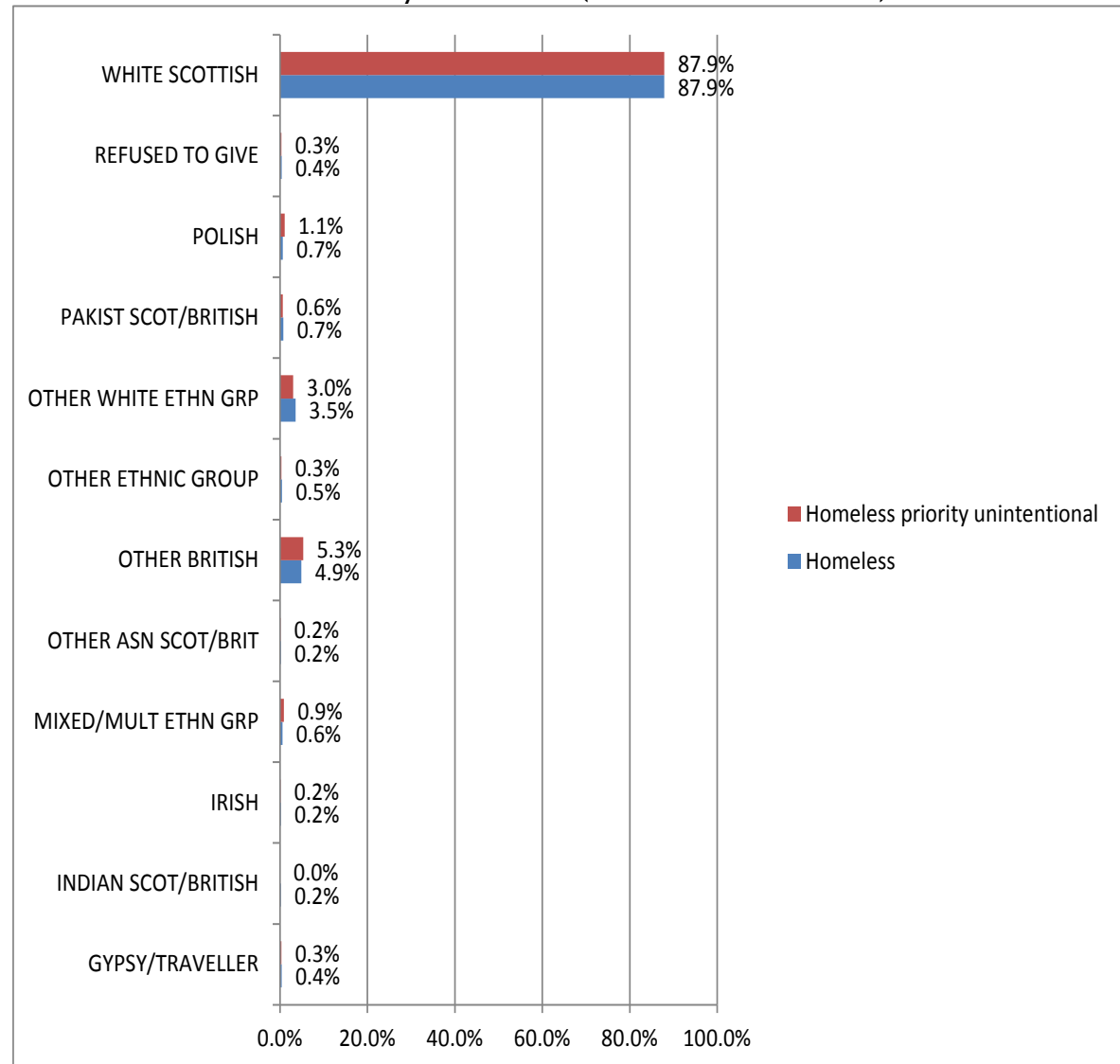
Source: Scottish Government Annual Report

The data in chart 26 above illustrates that most homeless applicants are aged 26–59 (61%) and a similar percentage were assessed as unintentionally homeless.

The remaining age groups displayed almost no variation between ratios of homeless applications and being assessed as unintentional. Almost no difference was evident between any age group and an increased likelihood of being assessed as unintentionally homeless.

Ethnicity

Chart 27: Homeless presentation by ethnicity compared against those assessed as Unintentionally Homeless (Falkirk Council area) 2013–14



Source: Scottish Government Annual Report.

The data in Chart 27 above indicates that the vast majority of presentations were made by people of a White Scottish ethnicity (87.9%). The rate is the exact same as the proportion of White Scottish applicants who were assessed as unintentionally homeless.

5. CHALLENGES FOR 2014-15

As the number of people presenting as homeless has gone down in the Falkirk area and nationally over the last two years, so has the length of time it takes to provide permanent housing solutions for some homeless people. However we must not be complacent and where possible every effort must be made to prevent homelessness from occurring in the first place and this will require positive joint working and a shared sense of ownership from all agencies involved with homeless people.

Over the coming year the following key challenges have been identified to ensure that we are preventing homelessness in the first instance:

- Addressing the impact of the Welfare Reform Act: there are a number of elements to the welfare reform act that will place challenges on our services over the coming years as various parts of the legislation are implemented. These include:
 - The introduction of universal credits which will merge means tests benefits such as housing benefit, income support, job seekers allowance, working tax credit and child tax credits. Benefits will be paid direct to the household monthly in arrears rather than the current fortnightly system. This could have a significant impact on rent arrears across the social rented sector. We continue to work with partners to identify vulnerable tenants to ensure appropriate measures and supports are put in place/implemented. A new Tenancy Sustainment team has recently been established within our local housing and finance offices to directly address Falkirk Council tenants who have been identified as struggling with their rent or affected by the impact of changes to the welfare reform system. Our housing support service delivery by the Ypeople Reachout project will continue to address the needs of any resident in the Falkirk area either starting a

tenancy for the first time or struggling to maintain their tenancy. They will ensure that every possible effort is made to support tenants to maintain their tenancies.

- We will continue to face the challenge that spare room subsidy places on current and future tenants. Various exercises have been completed to ensure that our current tenants are informed and assisted to deal with the implications from this reduction in housing benefit. We continue to monitor arrears and review our DHP policy to maximise all routes of revenue/income to our tenants. We provide specialist money advice services to maximise tenants income and provide debt management strategies to ensure priority debts. We also provide housing support and budgeting advice in partnership with external agencies. The new Tenancy Sustainment Team will actively work with tenants who are currently in arrears to arrange re payment schedules, seek additional benefits advice or housing support.
 - The administration of the social welfare fund transferred over to the local authority on the 1st of April 2013. The Scottish Welfare Fund has introduced a fair and equitable system that allows ease of access within the local area rather than lengthy waiting times for from a national administration.
- We are continuously analysing the effectiveness of our housing information and advice services to ensure that we are providing expert assistance on the full range of housing options available to applicants to ensure that they find suitable accommodation that meets their needs. In August 2013 the Scottish Housing Regulator completed a Thematic Study of Housing Options in 6 Local Authority Services during 2013 of which Falkirk Council was one. The Scottish Government are now working on guidance for local authorities on the delivery of housing options service to ensure consistency throughout the country. This is expected to be completed in early 2015.

- We are increasing the range of affordable housing options in the Council area by (a) maximising the use of resources to develop new affordable homes built either by the Council itself or through partnership work with RSLs, (b) participating in the National Housing Trust Initiative to deliver new homes at mid-market rents (c) the application of the Affordable Housing Policy in appropriate circumstances and (d) buying back ex-Council houses to increase the stock of smaller properties. This will also include facilitating access to accommodation in the private rented sector which has the potential to play a more significant role in meeting local housing needs.
- Through the East Housing Options Hub, Falkirk Council has been able to purchase a website for local landlords to advertise their properties. This will hopefully be a one stop shop for those looking for accommodation in the Falkirk area as well as those offering advice.
- We are completing the review of accommodation based support services to ensure that tenants learn the necessary skills to assist them to live independently in the community,
- We continue to work with Forth Valley Health Board to ensure that people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are able to access primary care services that will improve their health and help to prevent them from becoming homeless in the future,
- We are continuing to analyse information about homeless people and the wider population to ensure that all groups have equal access to the services they need and developing ways of engaging with harder to reach groups,
- We have launched a new self-help housing options tool where anyone looking at their housing options can complete an online proforma of their circumstances to find out what housing options may be available to them. This will assist the council in its delivery of services within the digital era.
- The Scottish Government in April 2014 launched a new statutory recording mechanism for all approaches of housing advice to the local authority. The Scottish Government hope that the system 'Prevent 1' will be able to analyse the impact that

housing advice has on the prevention of homelessness. The first reports will hopefully be available in early winter.

In taking this challenging agenda forward, partnership working will continue to be necessary, particularly in relation to supporting people who are particularly vulnerable. Initiatives with Social Work and Health will continue to be necessary to assist in the prevention of homelessness from occurring by providing people with the support they need to manage their lives better. Where it is not possible to prevent homelessness, more work will require to be done with those affected to help them sustain their new accommodation arrangements and to prevent them from becoming homeless again.

At the same time, focussed work will continue to be required by the Council and its local partners in terms of achieving the maximum effectiveness from their processes so that, for example, properties do not lie empty for unacceptable periods of time and can play a more active use in meeting local housing needs. Continued attention to the Performance Management Framework will help ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of services for homeless people.

Finally, whilst there is clearly a link between homelessness and the overall supply of affordable housing which will be explored in the Local Housing Strategy, it is evident that a shortfall of affordable housing is not the only cause of homelessness. The LHS will consider housing support issues and how people can be helped to become more resilient to the factors that can lead to them becoming homeless but commitment from other agencies who deliver services to homeless people is vital if homelessness is to be prevented and people are to be sustained in accommodation as part of sustainable and inclusive communities.

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