The Impact of COVID on people experiencing homelessness in Scotland

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PHINS Webinar

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Three projects

- Homelessness Monitor Scotland (2021)
- The COVID-19 Crisis Response to Homelessness in Great Britain (ESRC funded)
- Evaluation of Institute of Global Homelessness 'Vanguard City' programme (Glasgow case study)

Effective COVID response

- Immediate focus on accommodating people sleeping rough and decanting 'shared air' night shelter accommodation
- Intensive joint working between Scottish Government, LAs and third sector organisations, supported by rapidly mobilized funding

"Scottish Government really did show some significant early leadership… that direct working with third sector… more money into the system; spirit of partnership; raising expectations… about what was possible; and encouraging that public health approach" (Key informant, voluntary sector)

- Inclusive of those with No Recourse to Public Funds
- *"Golden opportunity"* to effectively accommodate support those with long histories of homelessness and complex needs, unparalleled intensive multi-agency working

Supportive wider policy changes

- Restrictions on evictions (29 of 29 LAs saw as very/somewhat important in preventing/minimizing homelessness)
- Additional funding Discretionary Housing Payments (28) and Scottish Welfare Fund (27)
- Additional £5m for RRTPs (24)

- Furlough scheme (28)
- Universal Credit £20 uplift (25)
- Benefit sanction suspension (23)
- Raising of Local Housing Allowance rates (23)
- Debt deduction suspension (22)

Limitations of the COVID response

- Ending of evictions restrictions – all LAs expect increase in PRS-eviction related homelessness

- Temporary UK Government welfare mitigations

- Access to social housing - 20% fewer permanent social lettings (36,000) made in 2020/21 than previous year

- Insufficient support to those in emergency COVID-hotels at start of the pandemic, especially in Glasgow

Extreme challenges in emergency hotels

…there [were] some adverse impacts initially, so we had to move quite quickly, for example, to get food in, because obviously there's a number of folk who would be in that city centre population, in particular, who were rough sleepers or at-risk of rough sleeping or who frequented the city centre and been involved in begging because their source of income dried up pretty much overnight. **Key informant, Statutory Sector**

…there was a risk of lots of exploitive situations… because whilst they were very much a captive audience for services, they were very much a captive audience for other people as well. It's that that creates the risks in the early days… These are things that are just live in people's lives all the time but because they were concentrated into large buildings, and there was very little else going on, all of this heightens…The city…did respond, we ended up with a city centre risk management multi-agency group to look at all of that. **Key Informant, Voluntary Sector**

But infection rates kept to a minimum

…not a single positive case of COVID …Nobody really knows why… and they were also a population that were out and about in the city centre, when other folk weren't. Around about the city centre, social distancing and was a real challenge to them, for them, and we had no major COVID-related.. **Key Informant, Statutory Sector**

Sustained positive impacts?

If they closed down, I don't know, three hotels for example all of a sudden there's the fact that 50 people are sleeping rough in the city centre Glasgow, I just don't think that we would want to do that. … So what we're trying to do is to try and move people through and get in to their own homes and all the rest of it…we've got Rapid Rehousing transition plans, there's trying to get people through in to settled accommodation faster and better but more sustainably as well. **Key Informant, Voluntary Sector**

I think the way that we respond to people with complex needs in particular will be sustained in the longer term. I think the level of multi-agency collaboration and inter-agency working - that was already there…but it's completely ramped up during the time of COVID. I think that will stay … The front line of all of those services have felt really empowered to act through the pandemic... The relationships that have been built up between… are not partnership agreements, it's just straightforward person-to-person joint working. I think that will all stay. **Key Informant, Voluntary Sector**
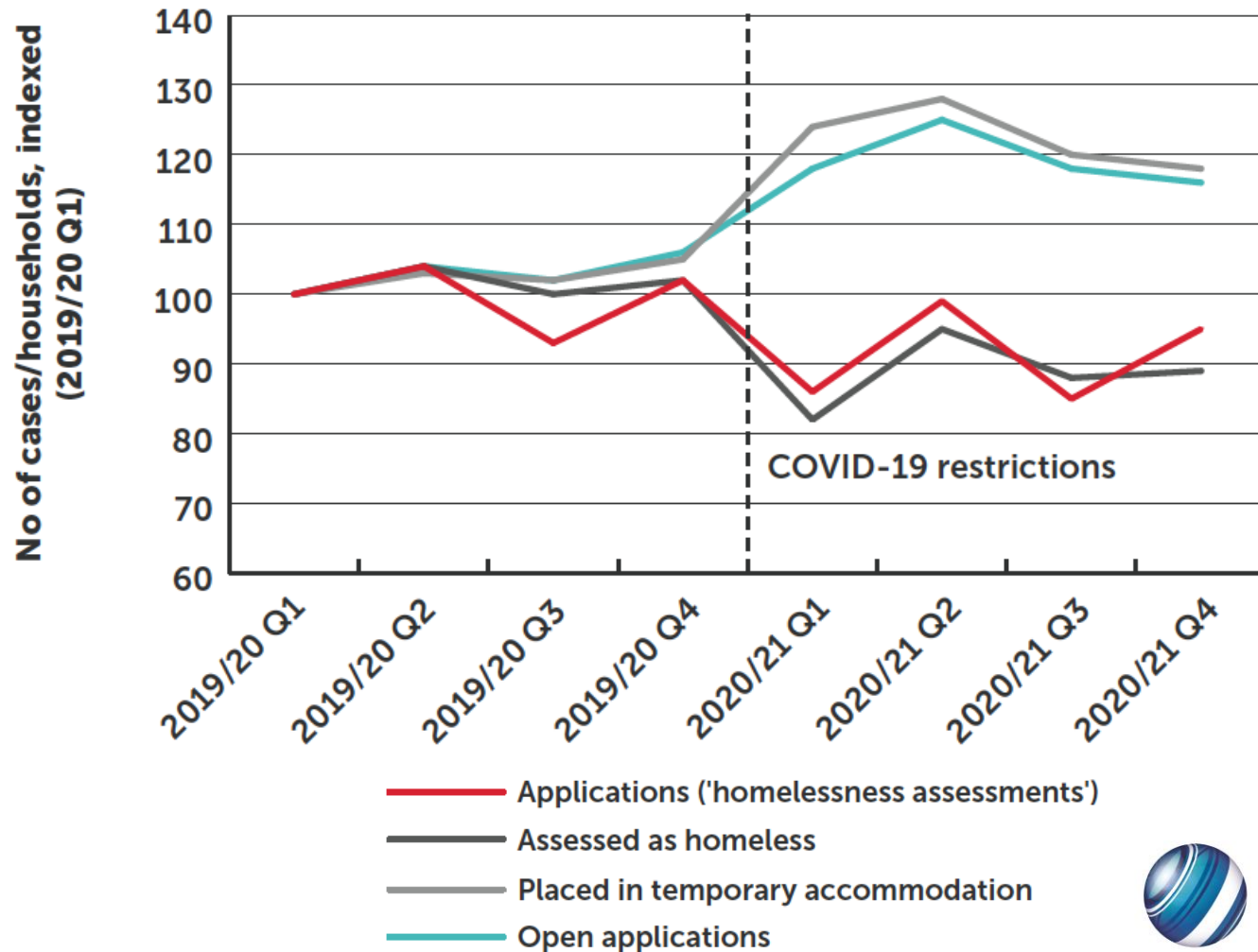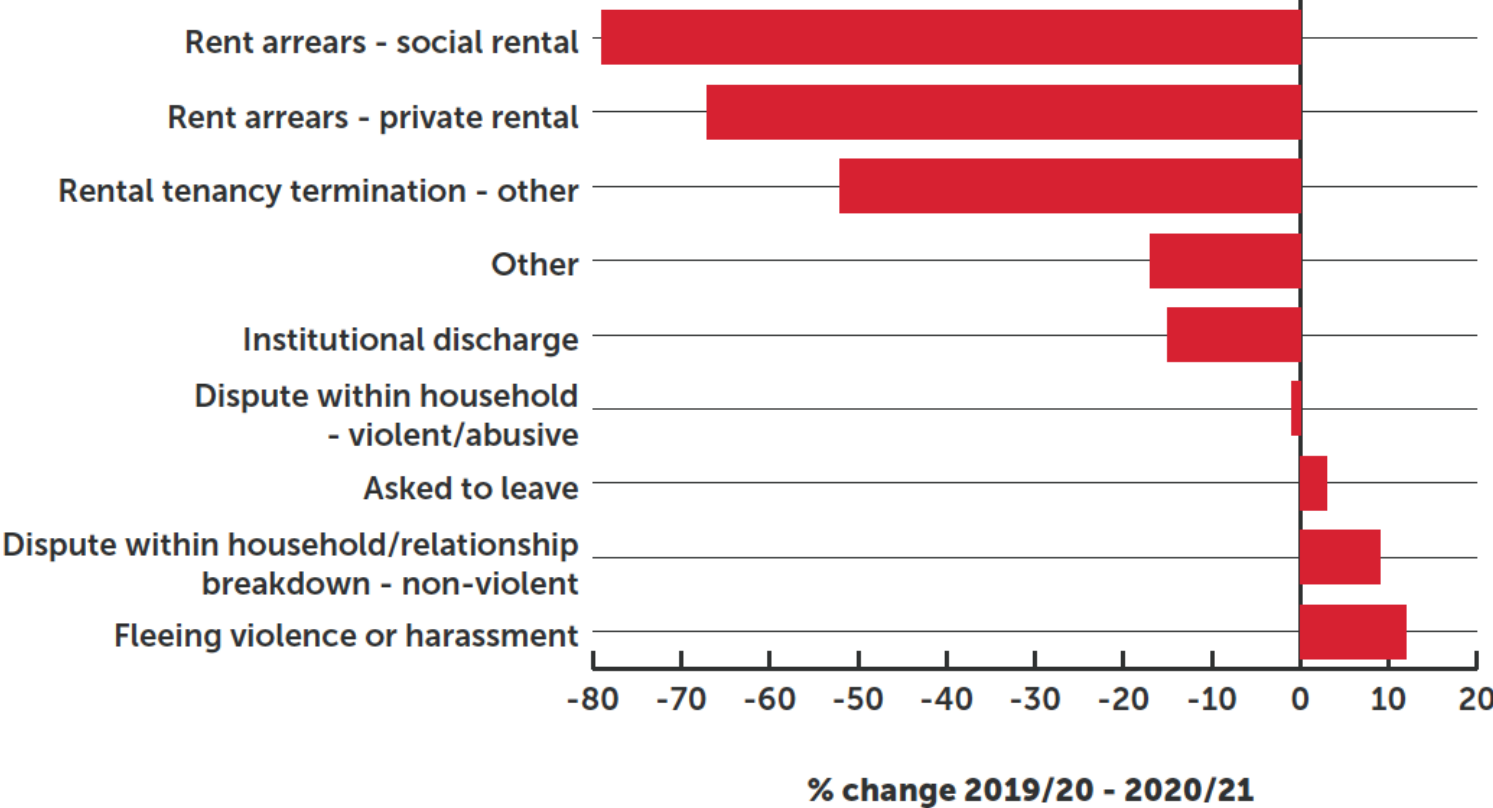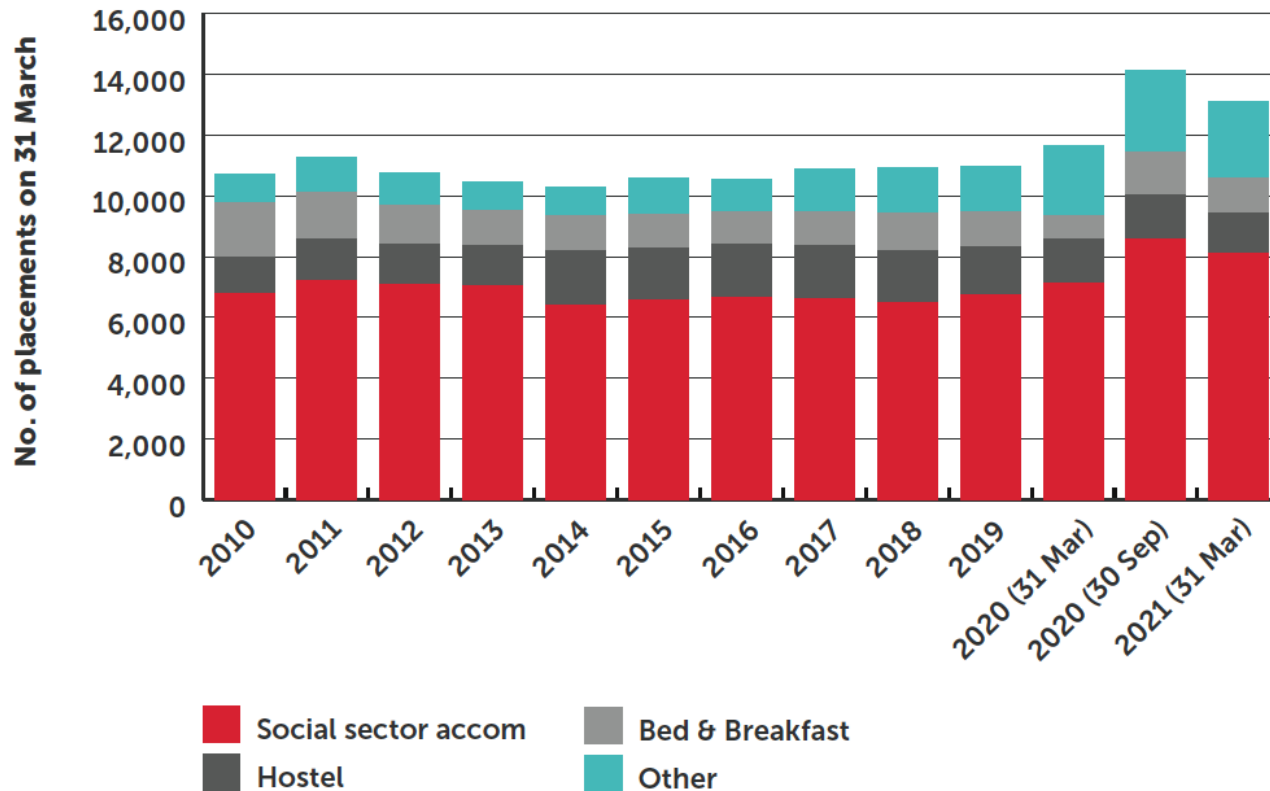
Rough sleeping
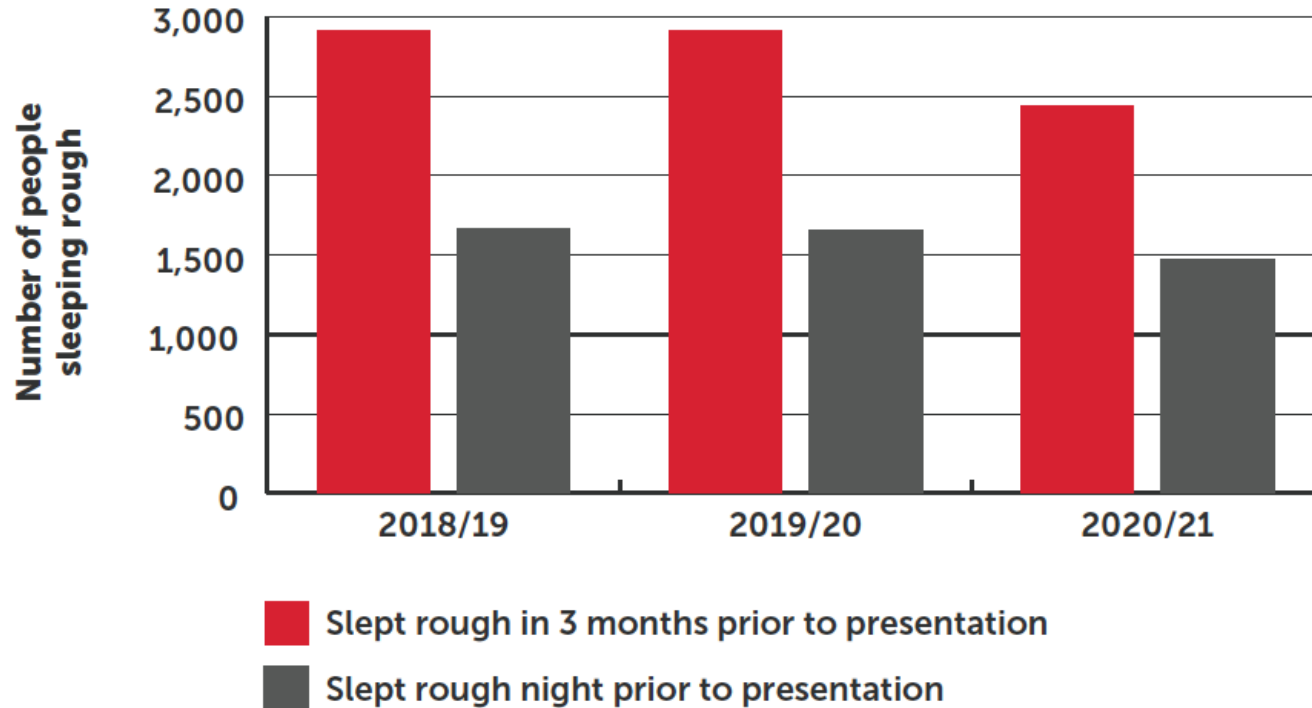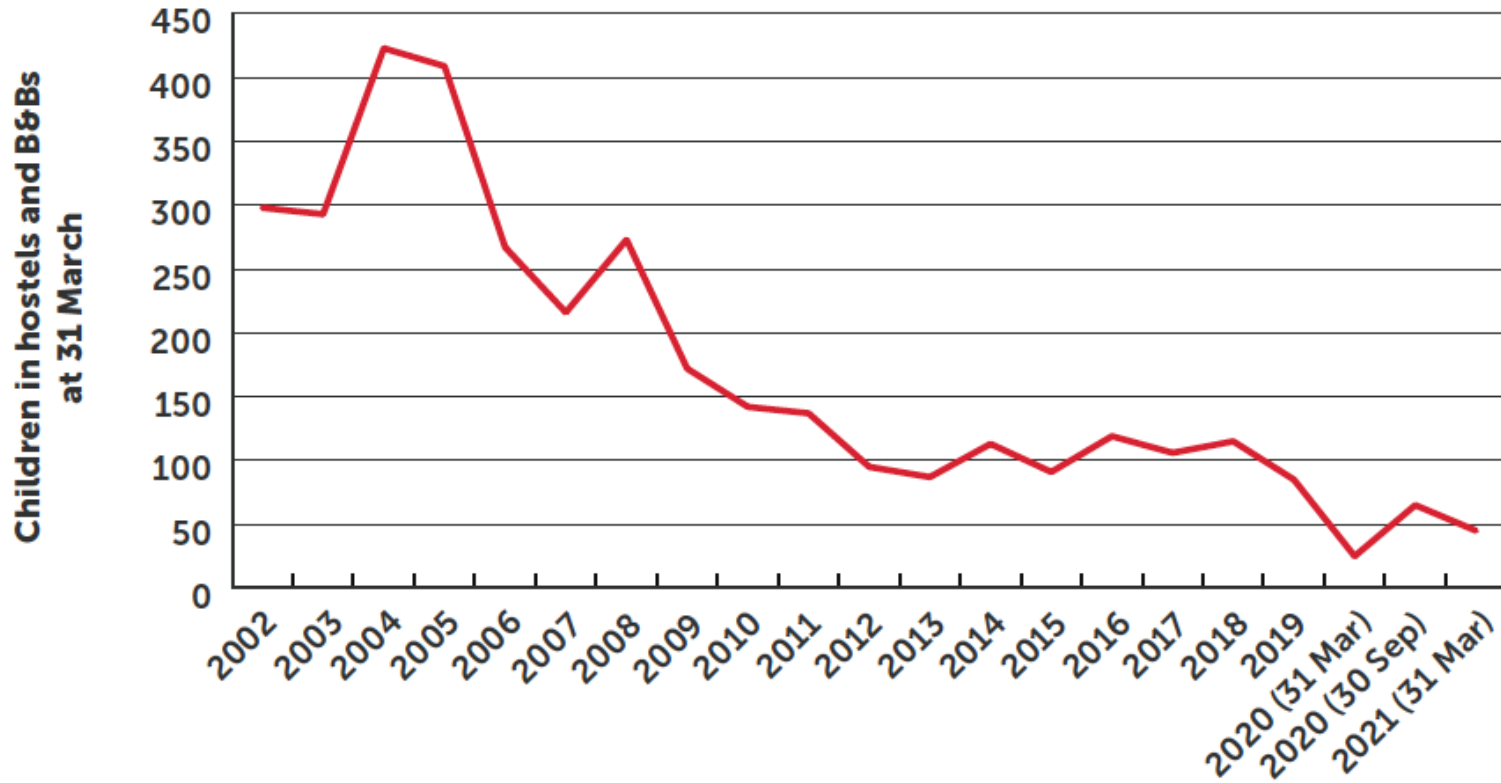

Source: Scottish Government

Statutory homelessness

Reasons for homelessness

% change 2019/20 - 2020/21

Temporary accommodation

Children in B&B

Homelessness a policy priority

- Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan, funding and updates

- Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans:
  - ➤ changes to social housing allocations in 15 (of 29) LAs;
  - ➤ 20 (of 29) LAs said supported their homelessness response to the pandemic

- Housing First Pathfinder programme
  - ➤ over 500 tenancies started; 85% tenancy sustainment to date

Wider progress and strengths

- 17 (of 29) LAs say HSCPs making positive contribution to homelessness prevention/alleviation

- Strong and widespread support for Unsuitable Accommodation Order. Delays largely understood as necessary during pandemic

Future developments

- End to the use of night shelter and dormitory style provision
- Improved responses to those with No Recourse to Public Funds
- Taking forward of the Prevention Review Group recommendations
    - Introduction of range of new prevention duties on public bodies
    - Clarify, strengthen and extend LA duty to prevent homelessness

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Links

- https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor/scotland/the-homelessness-monitor-scotland-2021/

- https://housingevidence.ac.uk/publications/the-covid-19-crisis-response-to-homelessness-in-great-britain/

- https://everyonehome.scot/