



Homelessness Allocations by Housing Associations:

Evidencing the contribution of
the Sector

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SFHA Foreword

For all of us, the security of a safe, warm and affordable home is the foundation for everything we hope to achieve in life. Whether it's settling down in a community with family and friends; the base from which we pursue education or career opportunities; or simply a place that gives us peace of mind and supports our wellbeing, it all begins with the security of home.

Yet for so many people in 21st century Scotland, the dream of such a home remains elusive and out of reach. Nationally we are experiencing record homelessness, persistent increases in individuals and families living in temporary accommodation and a broken housing system which means around 41 children become homeless every single day.

Behind those figures lie devastating consequences that shape lives for decades: disrupted education, worsening health, exhausted parents, and children denied the stability and good quality of life that every one of them deserves.

We know that the reasons for homelessness and housing insecurity are complex and involve a multitude of factors. The routes to tackling homelessness are equally complex, varied and often not identified through existing data collection.

As not-for-profit social justice organisations, tackling homelessness and providing safe, warm and affordable homes is at the heart of Scotland's housing association and co-operative movement. They do this in so many ways, including: support with finding, maintaining, and securing an affordable home; managing rent arrears; assisting with entitlement to social security and money management; providing housing and employability support; and signposting to other support services. All of this, and so much more, is done to ensure that a move to a social tenancy will be successful.

The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA) has commissioned this research because the sheer size and scale of the ways in which housing associations and co-operatives tackle homelessness is not often well understood. This research seeks to explore gaps in current data collection and demonstrate how Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) focus on positive outcomes for people experiencing homelessness which goes far and beyond their legal responsibilities to provide homes.

It also includes recommendations on how we can protect the multitude of routes to social housing for those experiencing or at risk of homelessness, beyond the obligation housing associations and co-operatives have under Section 5 of the Housing Act (2001).

The social housing sector is delivering well on its shared responsibilities under this legislation, however, this research makes clear that Section 5 referral data is not always a particularly robust indicator of performance. This is because it fails to capture the entire contribution housing associations and co-operatives make to preventing homelessness.

For many RSLs, Section 5 referrals account for only part of the homes they provide to people experiencing homelessness and therefore offer an incomplete picture of their contribution. In practice, people secure social housing through multiple routes, including Section 5, Common Housing Registers, nominations agreements, and direct applications.

If Scotland is to end its housing emergency and ensure everyone can access a safe, warm, affordable home, all of these routes must be recognised and protected. This research highlights the data gaps in understanding housing associations' role in tackling homelessness and offers practical recommendations to support better evidence and more effective policymaking.

SFHA's members are fully committed to an effective, transparent framework that supports homeless households into settled housing quickly and sustainably – and believe that improvements to protocol, information and data sharing can all contribute to that.

Richard Meade
Chief Executive, Scottish Federation of Housing Associations

1. Introduction

North Star Consulting & Research was commissioned by the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA) to carry out the research study 'Homelessness Allocations by Housing Associations: Evidencing the Contribution of the Sector'.

SFHA is the membership body for, and collective voice of, housing associations and co-operatives in Scotland. The SFHA represents 133 housing associations and co-operatives providing homes to around 600,000 people and with a capital value of over £50bn. Its' mission is to sustain and strengthen the impact its' members have on people and communities across Scotland.

1.1 Background

Scotland is in the grip of a housing emergency. There are record levels of homelessness, record numbers of people living in temporary accommodation, and a quarter of a million people on social housing waiting lists. At the same time the pipeline of new social homes is slowing to levels not seen since the 1980's.

In February 2023 the Scottish Housing Regulator identified in their Thematic Review that there was an emerging risk of systemic failure in Scotland's homelessness services. Scotland now has the most homelessness cases on record, with the number of children in temporary accommodation also reaching record levels. As of March 2024, there were 33,619 households assessed as homeless in Scotland.

One of the Temporary Accommodation Task and Finish Group's key recommendations was that Local authorities should look to increase the percentage of lets to homeless households for a fixed period to address the backlog of households in temporary accommodation waiting for a permanent home and that this should **include an increased and significant contribution from RSLs** where appropriate, **which should be tracked and assessed via Section 5 referral data**.

Housing associations and co-operatives have an obligation under Section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to help provide a permanent home to people experiencing homelessness. Where a local authority has determined that someone is homeless unintentionally it can request that a registered social landlord provide permanent accommodation for them.

However, one significant issue for SFHA members is that Section 5 referral data is not a robust indicator of performance in this area as it does not capture the full contribution that the RSL sector makes to tackling homelessness.

For many RSLs, Section 5 referrals represent only a portion of their lets to homeless households, and as such, these referrals are an incomplete measure of Housing Association activity in this area as they do not include lets to homeless households through other routes. Homeless applicants from general waiting lists are not included in Section 5 or 'Other Referral' figures. It is also important to recognise that almost 14% of Section 5 offers are rejected by homeless households themselves.

1.2 Study Aims

This research aims to identify and make suggestions for addressing the current data gaps in relation to the contribution RSLs make across Scotland to tackling homelessness. This is vital to supporting evidenced based policy making in this area and to demonstrate the contribution Housing Associations make in tackling homelessness and determining whether this can be increased.

Specifically, the aims of the study were to:

- Provide a credible evidence base to establish the extent of Section 5 referrals to RSLs across Scotland and the level of these referrals that are declined with reasons for this
- Provide a credible estimate of the number of direct homelessness referrals to RSLs not captured by Section 5 referrals
- Provide credible evidence of the number of households at risk of homelessness directly housed by RSLs
- Make suggestions for how to fill the current data gap that exists in terms of evidencing the other contributions that RSLs make to tackling homelessness

1.3 Study Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

- Provide a clearer picture of the RSL contribution to tackling homelessness and the challenges and opportunities for increasing lets to homeless households
- Make robust recommendations for data capture on homelessness lets and homelessness prevention

1.4 Study Methodology

The key stages of the study included:

- Desktop review to establish context and inform survey design
- RSL Survey
- RSL Focus groups

- Analysis and Reporting

1.5 Acknowledgements

The SHA would like to thank the following members for their participation in this research:

- Berwickshire Housing Association (HA)
- Cernach HA
- East Lothian HA
- Forth HA
- Grampian HA
- Glasgow West HA
- Hebridean Housing Partnership
- Hillcrest Homes
- Hjaltland HA
- Osprey HA
- North View HA
- Paisley HA
- Scottish Veterans Residences
- Trust HA
- Waverly Housing
- West Highland HA
- Yoker HA

2. Literature Review

A Section 5 referral occurs when the local authority refers a statutorily homeless household to an RSL for housing. Section 5 of the 2001 Act sets out the rules on Section 5 referrals.

There is very little research or publications on Section 5 referrals, the two main publications are from 2005 and 2009.

Key findings from the 2005 Shelter Scotland Practice Briefing: *Maximising the use and effectiveness of Section 5 Homelessness Referrals*¹ include:

- Many LAs and RSLs have developed protocols which govern the referral process. At best these protocols offer a clear steer to LA and RSL staff on both the housing context and the specific ways in which referrals should work.
- There is, however, also confusion as to how Section 5 referrals sit alongside existing nomination arrangements, which are used to house people from mainstream housing registers.
- Shelter's view was that all homelessness referrals should be made through Section 5 while nominations should be used only for mainstream housing applicants.
- Nomination arrangements and quotas can take account of, but should not constrain, the number of Section 5 referrals made to any one RSL.
- Overall, the briefing highlights some encouraging areas of practice which can be built on. Where Section 5 referrals are working well they are based on clear working relationships between RSLs and LAs and on effective tracking and monitoring systems.

The Scottish Government Review Of Section 5 Of The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001² in 2009 found that:

- A growing body of evidence suggests the use of Section 5 differs across Scotland and that its use may be less than had originally been anticipated. There also seems to be confusion regarding the purpose and scope of the requirements.
- A model protocol was issued by the SFHA and COSLA to provide a degree of consistency and to be used by local authorities and RSLs as a basis for their own local protocol.

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https://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_library/maximising_the_use_and_effectiveness_of_section_5_referrals

²<https://lx.iriss.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/0080284.pdf>

- Where both nominations and Section 5 referrals were being used, it was not always clear why one referral route was selected and there was often inconsistency of practice between different offices and staff.
- Some RSLs were concerned that housing households holding statutorily homeless status through their general waiting list was not sufficiently reflected through current performance reporting systems.
- Overall, most landlords considered that their local arrangements were either very or quite effective in assisting statutorily homeless households to access accommodation in the RSL sector.
- Tensions between RSLs and local authorities also arose around the support needs of applicants. This could be about the initial assessment, of the lack of one, or could be about the nature of the support package that had been put in place. Support packages, or the absence of them, certainly emerged as one of the more contentious issues within the case study areas, although it rarely led to a refusal of a referral.
- The main consistent theme to emerge from local authority based consultees, was that many would like to see RSLs giving greater priority to re-housing statutorily homeless households (the same proportion as the local authority and for RSLs to have an equivalent responsibility as the local authority for achieving sustainable housing outcomes for statutorily homeless households).
- The most commonly sought change from RSLs was the provision of better support packages, although in essence this is not about Section 5 itself but rather about whether the associated arrangements lead to the creation of sustainable tenancies.

3. Key Findings

An **online survey** of all SFHA members (130) was conducted in June 2025. Forty three responses were received which is a 33% response rate accounting for just less than one third of Scottish RSLs.

The survey was largely quantitative in nature collecting statistical data over two years. These questions sought data on:

- Number of Section 5 referrals received
- Number of Section 5 referrals allocated a property
- Number of Section 5 referrals refused and reasons for refusal
- Number of lets to homeless households outwith Section 5 referrals
- Number of lets to households at risk of homelessness outwith Section 5 referrals

There were also a number of qualitative questions which collected data on how homeless allocations take place in practice.

In this section we provide the survey results alongside the findings from two RSL focus groups.

3.1 Number of Section 5 Referrals

The SHR Charter data for RSLs shows that there were 7,528 Section 5 referrals which resulted in a let in 2023/24 and 7,169 during 2022/23.

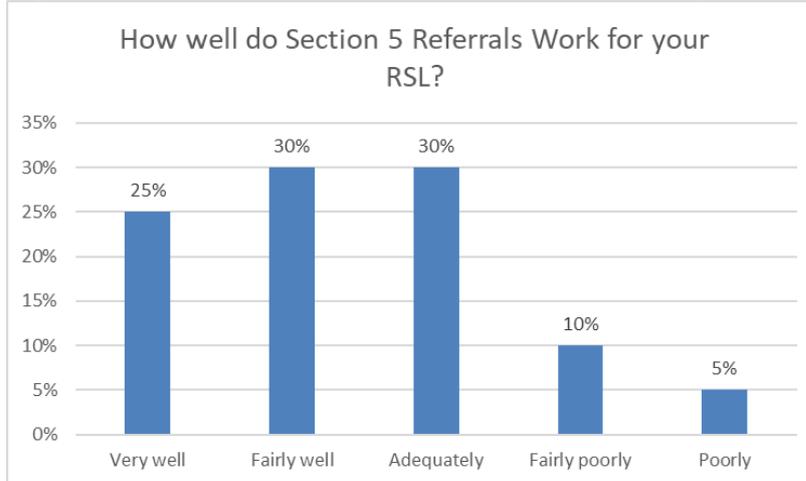
3.2 How Well Section 5 Referrals Work

RSLs were asked 'How well do Section 5 referrals work for your RSL?'. Those whose local authority partners do not use this route were advised that other mechanisms would be covered in subsequent questions.

Thirty per cent (30%, 13 respondents) said that they did not use Section 5 referrals and the vast majority of these said that they let directly from the Common Housing Register and so these lets to homeless households are not captured in the official Section 5 referrals data.

Of those who used Section 5 referrals, 55% said that they work well (25% very well, 30% well) while 30% said they worked adequately and 15% said poorly (10% fairly poorly, 5% poorly). Over 13% said that Section 5 referrals were not applicable to their RSL (these said that they allocated through a Common Housing Register).

Figure 2.1 How well do Section 5 Referrals Work for your RSL?



RSLs have mixed experience in relation to timescales associated with Section 5 referrals. Some described poor timescales, poor organisation of viewings and a lack of interviews explaining that only one offer will be made in order to discharge the duty.

Others said that they generally receive a fairly quick response, and referrals are available from Section 5 applicants but though this was likely influenced by the very high demand in the area.

One RSL described having a good relationship and communication with the local authority team but still encountering issues surrounding applicants' perceptions of stock, expectations and interpreter costs.

Another described instances where homeless lets are not as high as they could be as the RSL finds that they cannot get in touch with the applicant or that they have already been housed. In addition to Section 5 referrals some local authorities operate nominations arrangements and some described properties sitting vacant for weeks while waiting for a nomination to be made and applicants not interested in the property when they have been nominated.

One RSL said that they reviewed the quota with the local authority and put in place arrangements to allow a percentage of Section 5 applicants to under occupy and to increase the number of 1 bed properties we offer our local authority for Section 5 lets.

3.3 Applicant or Void Led Approaches

How well Section 5 referrals work was said to vary by each local authority, with some adopting a voids led approach while others an applicant led. RSLs said that they find applicant led works better for tenancy sustainment.

One RSL described their problem in receiving Section 5 referrals where they do not have much stock, or where Section 5 applicants are not bidding through the CBL. They have adopted a different approach where they identify a property for Section 5, allow for bids and match, if there is no interest they look at the Section 5 list and match best suited, or approach the Council for someone. This is increasing the number of lets.

3.4 Quality of Information

RSLs thought that the main issue with Section 5 is the quality of information provided in the referrals, which is often inaccurate or lacking in key detail. The level of information is often inadequate to allow the RSL to ensure that appropriate supports are in place and that tenancies are not being set up to fail. One said:

“Information sharing on prospective tenants is poor, giving us little to no background information to help us prepare for applicants. There is no resettlement plan and no holistic housing support service in place post-let from the referring authority.”

RSLs reported frequent gaps in the information provided with Section 5 referrals, particularly regarding applicants' complex medical and mental health support needs. This lack of detail often results in housing staff spending significant time chasing information and arranging support after referral, sometimes only discovering complex needs during initial pre-tenancy meetings. Housing Officers can spend days trying to link with CPNs and support workers and medical support needs are often not addressed at all, so they may then need to invest in adaptations to a property. ‘

RSLs raised concerns about inconsistent and sometimes conflicting information regarding high-risk applicants, such as registered sex offenders, which can lead to unsafe allocations. A recent issue has prompted further collaboration with local authorities to improve information accuracy and safeguarding.

RSLs find it frustrating that needs are not identified during the homelessness assessment and before a referral is made. It can also be a health and safety issue for housing officers, if they are visiting applicants alone where there is an unidentified safety risk.

Some RSLs described the use of pre-allocation interviews to assess applicants' readiness and support needs, with tenancy sustainment officers involved from the outset. However, they also noted that the responsibility for support is increasingly falling on housing staff rather than external agencies, raising concerns about staff capacity and qualifications, and increasing need by housing organisations to provide support to staff dealing with complex situations outwith their area of expertise or training.

RSLs raised data sharing as an issue in this respect with authorities thought to be scared of sharing data and resistant to the introduction of Data Sharing Protocols.

3.5 Common Housing Registers and Choice Based Lettings

Several RSLs described their approach within Choice Based Lettings (CBL) systems and the use of homeless quotas. CBL is an applicant led approach where landlords advertise vacant properties and applicants make a bid for those that they consider meet their preferences and needs based on the priority they have been awarded in relation to their housing need.

One said:

“We operate a choice based lettings service and generally speaking, there has not been the need for Section 5 referrals, but it has been used on occasion to get around a policy decision not to house someone for example significant arrears owed to the Association.”

One RSL said that it is confusing where CBL is in place as a let to a homeless person should be counted within the number of allocations to this group but as it is not a Section 5 referral the let is not counted in this way, and the true contribution of the sector is not recognised.

3.6 Lets to Statutory Homeless Households (Excluding Section 5 Referrals)

From the most recent Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) Charter data we find that there were a total of 3,109 RSL lets to homeless households through other referral routes during 2023/24 and 3,718 during 2022/23.

3.7 Refusal Rates

RSLs described instances where applicants have declined suitable offers (including cases where multiple refusals have already been made to other RSLs) and the limited action taken by the local authority when Section 5 applicants refuse offers. This means that, in practice, housing preferences seem to be influencing the outcomes of Section 5 offers more than actual housing need, which undermines the purpose of the process. Some thought that certain property types are often refused by Section 5 referrals and applicants have high expectations in relation to the housing they will be offered.

In city areas city centres were thought to be most popular with applicants reluctant to accept an offer of housing in areas further from the centre. In rural areas similar issues were described with applicants preferring town locations to more rural areas where

transport links, support services and amenities are fewer. One RSL said that they had tightened up referrals to these areas to applicants who have requested them and refusal rate has dropped.

One RSL which does not receive Section 5 referrals described a system where they ask the local authority to provide a name for a forthcoming vacancy. A fairly high percentage of properties being made available to the local authority result in no nomination being received.

3.8 Homeless Allocations Quotas

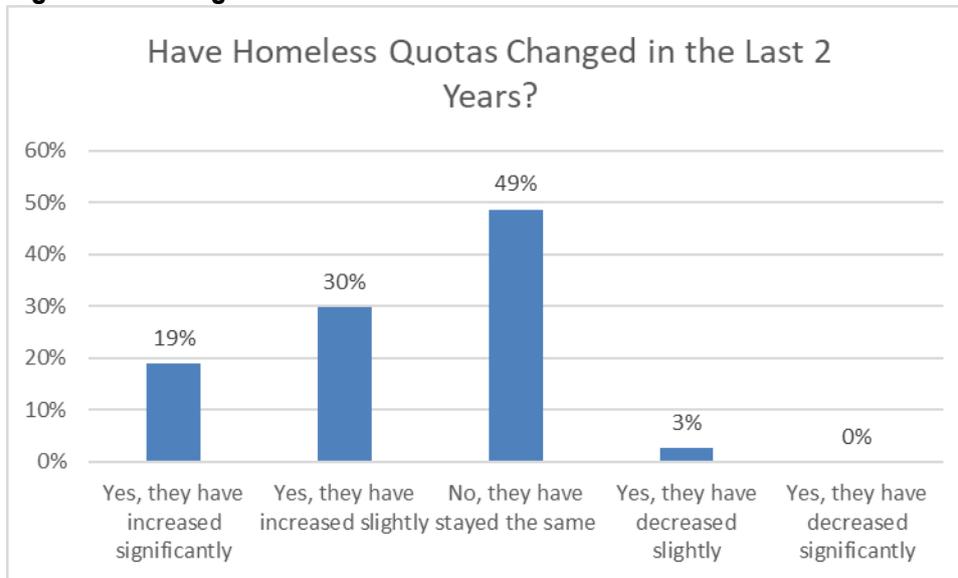
Many social landlords set quotas or targets to achieve a spread of allocations over the various needs factors. These tend to be structured around the proportion of lets being made to homeless households, those on the general needs list or waiting list and those on the transfer list.³

Thirty eight (88%) survey respondents said that the local authority areas in which they operate make use of Homeless Allocations Quotas. Twenty four local authority areas were covered by these responses. In some areas only one RSL provided information on quota levels while in others several RSLs provided data. Eight local authorities were said not to have quotas in place, although in some cases more than one RSL responded for the same area and some said they did not have quotas in place while other RSLs operating in the same area provided a quota level, so not all RSLs in the same area are subject to quotas or the same quota level. Quota levels ranged from 10%-20% to 81% to 90% of all allocations.

Those RSLs which operate in areas with local authority Homeless Allocation Quotas were asked if these quotas have changed in the last two years. Almost half (49%) said that quotas have remained the same while 49% said that quotas have increased during this time (19% increased significantly and 30% increased slightly), 3% said that quotas have decreased slightly.

³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-housing-allocations-scotland-practice-guide/pages/11/>

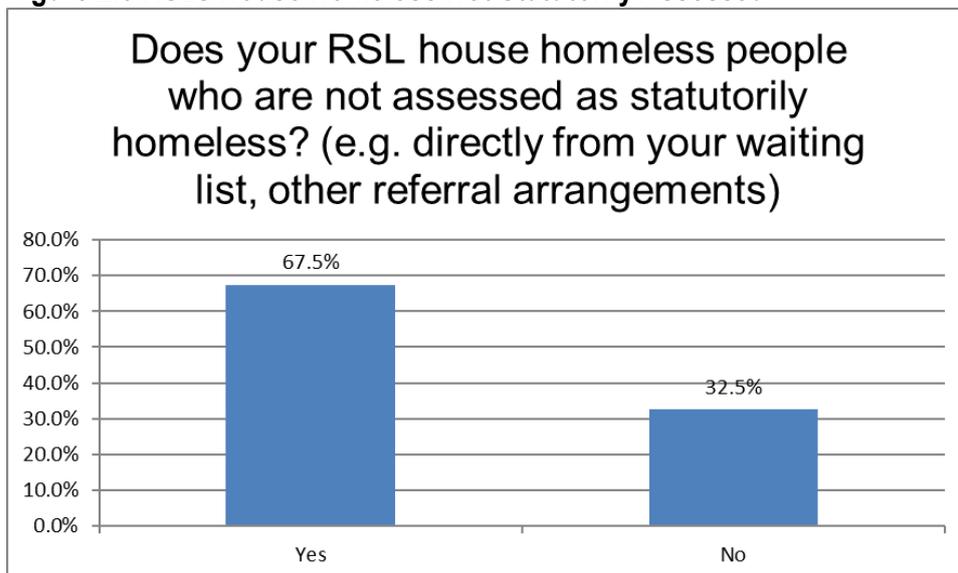
Figure 2.2 Change in Homeless Allocations Quotas



3.9 Allocations to Households who are Homeless but not Statutorily Assessed

Sixty seven and a half per cent (67.5%) of RSL survey respondents house homeless households who are not assessed as statutorily homeless. This may be directly from their waiting lists or other referral routes.

Figure 2.3 RSLs House Homeless Not Statutorily Assessed



RSLs described the following circumstances where they house homeless households which have not been statutorily assessed:

- Directly from the waiting list (including those who are sofa surfing)
- Use of an 'insecure housing' category in the allocations policy which takes account of those losing accommodation for various reasons
- Use of an 'abuse and harassment' category in the allocations policy which assists people before they need to make a homeless application
- This is due to the personal choice of the applicant who may decide not to apply
- Other nominations/ protocols from local authorities and both statutory and voluntary agencies. For example - allocation to Throughcare Aftercare, Ukrainian families, Housing First
- By maintaining a separate housing list and priority need points are awarded for people who are homeless
- By housing those experiencing homelessness in the area who may have accessed statutory homelessness services via an English rather than Scottish local authority
- Serving members of the Armed Forces living within barracks accommodation being discharged to a new tenancy and a prevention of a statutory homeless case
- Cases of domestic abuse where individuals and their children have been fleeing another address and have our highest banding of priority which exceeds statutory homeless priority
- Cases where customers experiencing relationship breakdown, which by accepting as the same priority as a statutory homelessness case, prevents referrals where customers can remain in a family home as opposed to temporary accommodation outside of our area
- Rehousing people leaving private rented accommodation due to Notice to Quit but have not yet had an eviction order granted and so are removing that requirement for them to present as homeless.
- Applicants with award of No Fixed Abode may be allocated properties via our choice based lettings model, or those living in insecure accommodation, such as mobile homes
- Variety of other referral routes including the individual themselves, other charities, local authorities, the NHS, HMPs, the Armed Forces, SOLO agreements MARAC, DTC's and TCAC

3.10 Nominations Agreements

RSLs said that it is often confusing to know whether a let to a homeless applicant is a Section 5 referral or is through a nomination agreement and that all should be counted as the RSL housing a homeless applicant.

RSLs described their efforts to pre-empt nominations through waiting list prioritisation and pre-tenancy interviews and to reduce refusals by improving communication with

the council. They ask the council to support homeless applicants to also make a direct application, so that they can gather more information in advance. They are also making homeless officers more aware of the geography of their stock.

Several RSLs said that while they are keen to help homeless households they would also like to try and balance this with the needs of applicants on their housing register and ensure that sustainable tenancies and inclusive communities are created.

3.11 RSL Prevention of Homelessness

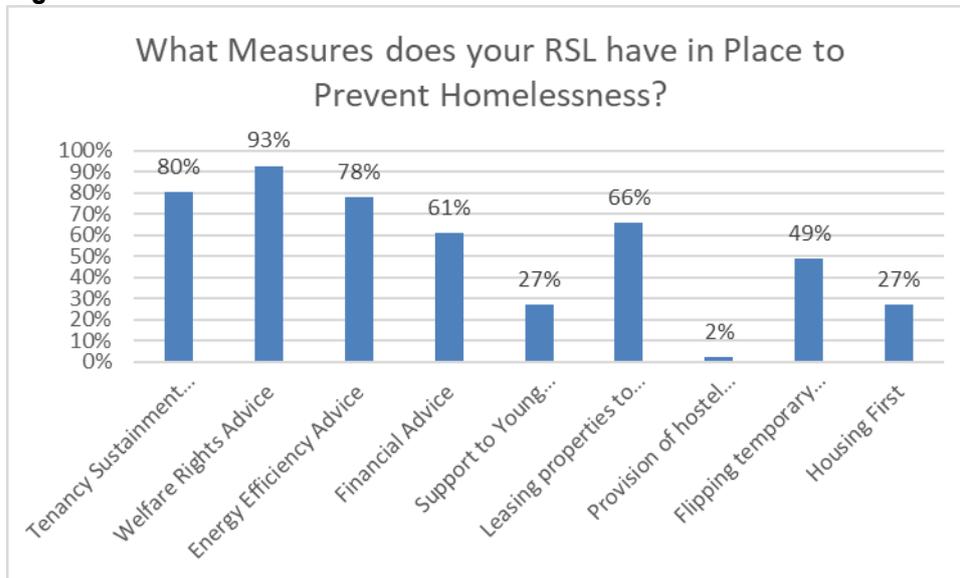
Ninety five per cent (95%) of survey respondents provided information on the measures which they have in place to prevent homelessness:

- 93% provide Welfare Rights advice
- 80% provide Tenancy Sustainment initiatives
- 78% provide Energy Efficiency advice
- 66% lease properties to support providers
- 61% provide Financial advice
- 49% flip temporary accommodation to permanent tenancies
- 27% adopt a Housing First approach
- 27% provide support to young people leaving care
- 2% provide hostel accommodation

Other initiatives include:

- Mutual exchange
- Income maximisation"
- Two settling in visits in the first 6 months to discuss tenancy issues.
- Sponsor paid membership of The Pyramid's Food Pantry and referrals for emergency food packages.
- An annual programme of visits to tenants who are over 75
- Cash for Kids equivalent funding each Christmas
- Save with Rent scheme in partnership with Credit Union
- Rent Reward Scheme
- Partnership referrals through the Fuel Bank Foundation and HACT for fuel vouchers
- Partnership referrals to Citizens Advice and Money Advice.
- Vulnerable Tenants Register - with tenancy sustainment interventions as required
- Upstream Homeless Prevention Fund following a whole system approach which incorporates training in ask and act, upstream programmes in schools along with Housing First for young people and victims/survivors of domestic abuse.

Figure 2.4 RSL Measures to Prevent Homelessness



3.12 Homelessness Data Capture

RSLs highlighted the importance of capturing the broader impact of housing associations, including welfare support and tenancy sustainment activities, which contribute to homelessness prevention but are not currently quantified in sector statistics. (e.g. pro-actively rehousing tenants following a relationship breakdown to prevent homelessness). Some of the RSLs would be able to identify non-statutory cases relatively easily, but for others, especially where turnover is higher, it would be very time consuming and complex. They suggested that a common definition of non-statutory homelessness would be essential as interpretations will vary considerably.

RSLs thought that people who are homeless are being housed through general waiting lists, who are not reflected in any of the statistics. They also highlighted other things that are not related to allocations that RSLs do to prevent homelessness and sustain tenancies, but with no mechanism to quantify the contributions made. (Pre and post tenancy interviews, tenancy sustainment teams, welfare rights advice etc). Also, allocations made through multi-agency agreements such as MARAC, care leavers etc. would otherwise come through a homelessness route and may not be recorded as such.

3.13 Pressures on Homelessness Services and Increasing Demand

Focus group participants discussed the rising demand for homelessness services, the use of temporary and unsuitable accommodation, and the factors contributing to increased homelessness applications across their regions. They identified reduced housebuilding, increased demand from refugees and asylum seekers as claim backlogs cleared in Glasgow, and reduced turnover in existing stock as key drivers of increased

homelessness. Statutory homelessness was thought to have become the main or only route into social housing in many areas, increasing pressure on local authority homelessness teams.

Focus group participants discussed the implications of increasing quotas for homeless lets, the risk of unintended consequences, and the need for a balanced approach that considers the needs of all applicants. They cautioned that raising quotas for homeless lets can lead to increased presentations as homeless as applicants are forced to present as homeless as the only route to housing. It can create greater demand for temporary accommodation, and resentment among other applicants, particularly those seeking their first home or who need to move within their local area due to changing circumstances.

As other services contract or are closed, tenants and applicants are turning more to housing providers who are in the community as the only door left open. There are issues that as housing professionals, staff are not qualified to deal with. They walk a fine line between a duty of care and landlord responsibilities.

RSLs suggested that a statutory duty on other public services (e.g. education, health, police, prisons) to identify and act on homelessness risk could improve outcomes, there are successful models in other countries where funding is top sliced from budgets and pooled for wraparound care in multi-agency 'housing first' approaches, rather than being left only to housing providers.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Section 5 referrals do not capture the full extent of the contribution of RSLs in housing homeless households. Data is already available through the Annual Return on the Charter which shows Section 5 referrals and other lets to homeless households. From this we can see that there were:

- 7,528 Section 5 referrals which resulted in a let during 2023/24
- 7,169 Section 5 referrals which resulted in a let during 2022/23
- 3,109 RSL lets to homeless households through other referral routes in 2023/24
- 3,718 RSL lets to homeless households through other referral routes in 2022/23

Therefore, the total number of lets by RSLs to homeless households through these two indicators were:

- 10,637 in 2023/24
- 10,887 in 2022/23

This accounts for 41% of all RSL lets in 2023/24 and 40% in 2022/23.

The sector also houses homeless households who have not been statutorily assessed as such so the actual number of allocations to homeless households is considerably higher. Many households who are homeless but not statutorily assessed are housed through general waiting lists, often without being captured in official statistics. These include people with no fixed abode, living in motor homes, those sofa surfing, or experiencing relationship breakdowns.

RSLs agreed that current systems do not easily allow for the identification and reporting of non-statutory homeless lets, as points categories often group various needs together. A regulatory or sector-wide approach would be needed to standardise data collection and reflect the full extent of homelessness prevention work.

RSLs also play a vital role in the prevention of homelessness through a variety of initiatives, most commonly Welfare Rights advice, Tenancy Sustainment initiatives, Energy Efficiency advice, leasing properties to support providers, Financial advice and flipping temporary accommodation to permanent tenancies.

Over sixteen years on from the Shelter Practice Briefing and the Scottish Government Review of Section 5 of The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 similar issues continue to exist including:

- Lack of clarity on how Section 5 referrals sit alongside existing nomination arrangements
- Whether all homeless nominations should be made through Section 5

- Statutorily homeless households being housed through RSL general waiting lists are not sufficiently reflected through current performance reporting systems
- Issues around information relating to Section 5 referral applicant support needs
- Agreement that Section 5 arrangements generally work quite well

Focus group participants recommend that the SFHA should do more to promote the actual contribution which its members make in housing homeless households.

RSLs currently make a significant contribution in this area and to provide an increased contribution in this area will create issues in relation to the establishment of sustainable tenancies and inclusive communities with over 40% of all lets now being made to homeless households before prevention of homelessness measures are considered.

The contribution of the sector should not be tracked and assessed via Section 5 referral data alone. Looking solely at the Section 5 lets does not paint the full picture of the RSL sector contribution. It is too simplistic a measure.

Recommendation 1: All routes (including Section 5 Referrals, nominations, choice-based lettings, direct lets, etc.) should count towards local and national homeless let figures to give a true picture of RSL (and council) contribution to housing homeless households.

Recommendation 2: Preparation for the new duties in the Housing Scotland Act 2025 (ask and act plus the strategic assessment of housing support needs) should be used as an opportunity to:

- Improve joint support planning for local authority homeless referrals to RSLs
- Record allocations that are not statutorily assessed as homeless as homelessness prevention
- Refresh Section 5 Referral and Nomination Protocols in every area