



ARGYLL AND BUTE RAPID REHOUSING TRANSITION PLAN UPDATE JUNE 2021

Prepared by

Argyll and Bute Council Housing Services

Contact

For further information on the content of this report, or copies of this document in alternative formats, please contact:

Iona MacPhail

Housing Team Lead - Operations
Argyll and Bute Council
Lorn House
Albany Street
Oban
Argyll and Bute
PA34 4AR

01631 700050

iona.macphail@argyll-bute.gov.uk

1. Introduction

Argyll and Bute Council's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) was first developed in response to The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action group (HARSAG) report *Scotland's transition to rapid rehousing – market area analysis, legislative and culture review* along with *Guidance for Local Authorities and Partners on Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans (RRTP)* in June 2018.

The guidance required that the local authority and partners (Housing Associations, Health and Social Care Partnership etc.) prepare a 5 year transformational plan for homeless services recognising that *“A safe and secure home is the best base to build and live our lives. Reducing the time people spend homeless and in temporary accommodation also reduces the damage to people's health and wellbeing that homelessness causes”*.

At that time the Argyll and Bute Council RRTP stated that “Rapid Rehousing is an ambitious proposal which should be delivered in the context of creating and sustaining mixed and diverse communities across the whole of Argyll and Bute. There are particular and competing demands on the affordable housing stock, for homeless people, for our ageing population and to house the workers essential for our future economic prosperity, as well as for the general needs of those who simply want to live here. Balancing these competing demands has been a major consideration in creating our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan.”

Argyll and Bute Council's RRTP built on existing processes and services that were in place. The Council had previously had a strategy to minimise the use of Bed and Breakfast style accommodation and it was largely out of use, apart from for short term emergency stays, by the time the RRTP was developed. Additionally, the Council had in place:

- a Mediation Service
- a Rent Deposit Guarantee scheme
- a funded post in the Housing Benefits section to give a named person contact for benefits issues for Homeless applicants
- a funded Occupational Therapist post to build links to the HSCP, provide expertise on complex cases and lead on bespoke new build solutions where required

In terms of working with Women's Aid, the Council own the Refuge in Argyll and Bute and funded a management agreement with Argyll and Bute Women's Aid to provide services both at the Refuge and across the communities of Argyll and Bute by outreach services.

Accordingly, the RRTP sought to build on the services that had been put in place and move towards a full rapid rehousing service.

This RRTP update details statistics and progress for 2020/21, and also considers the complexity of delivering transformational change within the reality of the Covid pandemic and the need to provide immediate front line solutions as

lockdown changed all our working practices and lives in 2020/21. Appendix A of this report provides a risk analysis of our work on the RRTP. The accompanying document “Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan - Monitoring Report - activity and funding” gives more specific detail on financial outcomes for 2020/21.

2. Local Housing Market and Homelessness Context

i. Local Housing Market

As of 2020 there were 2,470 active applicants on the HOMEArgyll waiting list: 1,611 were deemed to be in housing need (i.e. in receipt of points according to the common allocation policy): 1,619 (66%) were on the general list; 667 (27%) on the transfer list; and 183 on the Homeless list (i.e. 7% of the total). In total, 257 applicants (10%) received the maximum 200 points and would be deemed to be in urgent housing need. The average length of time on the waiting list for open homeless applicants was 61 weeks (but this varied considerably for individual cases).

Comparing waiting list demand for social housing with available lets (pressure ratios) provides a provisional indication of potential imbalances in supply and demand and can highlight areas experiencing housing pressures. Overall, there are around 3 applicants per available let in Argyll and Bute, i.e. a pressure ratio of 3:1 however this varies considerably by HMA as the following table illustrates. Based solely on these figures, the most pressurised areas would appear to be Coll & Tiree (6:1) and Islay, Jura & Colonsay (7:1).

Pressure Ratios by HMA and Property Size, 2019/20

HMA	0/1 bed	2beds	3beds	4beds	5+ beds	Totals
Bute	1:1	1:1	1:1	4:1	n/a	1:1
Coll & Tiree	15:0	1:1	n/a	1:0	1:0	6:1
Cowal	3:1	3:1	3:1	5:1	3:0	3:1
Helensburgh & Lomond	7:1	2:1	5:1	2:1	7:0	4:1
Islay Jura & Colonsay	7:1	5:1	11:1	4:0	n/a	7:1
Kintyre	1:1	1:1	2:1	2:1	n/a	1:1
Lorn	7:1	3:1	5:1	32:1	5:0	5:1
Mid Argyll	5:1	1:1	3:1	7:1	2:0	2:1
Mull & Iona	8:1	3:1	5:1	2:0	2:0	6:1
A&B Totals	4:1	2:1	3:1	6:1	20:0	3:1

Source: Council Abrisas CHR Reports & Annual RSL Returns, 2019/20

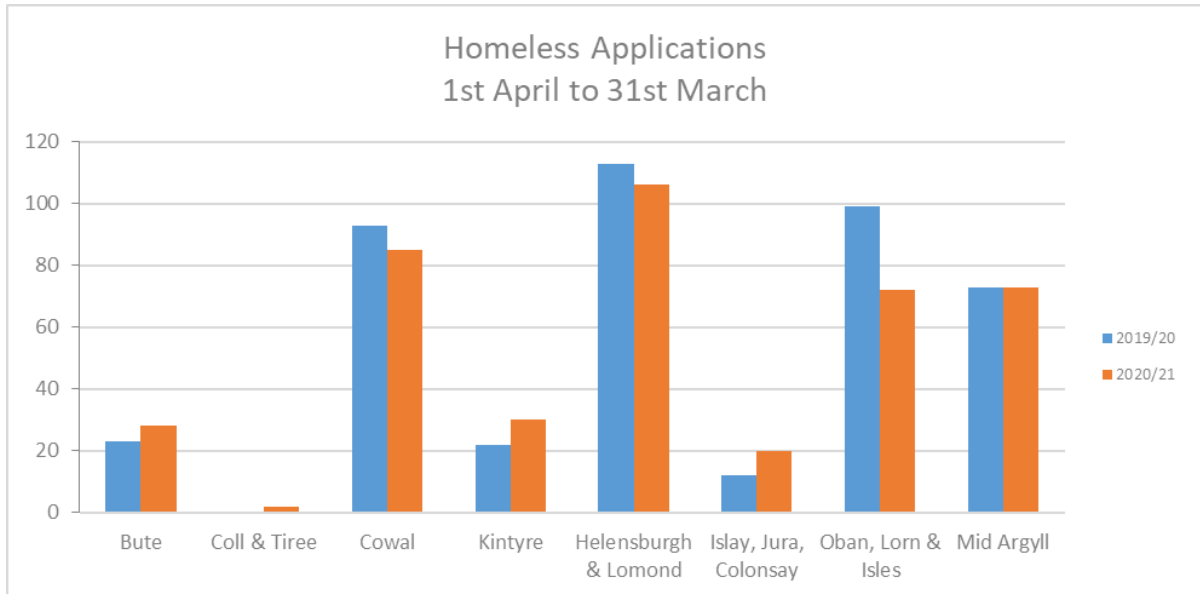
Registered Social Landlord (RSL) Allocations

In 2020/21 221 lets, which equated to 35% of total lets, were made to Homeless Applicants by the Home Argyll Partner landlords (ACHA, Dunbritton, Fyne Homes & West Highland Housing Association). During the Covid lockdown the Home Argyll partnership prioritised homeless and domestic abuse cases.

ii. Homelessness

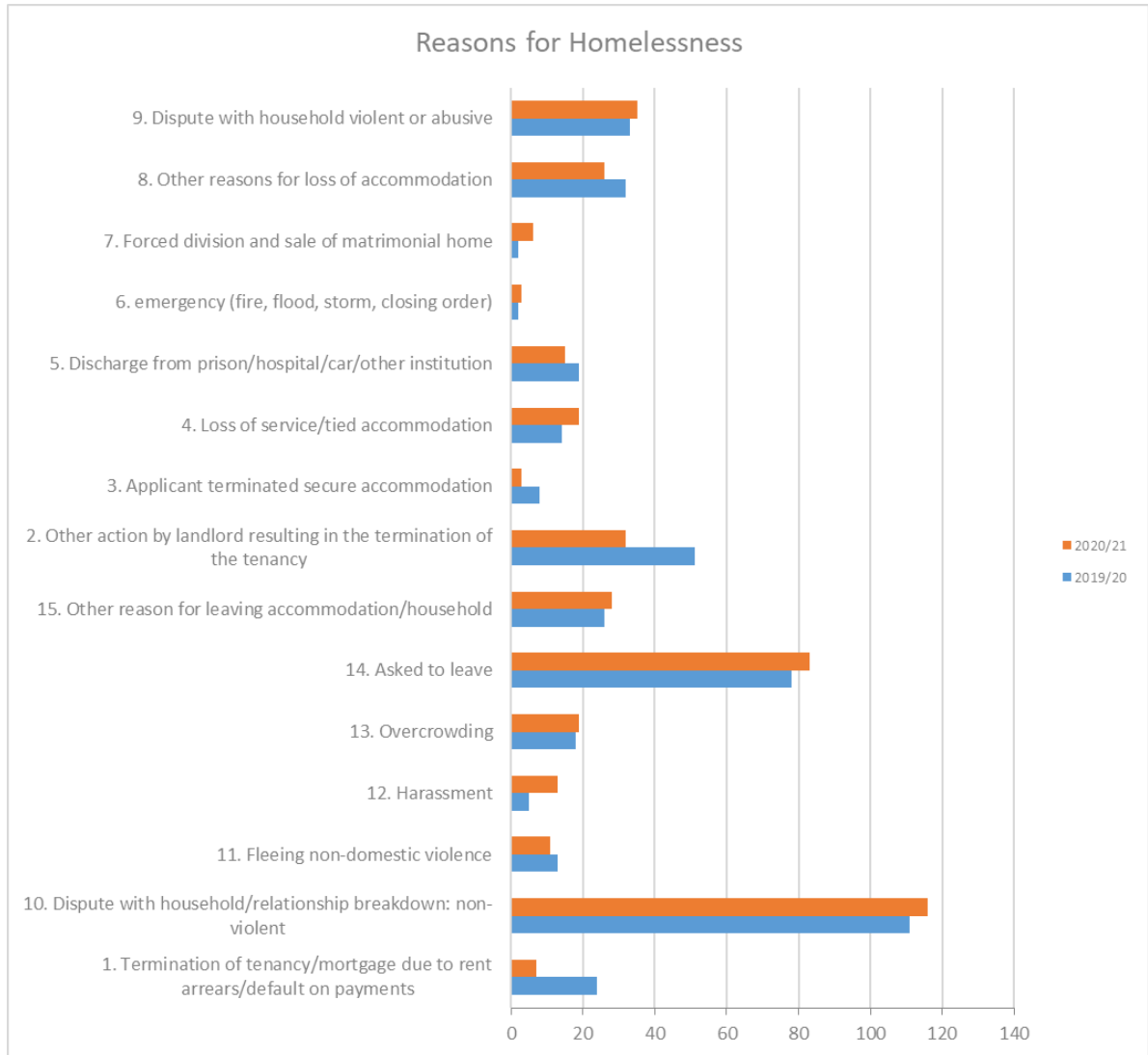
- 416 homeless applications were recorded during the period from 1st April to 31st March 2021. Our original RRTP aim was that the number of homeless applicants would reduce from 517 per annum (2017/18) to 300 (2023/24). 460 homeless applications were taken in 2018/19. 434 homeless applications were taken in 2019/20.





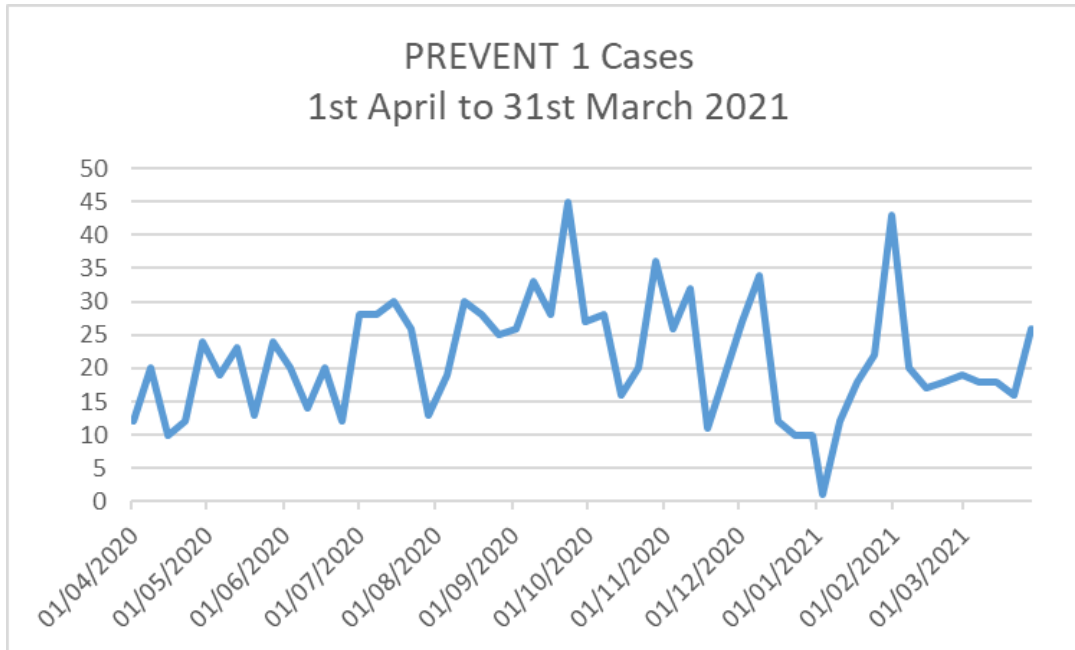
Reasons for Homelessness

The main reasons for homelessness remains consistent with previous years with **'Dispute with Household – non-violent'** and **'Asked to Leave'** being the main reasons. At 31st March, there were 5 more cases than in the previous year presenting as a result of **'Dispute with household – violent or abusive'** and 5 more cases presenting as a result of being **'Asked to Leave'**.



Homelessness Prevention

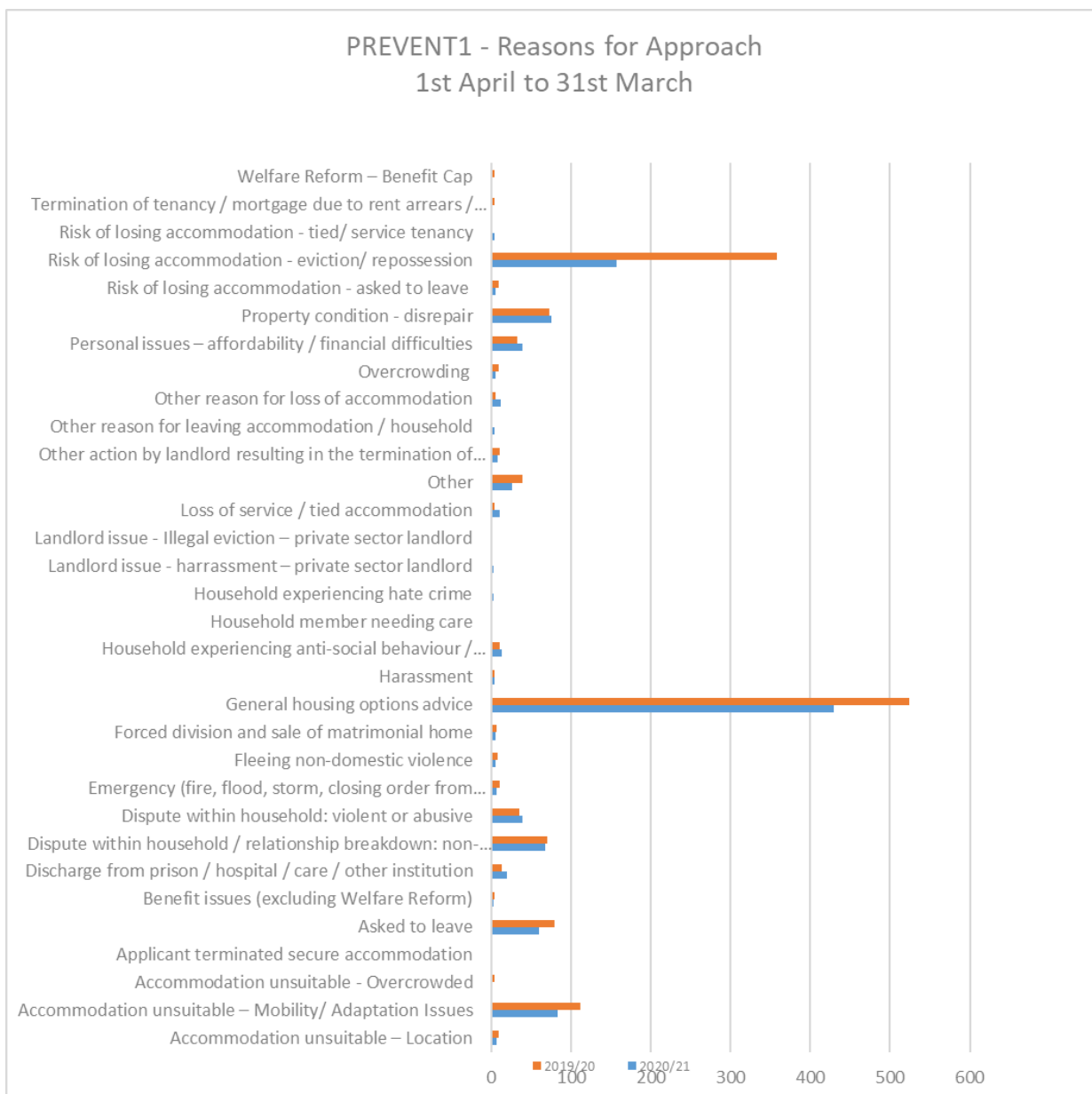
The number of Prevention and Advice cases has reduced from 1,456 in 2019/20 to 1,114 in 2020/21 which is a reduction of 342 cases (24%). The table below shows illustrates the numbers by month.



The graph below illustrates the reduction in the number of households seeking advice in respect of 'A Risk of Losing Accommodation by eviction/repossession', or, seeking 'General Housing Advice'.

Risk of losing accommodation by eviction/repossession reduced from 358 households to 158 (56% reduction).

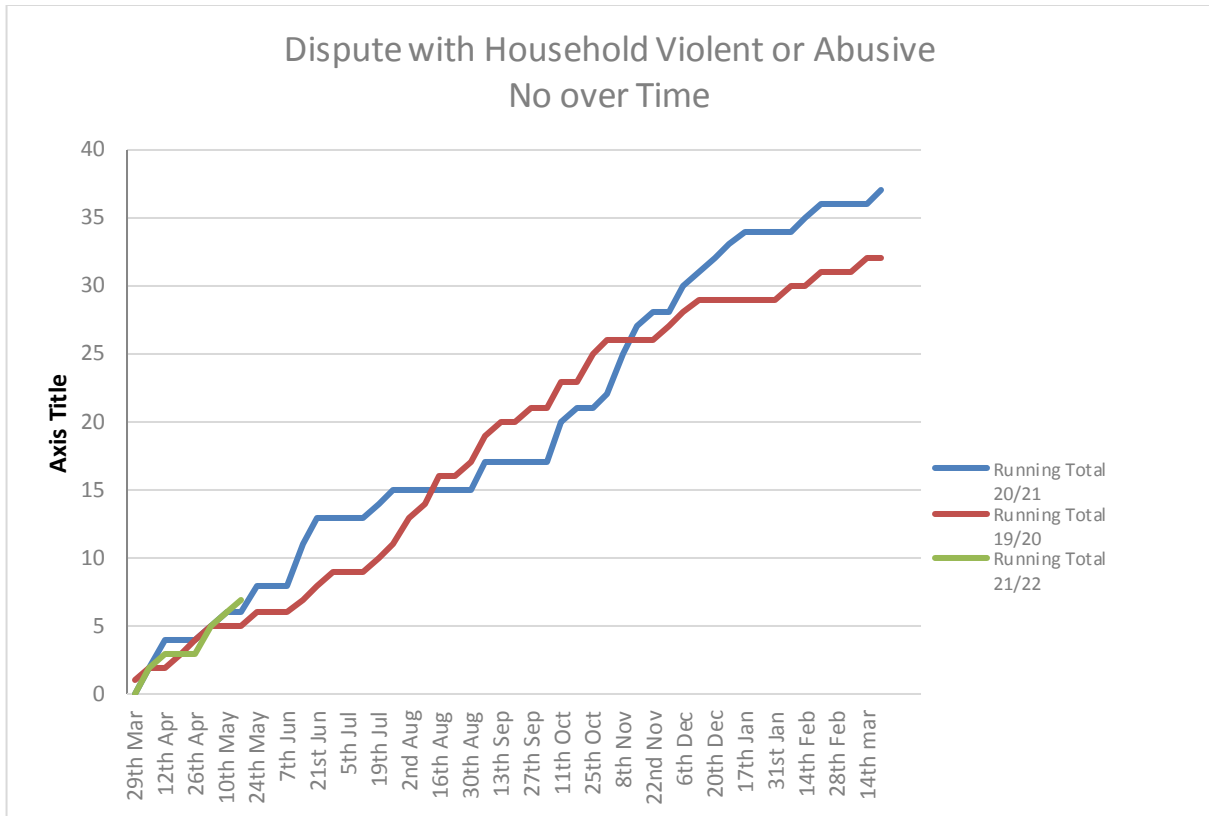
General Housing Advice reduced from 524 households to 429 (18% reduction).



These figures however may not indicate a trend in Argyll and Bute. Rather, they may just be a reflection of the reality of Covid related changes to legislation that meant landlords had to provide extended notice periods for legal action to end tenancies, and there was also an eviction ban in place. At this stage it is therefore impossible to predict whether this level of downward trend will continue.

Domestic Abuse

In 2020/2021, there were **35** households who made a homeless application due to being the victim of domestic abuse. This was an increase on the previous year. As above, it is impossible to predict whether this is an upward trend or whether the Covid lockdown played a part in creating dangerous household circumstances which people had to move from.



3. Temporary accommodation supply

The RRTP vision for temporary tenancies was:

- The number of homeless applicants will reduce from 517 per annum (2017/18) to 300 (2023/24). 460 homeless applications were taken in 2018/19. 434 homeless applications were taken in 2019/20. 416 homeless applications were recorded during the period from 1st April to 31st March 2021.
- Units of temporary accommodation are accordingly reduced from 140 to 100 (2023/24). Due to COVID lockdown the Council had to increase the number of temporary accommodation units in the short term.
- People spend as little time as possible in temporary tenancies before finding permanent re-housing and no more than 26 weeks without good reason reducing to 20 weeks by 2024. In 2019/20 this figure was 26 weeks, and in 2020/21 the figure rose to 29 weeks. This increase could be due to Covid lockdown when additional accommodation had to be procured.
- People sustain permanent tenancies with a reduction in repeat homelessness. 5.7% of households were repeat homeless cases in 2018/19. In 2019/20 there was a further reduction to 5.3% however in 2020/21 the figure rose to 6.8%. This was an increase of 7 cases. This increase could be Covid lockdown related as limited homelessness

prevention face to face support or mediation could be provided and will require further review and analysis in the coming year.

The Covid lockdown brought particular challenges to this piece of work in 2020/21. Additional accommodation had to be sourced at the start of lockdown, as it became clear there would be a backlog of void lets whilst our partner RSL's adjusted to the new arrangements. Therefore, unusually for Argyll and Bute Council, homeless applicants had to be placed in B & B. Whilst this was far from our intended approach it was essential as it was the only means that homeless applicants could be provided with immediate accommodation in their area of choice. This was unfortunately a backward step in terms of our approach to providing self-contained accommodation and we recognised that it created particular challenges for families with children who also had the complexity of home schooling. Moving the families to self-contained accommodation was undertaken as a priority as lockdown eased, but we must accept that the reality is that in 2020/21 greater numbers of homeless applicants spent time in unsuitable accommodation than was our usual approach, much less our proposed RRTP approach. We have worked hard to find more suitable accommodation options, and at present are on target to meet the requirements of The Unsuitable Accommodation Order when it comes into force on 30 September 2021. However, we recognise that this progress may indeed be fragile, and any further lockdowns could lead to us having to source short term accommodation again.

In terms of Housing First we have been able to make some progress despite Covid. We recognise now that for Housing First to be fully implemented it must be on the basis of offering full SST's, rather than flipping SSST's. In 2020/21 we set up a Housing First Delivery Group with our Home Argyll partners. To date the group has agreed a Memorandum of Understanding for Housing First governance and processes which is being presented to partner RSL Boards. We had intended to implement 10 housing first tenancies in 2020/21. However it was agreed by the group that as, due to Covid, we could not provide crucial face to face intense support in new tenancies this work would be delayed until it could be safely provided by our identified Support Providers. The target of ten tenancies will now be moved onto 2021/22 to be implemented. Again, we recognise that any further Covid lockdowns could jeopardise this work.

4. Identifying support needs

Housing Services staff provided a virtual Housing Service as soon as lockdown was announced. Tenancy support providers had to look at new ways to deliver support and this was carried out virtually however several support practitioners continued to deliver face to face support to those who were extremely vulnerable and struggled with lockdown and isolation, taking into account social distancing. Support practitioners saw an increase in support given to service users who had been furloughed and then made redundant in accessing benefits or support to apply for employment and also an increase in supporting people with poor mental health. Support has been some service user's lifeline during lockdown.

Housing Services and the support providers were required to respond quickly to a range of complex issues. New ways of delivering support via WhatsApp, Messenger, Skype, emails, text messages were put into place. Our Housing Support providers provided a virtual drop in service for Universal Credit (UC). This enabled service users to get assistance with general UC claims or applying for UC, which was crucial as due to lockdown many people found themselves with reduced incomes and were unfamiliar with the benefits system.

Our focus in 2020/21 in terms of support was clearly on providing services to those in immediate need due to Covid. However, we were able to undertake some specific actions on our RRTP actions for Tenancy Support. The post of Mental Health/Addictions Practitioner was planned as it was recognised that a patchwork of support services was available across a large rural and island area in Argyll and Bute. The Mental Health/Addictions Practitioner would seek to ensure that appropriate services could be accessed by clients at the appropriate location, and build contacts and service links. The role of the post would include awareness raising of housing options within the HSCP so that the HSCP could refer into housing services at an earlier stage to try and avoid/minimise any crisis situations. Additionally, the Mental Health/Addictions Practitioner would play a key role in the roll out of Housing First by being a key contact for clients and the service providers supporting them.

The Mental Health / Addictions Practitioner work stream has been by far the most challenging part of the RRTP in 2020/21. Good joint work was done with the local HSCP which agreed to advertise the post and employ the post holder, and this is seen as the preferred route as we develop our partnership work with the HSCP with this post being crucial to creating and strengthening links. However, despite the post being advertised several times, we have been unable to recruit. It is impossible to determine the reason for this, particularly given the challenges of Covid. However, the post is temporary in line with the funding arrangements and it may be case that may be off putting to potential candidates, and equally may not give enough job security to make somebody consider moving to Argyll and Bute to take up the post. This workstream will continue to be pursued in 2021/22.

As stated above, in 2020/21 the Argyll and Bute Council Housing team quickly implemented a virtual service. As part of that we have been trialing the Near Me system, as a means to facilitate virtual face to face communication with clients. This could be a transformational change to our services, and has the potential to provide parity of service to rural, remote and island clients in a way which has never been realistic before. We are involved in the national working group which is working on the national roll out of the system. As a result, we have added this work to our RRTP workstream for 2021/22.

A number of parts of the RRTP which were in place in 2020/21 proved to be critical in our Covid response. The Rent Arrears prevention project was subject to a Covid review to make sure it met the needs of applicants facing new and challenging circumstances. It has been a vital prevention tool and will continue to be so during Covid recovery. Full details on spend are available in the

accompanying document - “Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan - Monitoring Report - activity and funding”.

Our Decoration Project was similarly crucial during 2020/21 in helping new tenants make their new tenancy a home, and also helping new tenants who were in Temporary Accommodation move timeously to their new home. This was crucial to free up suitable temporary accommodation for those who were in unsuitable B & B. Full details on spend are available in the accompanying document - “Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan - Monitoring Report - activity and funding”. The following pictures show before and after of a new tenancy as a result of input from our decoration project funds:

Before



After



Our Flexible Emergency Fund meant that we could provide immediate solutions at local locations by trusted providers even during full lockdown and was again a useful tool. Full details on spend are available in the accompanying document - "Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan - Monitoring Report - activity and funding".

The Rent Arrears Prevention project, Décor Project and Flexible Emergency Fund will be on-going work streams for our RRTP in 2021/22.

APPENDIX A

RRTP actions at June 2021:

Action	Progress	Status	Comments
Rent Arrears Prevention Fund	In operation	On Target	Will continue in 2021/22
Decoration Project	In operation	On Target	Will continue in 2021/22
Flexible Emergency Fund	In operation	On Target	Will continue in 2021/22
Mental Health / Addictions Practitioner	Post advertised again	Not on Target	
Establish a rural Housing First model	MOU underway.	Partly on Target	10 tenancies to commence in 2021/22.
Housing First/RRTP Training	Dates agreed	Partly on Target	To include Housing practitioners from RSL's and RSL Board Members
<p>The number of homeless applicants will reduce from 517 per annum (2017/18) to 300 (2023/24). 460 homeless applications were taken in 2018/19. 434 homeless applications were taken in 2019/20.</p> <p>Units of temporary accommodation are accordingly reduced from 140 to 100 (2023/24).</p> <p>People spend as little time as possible in temporary tenancies before finding permanent re-housing and no more than 26 weeks without</p>	<p>Reduction - 416 Homeless Applicants in 2020/21.</p> <p>Due to Covid lockdown, additional temporary accommodation was required.</p> <p>26 weeks in 2019/20. 29 weeks in 2020/21.</p>	Partly on Target	

<p>good reason reducing to 20 weeks by 2024.</p> <p>People sustain permanent tenancies with a reduction in repeat homelessness. 5.7% of households were repeat homeless cases in 2018/19.</p>	<p>Repeat homeless cases were 5.3% in 19/20 and 6.8% in 20/21. An increase of seven cases in 2020/21.</p>		
<p>Implement Near Me as virtual face-to-face communication tool.</p>	<p>System testing underway</p>	<p>Partly on Target</p>	