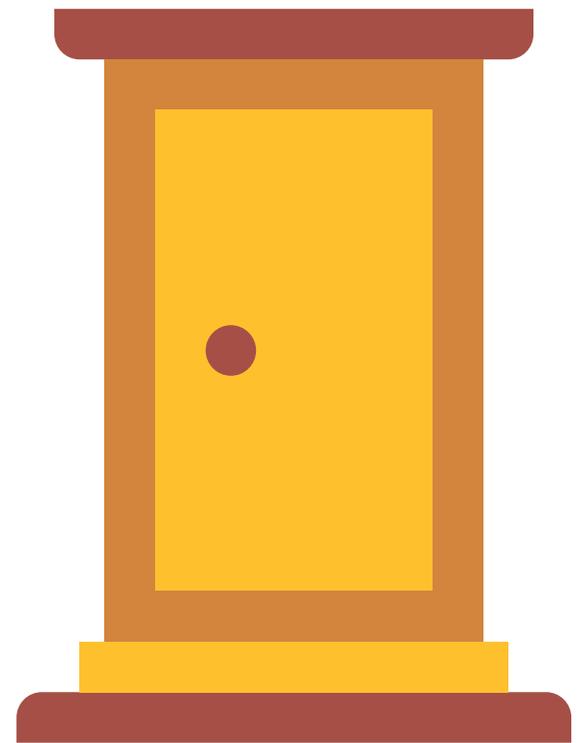


Quarter 4 report

January-March 2021



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You will read elsewhere in this report what a busy time we have had of it in HOS - and that's not just been in Quarter Four, but for most of the year! We were all very glad to be busy, and very fortunate to have meaningful work to do, during the various lockdowns.

What I want to do now is to thank the hundreds of new clients who took the time to complete our Get Help Request Form; who shared their situations with us and who trusted us with their personal information.

And then I must thank the thousands of social housing staff, occupational therapists, private sector landlords, benefits advisors, charity staff, elected members, financial advisors, social workers and advocates who helped us to find The Right House, in the Right Place for our clients during the most difficult of times.



Moira Bayne

CEO, Housing Options Scotland

Headline figures

This has been the busiest quarter we have ever seen at Housing Options Scotland. We have seen a record number of clients get in touch, with 224 referrals made between January and March. This represents a **+33.3%** increase on the previous quarter (Q3, 2020-2021) and **+80.6%** increase on the equivalent quarter last year (Q4, 2019-2020).

Our Military Matters casework continues to grow, with 93 of the new clients getting in touch this quarter being from the Armed Forces community. This represents a **+36.8%** increase from the previous quarter (Q3, 2020-2021), and a huge **+173.5%** increase from the equivalent quarter last year (Q4, 2019-2020).

As well as supporting new clients who get in touch, our team have been busy closing off older client cases too. This quarter, we have closed 183 cases, finding housing solutions for many of these. As of 1st April 2021, the team are helping 283 clients to find the right home, in the right place, and new casework comes through every day.



Olivia Lindsay

Head of Casework Services

“ We have been exceptionally busy in recent times, but I’m really proud of how the team has pulled together to make sure each and every client still receives the high quality of service that we are known for. This is especially impressive given that we are all working remotely and have not met any team members or clients face-to-face in such a long time.

We continue to have clients getting in touch from right across Scotland. This quarter, we've seen casework come in from 29/32 of Scotland's local authority areas. With the exception of the Western Isles, West Dunbartonshire and Orkney, we've supported clients from right across the country.

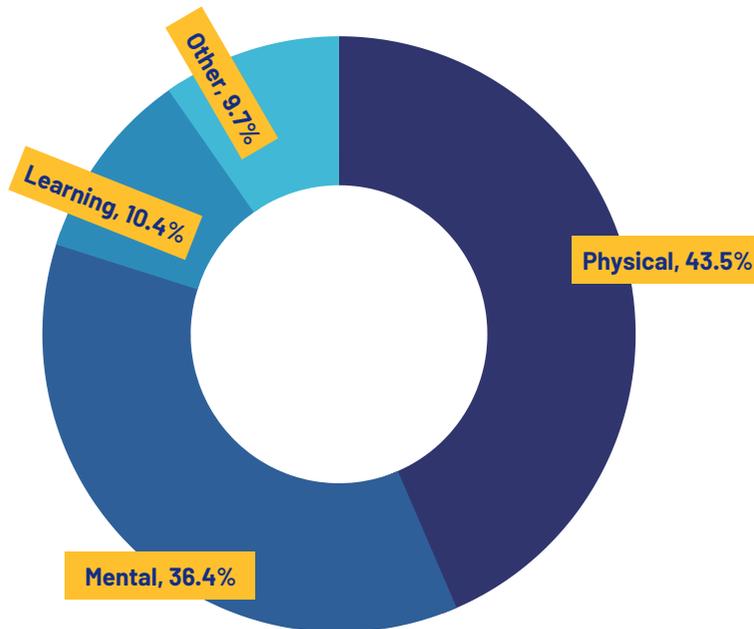
On top of this, we have also had a small number of clients get in touch from the rest of the UK and other parts of the world too.



29/32

Local Authority areas

- 1** Glasgow (38)
- 2** Edinburgh (25)
- 3** West Lothian (16)



In terms of presenting disability, client demographics are fairly consistent with previous quarters. A similar proportion of clients are getting in touch with a physical, mental or learning disability compared to previous quarters.

We continue to see a significant proportion of our clients report having multiple disabilities (42.4%), and a small, but significant proportion of these (7.1%) report having 3+ disabilities.

From our clients

When an operation left her 12-year-old son unable to walk, Senga knew they could not stay at their old home.

"We lived in a house that had six steps to get up to the garden part and then it was another four into the house, so it wasn't suitable."

Senga was looking for a property with a bedroom and bathroom on the ground floor, in the area she and her son were already living in. After lots of searching, Senga found someone who agreed to swap houses with her via HomeSwapper. Although the house she swapped for was inaccessible at the time, it could be made suitable through adaptations. Senga got in touch with HOS for advice about how to pursue the adaptations with the council. Jil, Housing Options Scotland broker, worked with Senga to help through the process:

"Jil came down and had some meetings with me. It was easier and if I had any questions, I would ask Jil 'what happened here?' and she answered me and helped me through things. I think she actually had communications with the council as well, at times."

After a difficult time working with the builders contracted by the council, Senga was relieved when the extension was finished, and thankful for Jil's support. Her son is now recovering from his latest operation and she is hopeful that their new home will help him to regain his independence.



I had to deal with so much at the time and I just thought 'I can't do this'. So if you've got someone else helping you who knows everything such as yourselves ... you've been giving me lots of advice, all the ins and out and the law, what my rights were, and you were there for me to help me fight my corner, to be honest.

[Read Senga's story.](#)



After years of living in caravans while travelling around Europe, Louise and David faced homelessness after losing their jobs. Housing Options Scotland broker Karen helped the couple find a home to settle down in by advising them to register as homeless with the council.

"Karen offered a sympathetic approach to our predicament and gave us an abundance of options that we had not thought of"

Read Louise and David's story

Read G's story

Following release from prison, G, a retired veteran, had hopes of a new start and his own place to call home. Upon leaving prison, he received support from a range of organisations who all pointed him in the direction of HOS. Olivia, Head of Casework, helped G to secure a home where he could feel safe and comfortable.

"Finding me this house is the best thing that could ever have happened ... I never in a million years thought I'd be here"



From the staff team



Susan Mendelovitch and Ben Parker

*Housing Options Broker / Volunteer
& Engagement manager*

Our Volunteer & Engagement manager, Ben Parker, spoke to Susan Mendelovitch, Housing Options Broker, about all things HOS and housing - past, present and future!

What is your role and how long have you been at HOS?

I'm one of the Housing Options Brokers and I've been with HOS since 2015. Before I joined HOS I had worked at various RSLs and councils across the country, mainly as a Housing Officer. I started working as the Team Coordinator dealing with all new clients and assisting at Board meetings. During this time, I slowly started to help the brokers with some of our clients that required assistance with social housing cases. I now work full time as a broker on a variety of cases putting my knowledge and experience to good use.

It's been the busiest quarter we've ever seen at HOS – why do you think this is?

Good question! I think some of the reasons are due to the pandemic and the changes and restrictions to our lives. People are finding themselves stuck at home all day which has made them think more about where they live. We have clients who are living in the private rented sector and they can no longer afford the higher rents having lost their jobs or because their landlord is looking to sell their property. Some are looking to move to be closer to family for support. We have also seen several clients who are separating from their partners and looking for alternative housing. Finally, we have also seen many clients who already struggled to make ends meet before the crisis now face the risk of losing their homes due to not being able to keep up their mortgage payments.

Thinking about the clients you support, what are the main challenges you think people face?

There are many different challenges, but I think that mental or physical health problems because of the condition of - or lack of space in! - houses during lockdown is something that I am seeing a lot. Inadequate housing and cramped conditions are making lockdown even more unbearable to some and they are desperate to move. However, supply and demand for affordable housing and the low turnaround of accessible properties has resulted in some waiting longer for a move. The high cost of rents in the private rented sector means that it is not always an option for clients so their only hope of moving to a more suitable home is to wait for an offer from the local council or housing association.

What's changed in the world of housing since you started at HOS?

There have been many changes in housing since I first started working at HOS but many things are basically the same - it would be hard to list them all! The introduction of ownership schemes to help people purchase a home are a fantastic opportunity for many who thought that they could never own their own home. I think that the move towards online services is difficult for some especially if you don't have access to the internet or you simply are not able to use it.

Reforms in the private rented sector have been beneficial to many but access to this tenure is still extremely difficult for some - especially when you are required to have a guarantor or a large deposit.

What are you looking forward to in the next year?

Hopefully, an end to this pandemic and all the restrictions! It would be lovely to be able to do things that we once took for granted - go out and about, meet people in person and gather in large groups indoors! Stop wearing masks, stop standing in long queues and travel freely around the country/world ... the list goes on! At HOS, I know that we are all hoping we can host our annual afternoon tea party for staff, volunteers, board members and associates - now that is something to look forward to in the next year for sure!

From the volunteers



It's not only been a busy quarter for the casework team – our volunteers have been working hard on a variety of projects. Even though lots of us still haven't been able to meet in person, we have been enjoying monthly (virtual) catch ups and are excited to make plans for later in the Summer when we hope to come together as a group in person. This quarter we've also managed to spruce up the [Volunteer section on our website](#) to reflect all the work going on. Thank you to everyone for their involvement with HOS – it is all appreciated.

Ben Parker

Volunteer & Engagement Manager

Your Area guides



Our Area Guides project is going from strength to strength and we now have guides completed / in progress for 12 different local authority areas. Julia Bandel, HOS Volunteer & Engagement Assistant said:

"In the past quarter, our volunteers have been working on 'Your Area' guides for the Highlands, Aberdeen, Dundee, Perth & Kinross, West Lothian and Shetland. It's great to see how they adapt the contents of each guide to suit the local area, whether it's a city or an island, and we're constantly learning from each other, so the guides keep getting better and better".

If you are interested in finding out more about the guides, or volunteering with us, contact Julia on julia@housingoptionsscotland.org.uk You can [see the latest guides here](#).

HOS Helps evaluation



Paula Cleary has been undertaking an evaluation project of the HOS Helps service. The evaluation has combined feedback from tenants and those making referrals, as well as insights from interviews with staff and managers of HOS Helps and Almond Housing Association. Paula said:

"I've been enjoying completing the evaluation of the HOS Helps service - thanks to everyone who has taken part. The feedback has been positive and I can't wait to share the report soon!"

The evaluation project is a great example of the different kinds of projects volunteers can get up to at HOS. If you have ideas about projects you'd like to complete with us as a volunteer, [get in touch here](#).

Learning disability research



Read me!



Lindsay (L) and Tessa (R)

Volunteers Tessa Brown and Lindsay Roches completed a research project looking at the provisions social housing providers have in place for applicants with a learning disability. The research found a mixed picture of provision for applicants across Scotland and the overriding conclusion of the research is that more work needs to be done in this area.

The research is timely as HOS launched their Making Moves service this quarter – tailored support for younger disabled people who want to live independently for the first time; a group which includes many people with a learning disability. You can [read the research on the website here](#), and [find out more about Making Moves here](#).

Housing Buddies

Our Housing Buddies have helped over 30 clients this quarter, supporting with a range of tasks. From helping clients to complete application forms for social housing or supporting brokers at meetings with several different parties, their support has been invaluable.



The support I have received from the Housing Buddies has been wonderful. It is such a blessing to have such knowledgeable and experienced volunteers. I know for many of my clients that this provides comfort and a sense of relief that there is someone to help them. If you are already experiencing difficulties in life, the last thing you want to do is fill out application forms.

Eve Young

Housing Options Broker

Do you have knowledge and expertise in housing? Are you looking for a flexible volunteer role? Find out more about volunteering as one of our Housing Buddies [on the website](#) and get in touch with Ben Parker, on ben@housingoptionsscotland.org.uk to find out more.



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