



LOCAL HOUSING STRATEGY ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2016 – 2017

LHS OUTCOME TWO: HOUSING OPTIONS



Delivering a housing system that makes a strong contribution to thriving and sustainable communities and economic growth



INTRODUCTION

LHS Outcome 2 aims to ensure that **“People can access an effective, personalised Housing Options service to meet their housing need”**. Success will be measured in terms of the following key strategic objectives:-

- **Fewer people experiencing homelessness**
- **Greater awareness of housing options**
- **More people sustaining tenancies for longer**
- **Adequate provision of good quality temporary accommodation**
- **Enhanced engagement with stakeholders and increased satisfaction for service users**

Housing Options is the Scottish Government’s recommended approach to homeless prevention; and the Council’s Housing Services co-ordinates and delivers this function via six front lines, area based, housing teams located across Argyll and Bute. This approach involves a targeted information and advice process to support persons presenting to Housing Services with any housing issue. It is a comprehensive, early intervention approach and aims to set out what housing options are available to individuals in order that they can access suitable and sustainable accommodation. This will include:-

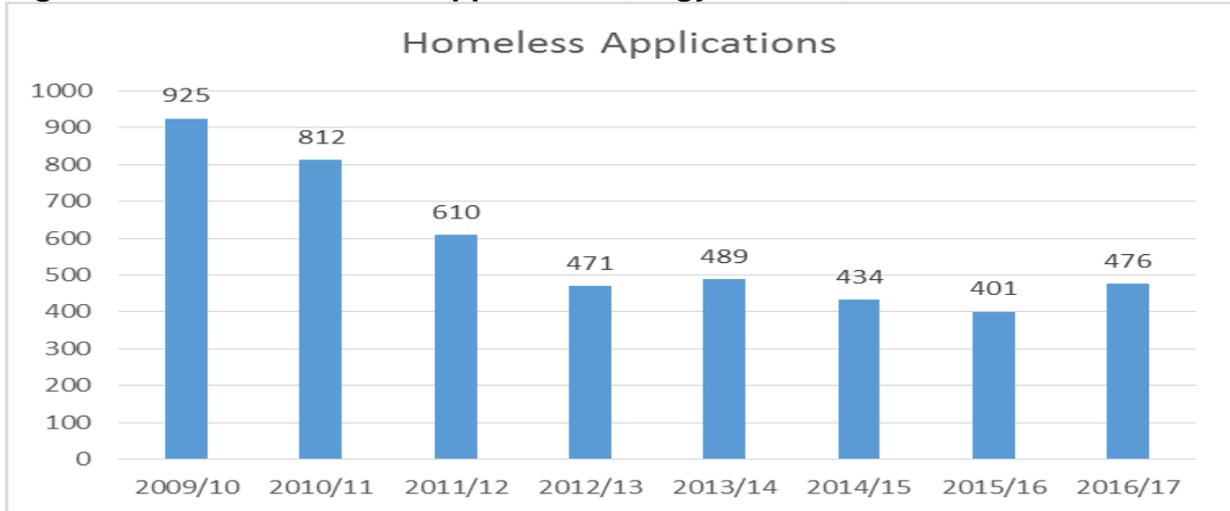
- **Delivering housing advice to people on a wide range of housing options, utilising a bespoke Enhanced Housing Options IT module**
- **Delivering services to meet the Council’s statutory obligations to homeless people, including assessment for and provision of required Housing Support**
- **Administering Argyll and Bute Advice Network (ABAN) Service Directory and highly commended Online Referral System**
- **Maintaining and managing Temporary Accommodation provision**
- **Operating a comprehensive case management system**
- **Acting as Responsible Authority in relation to MAPPA (Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements)**
- **Co-ordinating Environmental Risk Assessments**

The following report outlines the successes of the Housing Service in respect of Homelessness and Housing Options for the first year (2016/17) of the Argyll and Bute Local Housing Strategy (LHS) 2016 – 2021.

HOMELESSNESS

Housing Services received 476 homeless applications in 2016/17, completed 473 assessments, and closed 477 cases. Presentations increased by 19% over the previous year and were the highest since 2013/14; however they are still almost 50% lower than levels recorded in 2009/10.

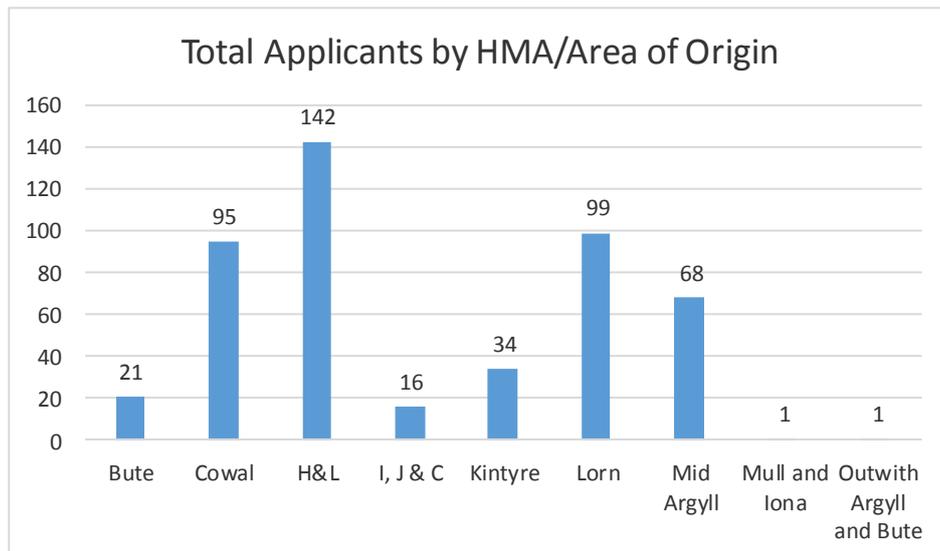
Figure 1: Annual Homeless Applications, Argyll & Bute, 2009/10 – 2016/17



Source: Scottish Government Annual Homeless Statistics Report, May 2017

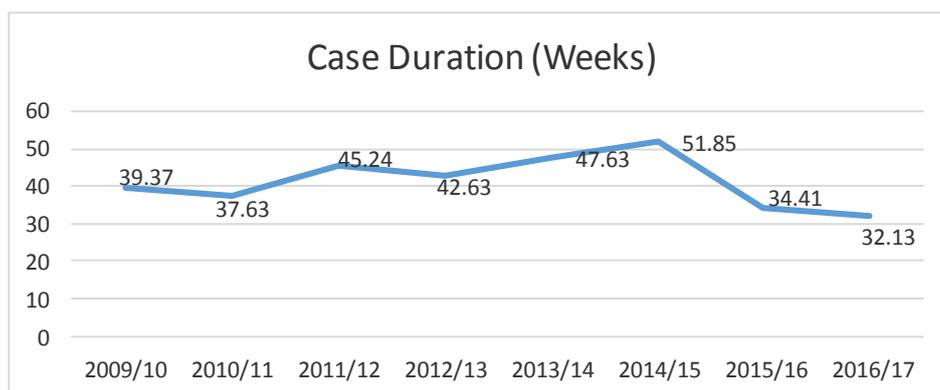
Helensburgh and Lomond had the highest incidence of homeless presentations during the year with 30% of the year's total; while Lorn saw 21% and Cowal had 20%. There was only one case presenting from outwith the local authority area.

Figure 2: Homeless Applications by HMA/Area of Origin, 2016/17



Last year also saw the lowest average time to discharge homeless duty in recent years, an average of 32.13 weeks. The LHS target is to ensure that at least 50% of homeless cases securing an RSL tenancy are rehoused within 26 weeks. Last year, 59% achieved this target. Repeat homelessness remained at the same level as the previous year, 4% of cases.

Figure 3: Average time to discharge duty, Argyll & Bute, 2009/10 – 2016/17

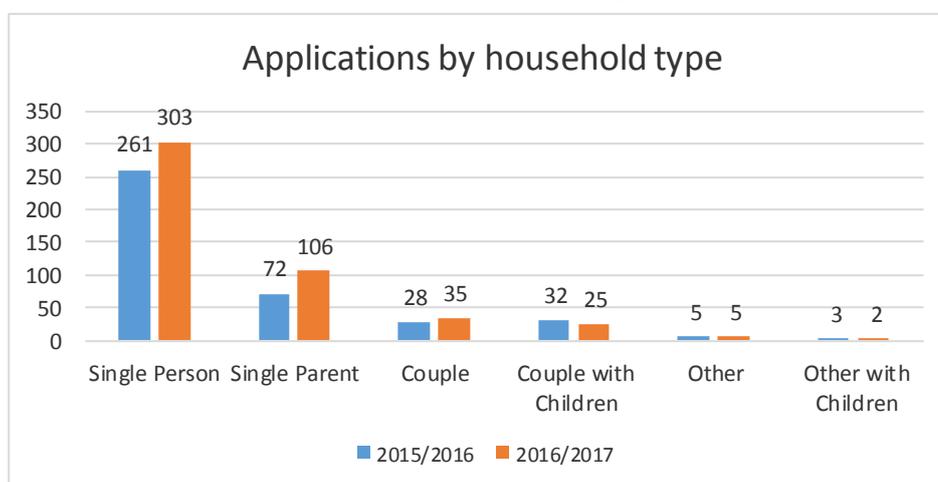


Source: Scottish Government Annual Homeless Statistics Report, May 2017

The majority of closed cases (81%) achieved positive outcomes, with 270 receiving a Scottish Secure Tenancy and 42 receiving a Private Rented Tenancy. This is up from 78% the previous year. There were nil cases resulting in B&B or hostel accommodation.

In terms of homeless trends, single persons continue to make up the vast majority of applicants (64% of the total, which is slightly down, by 1%, on the previous year), followed by single parents who made up 23% of the total (compared to 18% the previous year). There was a relative decline in the number and proportion of couples with children, however, overall, the number of families with children applying as homeless actually increased by 24%, from 107 in 2015/16 to 133 in 2016/17.

Figure 4: Homeless Applicants by Household Type, 2015/16 & 2016/17



Source: Scottish Government Annual Homeless Statistics Report, May 2017

The majority of applicants were occupying a parental/family or relative's home (29%) or had a tenancy in the private rented sector (23%); while another 16% were living with friends or partners. Almost 5% owned or were buying their own property.

The main reasons for presenting as homeless last year, were “a non-violent dispute within household/relationship breakdown” (107 applicants, 22% of total) or “being asked to leave” (90 applicants, 19%). Between 2015/16 and 2016/17 there appears to be a notable increase in the number of cases of persons unable to retain their home because of financial issues such as debt or unemployment; as well as a rise in

cases due to mental health conditions. The main reasons for failing to maintain accommodation are listed overleaf (selected reasons only):-

Reason	2015/16	2016/17
Financial difficulties/debt/unemployment	28	46
Physical health reasons	15	14
Mental health issues	13	24
Lack of support from friends/family	18	11
Drug/alcohol dependency	9	14
Criminal / antisocial behaviour	8	8

Source: Scottish Government Annual Homeless Statistics Report, May 2017

Rough sleeping constitutes an extreme form of homelessness and housing need, and the LHS sets out a target to ensure that this is maintained at or below baseline levels. In 2015/16 the incidence of applicants sleeping rough within the 3 months preceding their application was 11% (44 of 401 cases). In 2016/17, the actual number was similar (43) but proportionately this was a decrease to only 9% of the total applicants, and over the last decade the actual number of rough sleepers has fallen by 65%, therefore indicating a positive downward trend.

SLEPT ROUGH IN ARGYLL & BUTE	2006/2007	2015/2016	2016/2017
during the 3 months preceding application	121	44	43
on the night preceding application	59	18	20
All Applicants	988	401	476

Source: Scottish Government Annual Homeless Statistics Report, May 2017

The LHS also identifies former “looked after children” as a key client group, and there is a specific target to establish formal protocols to ensure that looked after children and care leavers have adequate access to housing. Pending assimilation of the recent legislative changes for this client group, this action is ongoing but a general downward trend has been recorded in the incidence of applications by persons who have been looked after by the local authority.

CASE STUDY 1

Ms X approached Housing Services for Housing Options advice in August 2016 due to her relationship with her husband breaking down and being left on her own with her child. She was in private rented accommodation and at risk of losing this as the rent was expensive and she was only in part time employment and struggling to make ends meet. She was then issued with a Notice to Quit due to increasing rent arrears and applied as homeless. A referral was made to tenancy support. She also had moved into temporary accommodation. The housing support provider supported Ms X with maximising her income with application to Child Tax Credits and Working Tax Credits, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction. Ms X was then offered her own tenancy in December 2016 and was supported with moving from temporary to permanent accommodation. With the support of Carr Gomm, she was able to maximise her income, have a smooth transition from temporary to permanent housing and her self-esteem was also built up again. A positive outcome.

INFORMATION AND ADVICE (PREVENT 1)

Housing Services staff carry out dedicated interviews with households approaching the council for housing advice or assistance, and RSL colleagues also provide this service. Households can access the Enhanced Housing Options module via the HOMEArgyll website. A personalised housing options plan will be produced for each household based on the information they have submitted.

Core advice options cover the following topics:

Home Ownership	Over Crowding
Gypsy / Travellers Accommodation	Under Occupation
Private Rented	Job & Training Advice
Social Housing	Money or Benefits Advice
Sheltered Housing	Mortgage To rent
Adapted/ Amenity Housing	Disrepair Prevention
Supported Housing	Additional support
Mutual Exchange	

In addition, the following support options are available:

Homeless with Support Needs	People with Drug Problems
Offenders or People at risk of Offending	People with HIV/ AIDS
Dementia	Refugees
Literacy / Numeracy	Rough Sleepers
English Not First Language	Student Accommodation
Older People with support Needs	Teenage Parents
People with a Physical Sensory Disability	Mental Health Problems
People with Alcohol Problems	People at Risk of Domestic Abuse
Young people at risk	Young people leaving care

The housing options approach is formally monitored by means of "Prevent 1" reports which record statistics on case work and outcomes on an annual basis. There were 1,662 completed housing options transactions recorded last year via Prevent 1, which was down on the previous year's total but still almost double the baseline figure recorded in 2014/15. Around 60% of these achieved a positive outcome in terms of accessing permanent, secure accommodation or being able to remain in their current accommodation, however, this is below the LHS target of 70%.

Over 37% of EHO self-assessments completed online were from persons resident outwith Argyll and Bute, as illustrated overleaf. It will be interesting to analyse these cases to determine how many went on to relocate within the area, in line with our strategic objective of promoting in-migration to reverse the population decline.

Enhanced Housing Options

Number of Self-Assessments Completed

1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017



Self Assessments completed by Area



The majority of households seeking advice were single persons (63%), while 19% were single parents; and both couples and couples with children made up around 8% each. The main reason for contacting the service was for “general housing advice” but over a quarter, 25.1%, were queries in relation to “risk of losing accommodation due to eviction or repossession”. The average duration for cases with a Prevent 1 outcome in 2016/17 was 60.6 days, compared to 53.8 days the previous year.

Housing Services continue to participate in the regional Tayside, Fife and Central Housing Options Hub which promotes best practice and, among other actions, is currently supporting the development of a training toolkit for service delivery.

CASE STUDIES 2

- A family in tied accommodation were contacted after completing an EHO assessment. Housing Services staff negotiated with the local RSLs and managed to secure a permanent offer of housing which the applicant accepted. Housing support was put in place to ensure that the applicant had the best possible chance of sustaining his tenancy.
- A single applicant in the Oban area was contacted after completing an EHO assessment. He was advised of all of his options and made a homeless application. He was provided with temporary accommodation in the local area.

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

Council Housing Services continue to manage contracts for serviced temporary accommodation; and for provision with housing management and housing support. In 2017, there were 143 units of temporary accommodation across 6 HMAs. The bulk are in the private rented sector; and located mainly in Lorn and Helensburgh & Lomond. The breakdown of locations and types of provision is summarised below:

Temporary Accommodation by HMA and Type, 2017

HMA	Serviced Accomm.	RSL	Private sector	BTHA*	Total
BUTE		5			5
COWAL	12	7	7		26
H'BURGH & LOMOND	18	4	21		43
KINTYRE			4	3	7
LORN		3	12	29	44
MID ARGYLL		2	16		18
TOTAL	30	21	60		143

(BTHA = Blue Triangle Housing Association which provides individual rooms for clients)

In 2016/17 there were 229 placements in temporary accommodation and the average length of stay was 159 days compared to 164 in 2015/16; which is within the LHS target of 160 days or less. Just over 44% of homeless applicants required temporary accommodation during the year, compared to over 50% the previous year. There were no breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order during the year. As of 31st March 2017, there were 161 homeless households in temporary accommodation. Of these, 36 households contained dependent children and pregnant women.

There was a drop in recorded customer satisfaction with accommodation provided, from 89% in 2015/16 to only 73% last year, which falls below the LHS target of at least 90%. This is due in part to a greater number of neutral respondents during the

year who were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their accommodation; nevertheless it indicates that there is room for improvement in this area.

TENANCY SUPPORT

Housing Services co-ordinate and oversee the local authority’s statutory duty in respect of assessing and securing housing (tenancy) support for homeless persons and those at risk of homelessness. Dedicated Housing Support officers assess clients’ support needs and manage contracts with support providers. The tenancy support service focuses on homeless prevention and transitional/tenancy sustainment. There are three main providers in Argyll and Bute: Carr Gomm, HELP, and Kintyre Youth Enquiry Service (KYES). In addition to one-to-one support, all 3 agencies provide a drop-in facility which is available to anyone in the local area.

In 2016/17 there were 286 new households requiring support. Clients are categorised by age i.e. those aged between 16-24, and those aged 25+. For both groups, the main areas of support related to accommodation and to social and economic well-being; however many also had issues around employment, health or safety and security. At the year end, there were a total of 124 current clients aged 16-24 and 143 aged 25 or over.

Figure 5: Active Tenancy Support Clients, Age 16-24, at March 2017

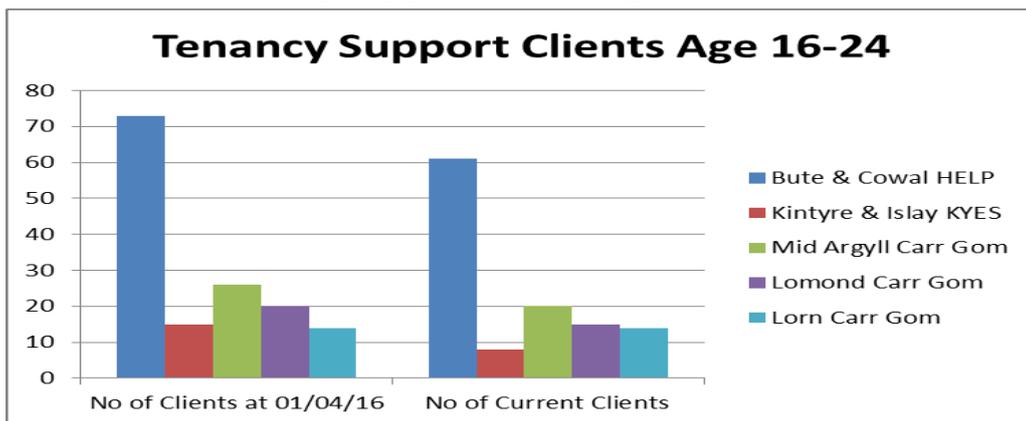
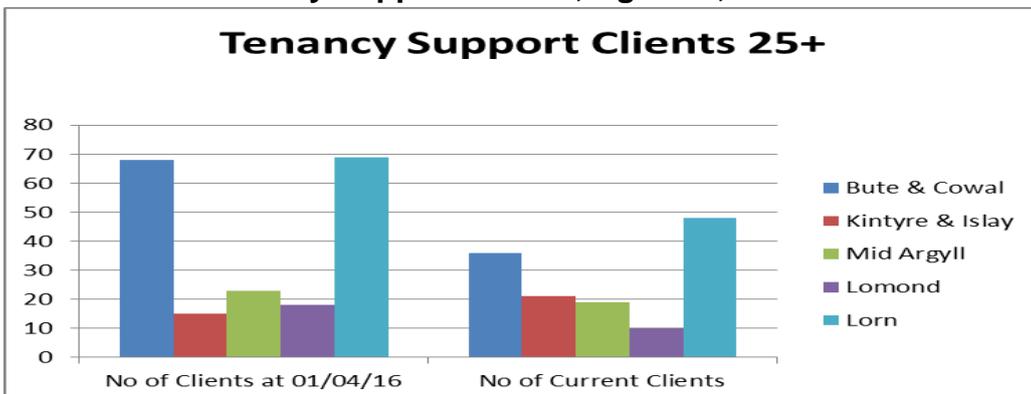


Figure 6: Active Tenancy Support Clients, Age 25+, at March 2017



The Housing Support duty requires that all applicable homeless households should be formally assessed for their support needs, and in 2016/17 this was achieved with 100% of the closed HL1 cases assessed.

The ultimate aim of the service is to achieve planned departures from support for clients, who should then be competent and confident to go on to sustain their own tenancy independently. Of the total 368 clients who left support services in 2016/17, the vast majority, 269, were planned departures, amounting to 73%. However, in the final quarter of the year, planned departures increased to 83%, giving a very positive outcome above the LHS target of 80%.

CASE STUDY 3

Following a relationship breakdown, single mother of three, Ms T, who was also expecting a fourth child, was referred to tenancy support as she was at risk of losing her RSL tenancy due to very high rent arrears. As she had been in high rent arrears before, she was known to the service. A referral was made to Carr Gomm and she was also advised to contact CAB who lodged a successful Recall of Decree. Carr Gomm successfully supported Ms T to apply for Income Support, Child Tax Credits and Housing Benefit/CTR. A Discretionary Housing Payment was also put in place. Regular liaison with CAB and RSL landlord was in place by Carr Gomm to ensure good communication to prevent Ms T losing her tenancy. A repayment plan was put in place for both rent arrears and also for very large Council Tax bill. Support included budgeting plan, dealing with previously ignored incoming correspondence, and applying for a transfer to a larger house due to overcrowding with new baby. Throughout the 2 years of support, Ms T continued to engage well with support worker and repayment plans were maintained. Support continued to ensure that tenancy was sustained. At the last review it was agreed that she was in a better place and support could end and that drop in service was available if she required further advice/support. Also communication with landlord has improved greatly. She continues to remain in her tenancy today.

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

Another key area of activity for Housing Services is liaising with partners and Criminal Justice services to support persons leaving custody to secure suitable accommodation and reduce re-offending. In 2016/17 there were 21 closed cases for released prisoners returning to the area and presenting as homeless; and 11 of these (53%) were supported to a positive housing outcome; including 8 who secured an RSL tenancy. Over the next four years of the LHS, the aim is to achieve an ambitious 75% rate of positive outcomes for this client group.

The council continues to support the Community Justice Outcomes Plan, and Housing Services liaise closely with a dedicated Community Justice Transitions Officer on these issues. We are actively participating in the development of national standards for advice, information and support for this client group as set out in the emerging Sustainable Housing On Release for Everyone (SHORE) document. Housing Services staff also carry out formal Environmental Risk Assessments to ensure community safety, and last year 25 ERAs were completed.

UNIVERSAL SUPPORT DELIVERY LOCALLY (USDL)



In addition to tenancy support, Housing Services were actively involved with partners in piloting an award-winning project which provided support to enhance clients' digital/literacy skills and help them to manage their finances in preparation for the implementation of Universal Credit in March 2016.

The project won the Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation (IRRV) overall Scottish Award for Excellence in Partnership Working in 2016. During the year there were 89 referrals via USDL.

MEDIATION

In 2016/17, Mediation services dealt with 53 cases, of which 11 remained ongoing at year end. Of the 42 cases closed during the year, the majority (52%) resulted in no engagement (second contact). The main type of mediation related to family dispute (69%); while there were 6 cases of neighbour dispute; 5 relating to common repair; and 2 "others". There were no referrals in respect of landlord disputes. Geographically, the cases were fairly evenly distributed across Mid Argyll (11), Lorn and Cowal (10 each), and Helensburgh & Lomond (9). There was only 1 case in Kintyre and 1 on Mull.

ARGYLL AND BUTE ADVICE NETWORK (ABAN)

Housing Services continue to administer and support the ABAN system, which is a web-based, inter-agency, referral network. 2016/17 was year 5 of operation, and the service continues to expand. Last year, there were a total of 2,852 inter-agency referrals which is double the level recorded in year 1, 2012/13. There were around 2,357 housing-related referrals, which included general housing, housing support, welfare rights, housing improvements and repairs, energy efficiency and others.



CONCLUSION

The Council's Housing Services continue to deliver essential, effective and efficient services for a range of clients, both directly via trained and dedicated front line staff, and in partnership with other providers and external contractors. In 2016/17, the council continued to fund a range of tenancy support agencies and invest in temporary accommodation across the area.

Support Service	Investment 2016/17
Tenancy Support – includes: Blue Triangle Housing Association; HELP; Woman's Aid; Kintyre Youth Enquiry Service; Carr Gomm, and Welfare Reform (DHP) activity	£897,497
Provision of Temporary Accommodation	£434,330

Housing Options activity addresses key LHS objectives, including encouraging and supporting in-migration/relocation where appropriate, and also contributes directly to local and national strategic outcomes; as well as meeting the council's statutory duties for homelessness and for some of the most vulnerable members of society.

The provision of timely information and advice, as well as targeted support and assistance, along with other preventative measures, not only addresses individual needs in an effective manner but can also help to reduce the requirement for more costly interventions at a later date.

Tenancy Support, for example, has proved to be a vital service for residents across Argyll and Bute, helping to prevent homelessness and also to support people to settle into, and sustain, new tenancies. Many clients advised that they would not have managed, and their circumstances and outcomes could have been very different, without this support.

A number of significant challenges, however, still remain:

- The increased awareness of Housing Options and proactive customer engagement has resulted in more people being aware of their rights under the homeless legislation, and if this trend continues there will be greater demand placed on services
- Vulnerable families present particular challenges and remain a priority client group requiring often complex, intensive interventions
- Despite effective service delivery, there is still scope to improve and enhance the positive outcomes for clients, especially in respect of PREVENT1 measures and Housing Support resolutions.
- We continue to record positive feedback from service users, nevertheless, there is a need to increase customer satisfaction generally; and to encourage greater engagement in the planning and delivery of services.

Moving forward, Housing Services is well positioned to build on recent successes and to improve efficiency, in order to achieve the LHS targets and strategic outcomes over the remaining years of the current planning cycle, up to 2021.