

Official Statistics in Development

Housing Options (PREVENT1) Statistics in Scotland: 2022-23

November 2023

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Introduction

This statistics bulletin provides information on [Housing Options services](#) in Scotland from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

The statistics are based on administrative data collected by local authorities in the course of providing Housing Options services that are available when households seek assistance for housing-related issues.

The bulletin includes information on the number of approaches made, details on the reasons for the approaches made, the activities undertaken, and the outcomes achieved. It also draws comparisons to trends within our most recent [homelessness statistics publication](#).

The bulletin focusses on data at a national level due to difference in how local authorities implement Housing Options. Local authority breakdowns are available in an Excel workbook containing tables, which can be downloaded from the [supporting documents page](#).

A note on interpreting the figures

As local authority needs differ, it is appropriate to tailor service provision accordingly. Therefore, the use and implementation of Housing Options varies greatly between local authorities.

For that reason, it is not appropriate to make direct comparisons between local authority Housing Options figures. Instead, local authority figures should be only used to understand the delivery of Housing Options at an individual local authority level.

A quick guide to Housing Options

Local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure advice and information is available free of charge about:

- homelessness and the prevention of homelessness, and
- any services which may assist a homeless person or assist in the prevention of homelessness.

When households seek assistance for housing-related issues from their local authority, they may be presented with advice on a range of Housing Options, including the opportunity to make a homelessness application. This is known as Housing Options and began to be implemented from around 2009.

The aim of this approach is to make households aware of their options for accommodation, and ensure they can make a more informed choice.

However, it is important to note that Housing Options is not a statutory function, but local authorities can use it in the delivery of their statutory duties.

Impact of coronavirus (COVID-19)

There was a decrease in Housing Options approaches and activity in 2020-21 because of COVID-19. This was likely a combination of limitations on local authorities being able to carry out services and decreased demand due to temporary measures put in place.

Temporary [Coronavirus legislation](#) was implemented to protect renters over the COVID-19 period by extending notice periods for eviction proceedings. In addition, [mortgage payment deferrals were introduced across the UK in March 2020](#) for customers experiencing issues paying their mortgage during COVID-19.

Caution should therefore be applied when making comparisons with 2020-21 figures, however, these comparisons are in themselves useful in observing any changes in trends since the onset of the pandemic.

Where findings are believed to have been impacted by COVID-19, or associated temporary protective measures, these have been outlined within the relevant sections.

Impact of cost of living crisis

The emergency [Cost of Living \(Tenant Protection\) \(Scotland\) Act 2022](#) came in to force on 28 October 2022, as a response to the ongoing emergency situation caused by the impact of the cost crisis on those living in the rented sector in Scotland. It introduced extra protections for tenants during the cost crisis, including: a rent cap; a moratorium on the enforcement of eviction orders; and increased protections against illegal evictions.

[Further information on the temporary rent cap and moratorium on evictions](#) is available on the Scottish Government website.

This came in to force partway through the reporting period 2022-23. Where figures are believed to have been impacted by cost of living crisis, these have been outlined within the relevant sections.

Official Statistics in Development Publication for Scotland

These statistics are official statistics in development. Official statistics in development may be new or existing statistics, and will be tested with users, in line with the standards of trustworthiness, quality, and value in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

Local authorities tend to focus resources on the delivery of statutory services and the recording of associated information. Similarly, the non-statutory nature of Housing Options means that local authorities will often ramp up and scale down such activity depending on their needs and resource availability. For these reasons, although the data is subject to thorough quality assurance checks, it is often difficult to a) identify data quality concerns and b) if identified, resolve these fully.

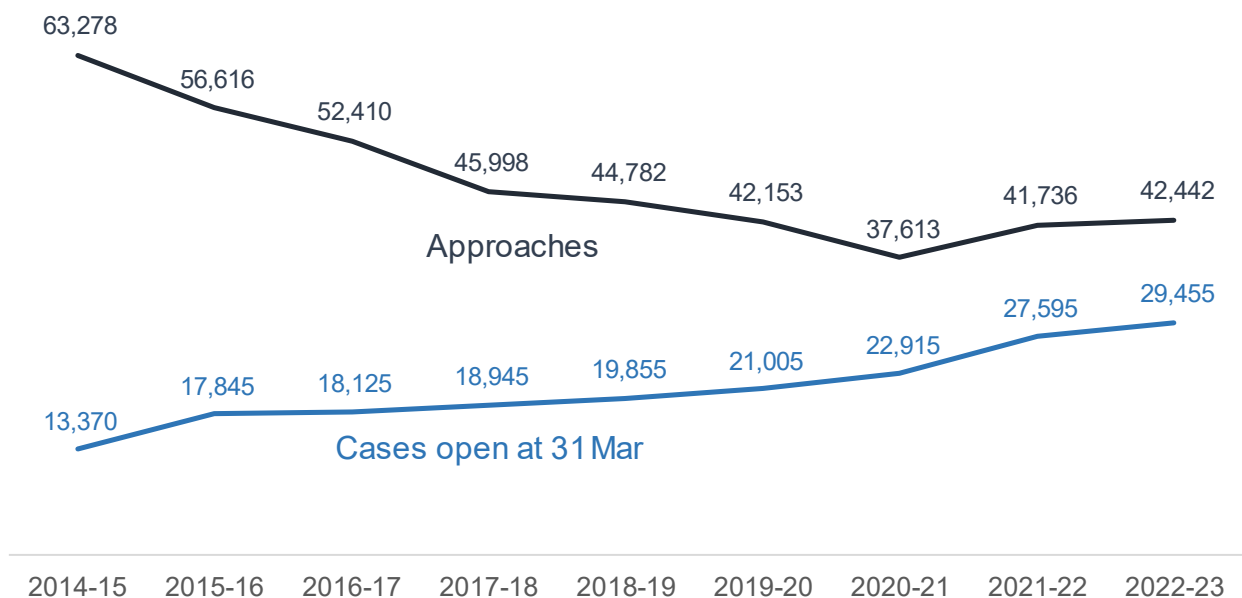
Work is on-going with local authorities to improve the quality of the data. Improvement to this data also falls under the remit of the homelessness statistics data review project which seeks to ensure all homelessness – and prevention of - data collection content is fit for purpose and of high quality. This project involves engagement with a large range of stakeholders to shape future data collections. In addition, as outlined in Programme for Government 2023 to 2024, the Scottish Government plan to introduce legislation which will include new duties aimed at the prevention of homelessness. This would remove the non-statutory nature of, and increase priority on, homelessness prevention, which should lead to an improvement in data quality.

Scottish Government statistics are regulated by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). OSR sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) that all producers of official statistics should adhere to.

Approaches for housing support

Housing Options approaches continue to increase in 2022-23 after a previous long-term reduction

Chart 1: Annual Housing Options approaches and open cases as at 31 March, 2014-15 to 2022-23



There were 42,442 approaches (from 40,038 unique households) in 2022-23. This is an increase of 2% compared to 2021-22 and 13% compared to 2020-21. Prior to the pandemic there had been a downward trend in the number of approaches. The latest figure is 33% lower than the start of the data collection in 2014-15.

Many local authorities reported a reduction in approaches in 2020-21 due to remain at home COVID-19 guidelines, limitations in service provision during the pandemic and measures put in place to [temporarily extend eviction notice periods and ban home reposessions](#) as well as [mortgage payment deferrals](#).

Open cases have been increasing year on year. These were 7% higher in March 2023 compared to the previous year, and more than double than when collection began in 2014-15. A number of local authorities note that increased workloads of housing officers have impacted on case management leading to cases being open longer. One local authority noted an increase in open cases due to the eviction ban introduced by the [cost of living legislation](#) meaning there was a delay in households being able to present as homeless. Additionally, several local authorities have noted that a number of Housing Options cases have been closed, but there has been a delay in submitting the data. These numbers will therefore be revised in due course.

These trends are similar to those observed for homelessness applications.

The vast majority of households made one approach (95%), with less than 1% making three or more.

Increase in approaches were not observed across the board. Indeed, over half (18) of local authorities recorded decreases compared to the previous year.

The largest numerical decrease was in Falkirk, with 945 (51%) fewer approaches – 909 in 2022-23 compared to 1,854 in 2021-22. Falkirk noted this is due to resourcing issues and changes in how they manage Housing Options cases.

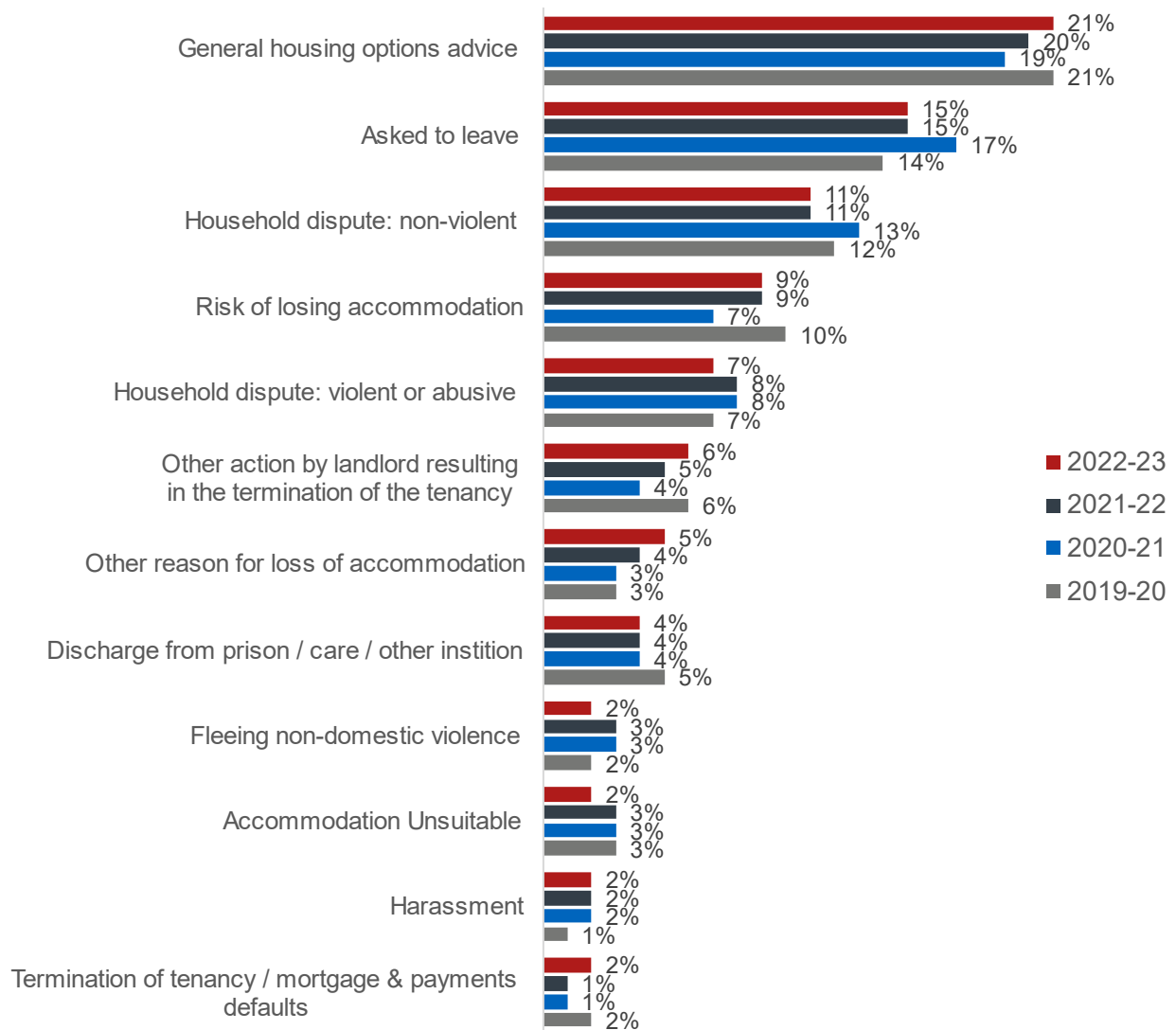
In contrast, Glasgow reported the largest numerical increase from 10,819 to 12,107 (12%) compared to last year. They noted increased efforts had been dedicated to homelessness prevention work which also lead to a decrease in the number of homelessness application (4%) and households assessed as homeless (7%).

The national rate of approaches is 157 per 10,000 households, though this varies greatly between local authorities. Glasgow has the highest rate of 370 approaches followed by Perth & Kinross with 340 approaches per 10,000 households. The lowest rate of approaches are recorded in Eilean Siar and Highland (both with a rate of 4 approaches per 10,000 households). The varying rates are likely reflective of local authorities using different approaches to Housing Options services.

Household circumstances

The most common reasons for Housing Options approaches remain general housing options advice

Chart 2: The most common reasons for Housing Options approaches, 2019-20 to 2022-23

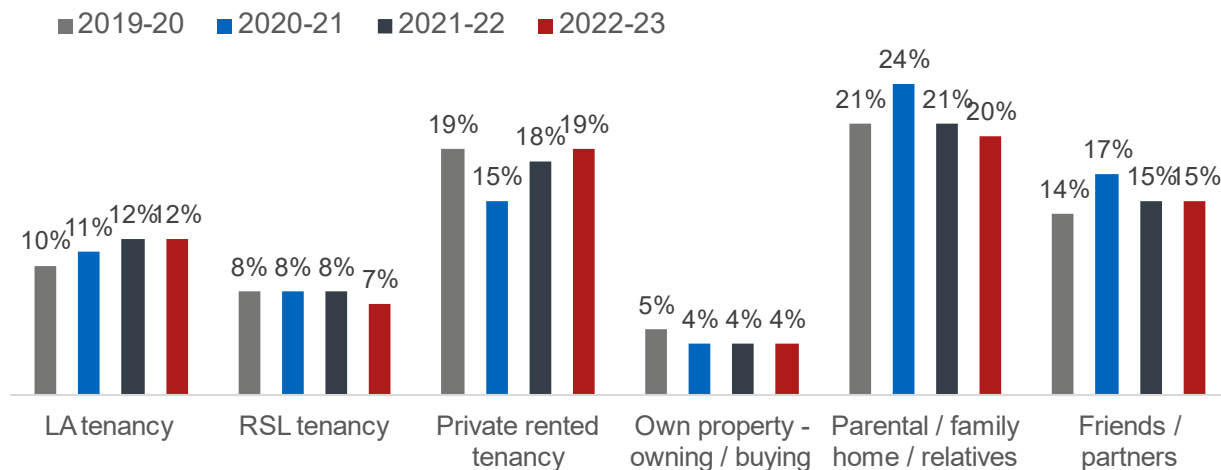


The majority of the reasons for housing support approaches are now similar to pre-pandemic proportions (2019-20).

An exception is the proportion reporting ‘other reason for loss of accommodation’ which has increased over the last two years.

The proportion of approaches made from private rented tenancies has returned to pre-pandemic levels

Chart 3: Property type from which the household made an approach, 2019-20 to 2022-23 [LA refers to local authority and RSL refers to registered social landlord]

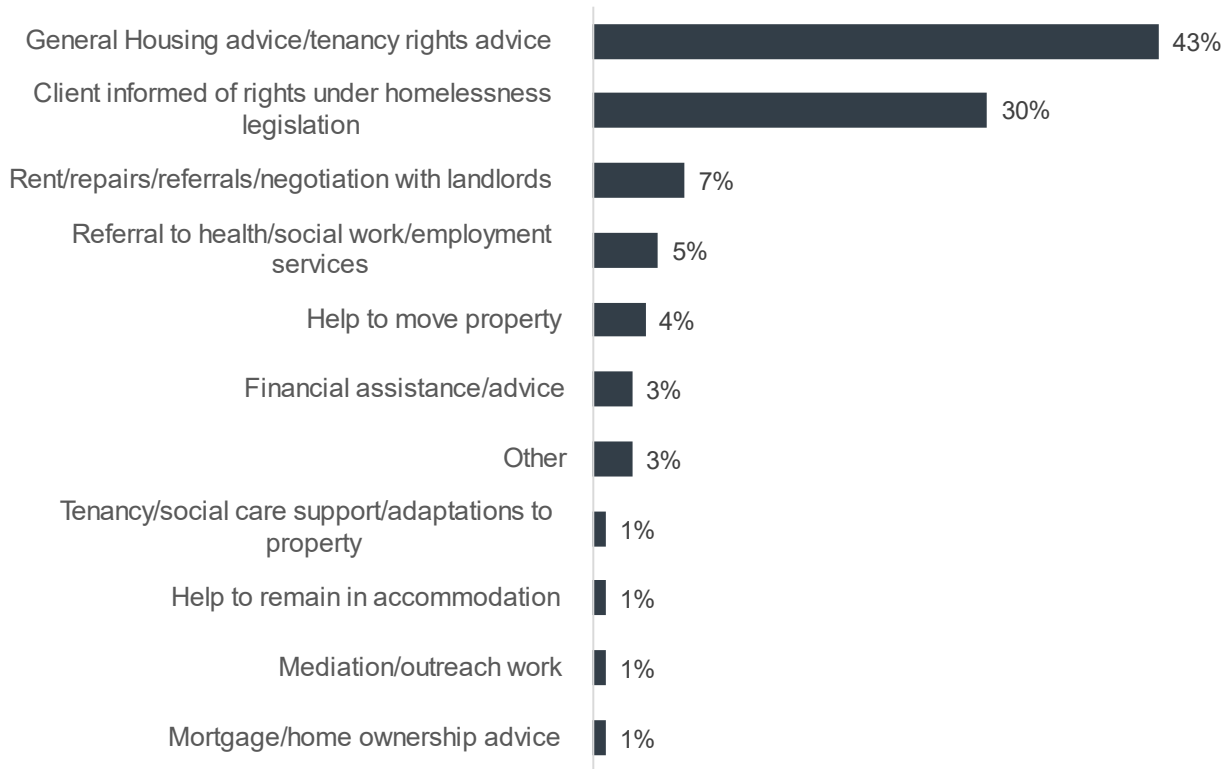


The proportion of approaches from the private rented sector has increased for a second year. Last year, the increase was attributed to the lifting of emergency coronavirus legislation. Emergency cost of living legislation, which introduced extra protection for tenants, came in to force in October 2022. However, it is unclear if and how this has impacted on the figures in the above chart.

Prevention activity

Most prevention activity continues to be general housing advice or informing clients of rights under homelessness legislation

Chart 4: Activity types carried out, as a proportion of all, 2022-23

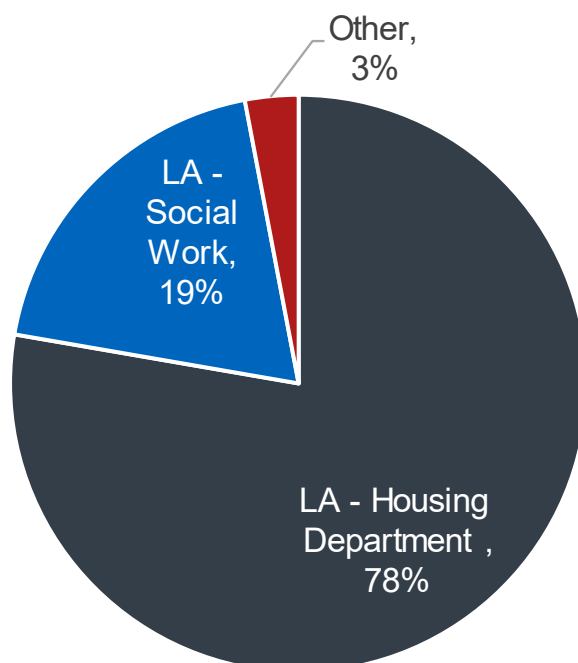


There were higher proportions of ‘General housing/tenancy rights advice’ and ‘client informed of rights under homelessness legislation’ compared to the previous year, 36% and 28% respectively.

However there was a general reduction in the number of activities recorded overall from 92,721 in 2021-22 to 78,837. This can be largely attributed to Falkirk who noted this is explained by changes to how cases are managed and their new housing management system. Continued quality assurance means that Falkirk figures may be revised in the future.

Most prevention activity is undertaken by the local authority housing department

Chart 5: Organisation carrying out prevention activity, 2022-23 [LA refers to local authority]



Type of prevention activity

Local authorities may undertake several activities related to Housing Options approaches. These are grouped in to three types, based on 'workload', where type I is considered the least and type III is the most.

- Type I – Active Information, Sign-posting and Explanation
- Type II – Casework
- Type III – Advocacy, Representation and Mediation at Tribunal or Court Action Level

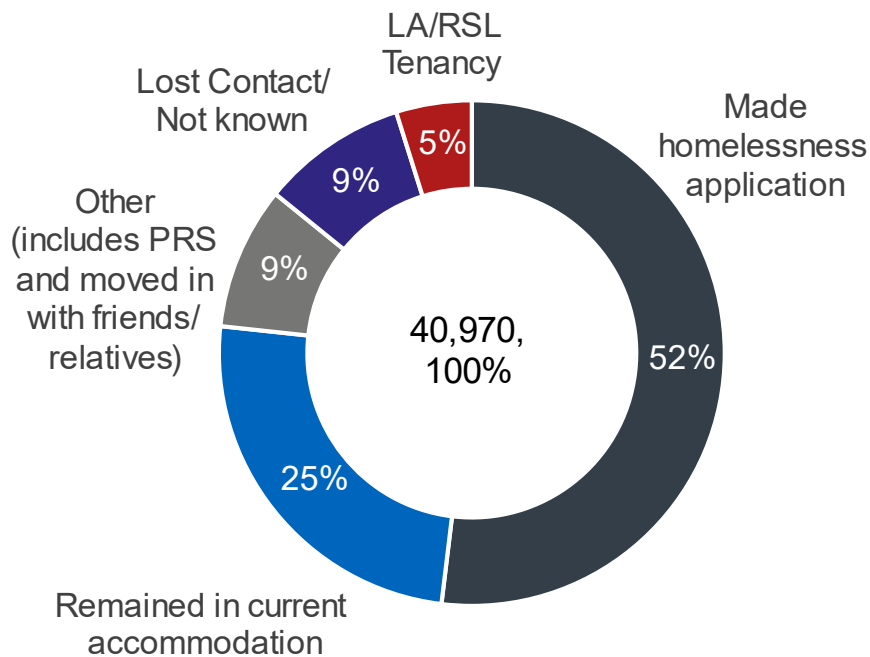
Of all approaches in 2022-23, 45% involved providing active information, sign-posting or explanation only and 55% involved casework (note: these may also have included type I activities).

Very few local authorities report advocacy work, with East Lothian, West Dunbartonshire and Angus being highest with 6%, 3% and 2%, respectively.

Outcomes

Over half of Housing Options approaches result in a homelessness application, though the proportion is lower than previous years

Chart 6: Outcomes of Housing Options approaches, 2022-23 [LA refers to local authority, RSL refers to Registered social landlord and PRS refers to private rented sector]



There was an 11% increase in Housing Options approaches closed in 2022-23 (40,970) compared to 2021-22 (36,960).

Just over half of those resulted in a homelessness application (52%) compared to between 55% and 57% in each year from 2018-19 to 2021-22.

The proportion of outcome 'remained in current accommodation' increased from 21% in 2021-22 to 25% in 2022-23.

While 5% of outcomes were 'local authority / registered social landlord tenancy', many of those who make a homelessness application will also go on to a local authority or registered social landlord tenancy.

Similar to 2021-22, East Dunbartonshire has the highest proportion with an outcome of 'remained in current accommodation' (83%) and Fife had the highest proportion with an outcome of 'local authority / registered social landlord tenancy' (32%).

East Lothian continues to have the highest proportion with an outcome of 'private rented sector tenancy' (26%) while in Eilean Siar and Clackmannanshire the

majority of outcomes are 'made a homelessness application' (100% and 98% respectively).

Across Scotland, it took an average of 138 days to close a Housing Options case (that did not result in a homelessness application). This has increased from 116 days in 2021-22.

Time to close cases varies greatly by local authority, which may be reflective of the differences in Housing Options service provision and case management between local authorities. As previously noted, there are cases that are known by local authorities to be closed but where data has not yet been submitted to reflect this, which will impact on average time statistics.

Glossary

LA: local authority

PRS: private rented sector

RSL: registered social landlord

Data and Methodology

All tables and charts in this publication are available in electronic format at the [supporting documents page](#).

These statistics are based on administrative data collected by local authorities while carrying out their Housing Options duties. The data is collected from local authorities and quality assured by the Scottish Government on a quarterly basis. Details about the data we collect, our quality assurance process, and how we engage with users to improve our statistics are outlined in our [quality assurance statement](#).

The data specification for the Housing Options (PREVENT1) statistics is available on our [data provider information page](#).

Updates to previous statistics

The data we use in this publication is collected from local authorities on a quarterly basis. As a result these figures are updated on an ongoing basis and may differ from those previously published. This may be a result of delays in some cases being reported to the Scottish Government due to IT issues, quality assurance processes and delayed entry of data – particularly at the end of the financial year.

Known issues with the data

South Lanarkshire has not been able to provide case level data for 2019-20, 2020-21 or 2021-22 due to technical issues.

For 2019-20 and 2020-21, South Lanarkshire provided aggregate level data to be incorporated into the tables accompanying this publication. No data at all was provided for 2021-22 and aggregate data for 2020-21 has therefore been used. As a result, we have not been able to carry out our usual level of quality assurance checks for South Lanarkshire's data for these years.

The 2020-21 data contained a discrepancy of 260, which therefore persists for the 2021-22 figures. The number of approaches (973) differs from the number for 'type of prevention activity' (713) and we have been unable to confirm with South Lanarkshire which of these is the correct figure. Additionally, we cannot confirm whether the total activities (2,395) are related to the 973 or 713 figure. This uncertainty affects all tables within the publication.

During quality assurance for this publication, an error was identified in the submitted South Lanarkshire figure for outcome 'Other (known)' for 2019-20. This has therefore been revised from 717 to 41, reducing the Scotland totals of 'All' and

'Other (known)' in table 13 by 676. No other data tables are affected. In addition, an error was identified for table 8 data, resulting in the figures relating to 'General Housing advice/tenancy rights advice' and 'Help to move property' being revised (upwards) by 497 and 309 respectively; the 'All' figure is unaffected.

Argyll & Bute, Fife, Midlothian and North Lanarkshire have reported systems issues which has led to a number of cases not being appropriately closed. This has artificially increased the number of open cases in these local authorities.

Legislation

Local Authorities can use Housing Options as a means of delivering their duty under [section 2 of the Housing \(Scotland\) Act 2001](#).

To note: the provision of Housing Options services is not a statutory duty.

Guidance to help Local Authority officers to record information is available on our [data provider information page](#).

Tell us what you think

We are always interested to hear from our users about how our statistics are used, and how they can be improved.

Feedback survey

We'd appreciate it if you would complete our short [feedback survey](#) on this publication.

Enquiries

For enquiries about this publication please contact:

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For general enquiries about Scottish Government statistics please contact:

Office of the Chief Statistician
e-mail: statistics.enquiries@gov.scot

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