Moving from homelessness into social housing: testing new approaches

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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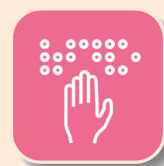
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About this pilot

Between 2019 and 2020, four Registered Social Landlords (RSL) in Glasgow worked with Glasgow City Council homelessness casework teams, homelessness outreach support services, the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF), and a furniture provider to test new ways of supporting people moving from temporary homeless accommodation to a social housing tenancy.

To prevent delays in taking up a new tenancy, the pilot aims were to fast-track Community Care Grant awards and delivery of furniture and white goods, alongside the four participating RSLs offering a two-week discretionary rent allowance. It was anticipated that these approaches could prevent the build-up of rent arrears, which tend to accumulate when moving to the new tenancy, and so support the longer-term aim of sustaining tenancies and preventing future homelessness.

The Glasgow Centre for Population Health led on the evaluation to assess the pilot's impacts, using data from 137 participating tenants and interviews with staff and tenants.

Key findings from the study

### 1. Who did the pilot reach and what were its impacts?

▶ The 137 tenants were primarily young, single people and single parents, with 94 (69%) receiving Universal Credit and 30 (22%) receiving housing benefit.

- Although ethnicity data was recorded for less than half of the tenants, there was higher diversity than the national average for homeless households.

- The majority of tenants moved into their new tenancy within the pilot two-week target: 99 (94%) moved in within two-weeks and 91 (87%) moved in on the same date they were liable to pay council tax on the new tenancy. Overall, the average move-in time was two days.

- Limited data on 22 tenants in receipt of housing benefit showed that the majority moved in without accruing rent arrears.

- Data up until March 2023, showed that among 104 tenants, 73 (70%) had remained in their tenancy for at least 2.5 years. Only 4% had moved out within the first year, compared with 2018 national data which showed that 12% had moved out.

- Community Care Grant awards data showed that the delivery processes did not always follow the agreed order: 55 out of 90 (61%) applicants had not received the full furniture support package *before* moving into a new tenancy.

- However, 91 grant applications were completed within the fast-track target of one week. Twenty-two applications were not fast-tracked, as the SWF team were unaware that the households were part of the pilot.

- Limited data provided by the SWF team showed that among 48 grant applications there was an acceptance rate of 87.5%, which was around 40% higher than the average rate for mainstream grant applications over similar timeframes. Although not all participants received an award, and none received the full amount applied for, the average amounts (£1,172) were around double the average for mainstream awards.

- From the small group of tenants interviewed, most appreciated the support received, although some indicated a preference for more appropriate housing that was larger or more accessible for families or for people with health conditions.

- It was noticeable that housing and outreach staff both spoke about supporting tenants experiencing a range of basic hardships. The support provided included supplying recycled goods and food parcels, and helping people access charitable or in-house funds.

2. What were the agencies' views on the pilot and on partnership working?
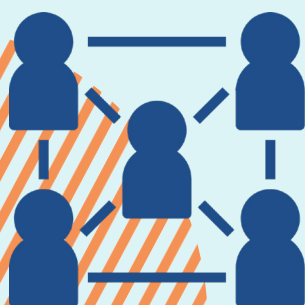
- The reported benefits from the new partnership included effective working relationships, growing trust among the agencies and with tenants, and a deeper understanding of roles, which had benefits beyond the pilot. The faster grant decision times led to some outreach staff noting an easing of work pressures.

- As the work developed, negotiating different values and ways of working was required, for example, some staff placed more emphasis on flexible and person-centred approaches while others prioritised statutory, welfare duties or the need to balance housing support with legal obligations around rent payments.

- Some staff groups recognised the systemic challenges of making connections between homelessness, housing and specialist services when supporting people experiencing severe and multiple disadvantage. Staff felt that establishing clear boundaries was key to effective partnership working. However, these boundaries were harder to maintain when supporting tenants with complex needs, who required a more flexible approach from all partners. At times, this need for flexibility could create interagency tensions.

- The managerial meetings were a valued leadership forum, which supported the strategic direction and day-to-day delivery of the pilot. The leadership provided by a council employee was valued by most, although there was a minority view that more distributive leadership would be required, if the work progressed.

3. What were the agencies' views on scaling up this work?

- All agencies were largely positive about scaling up the pilot, but there were some concerns related to fairness, eligibility, and constrained funding. Some wondered if other housing providers would commit to this work and whether the pilot was equally relevant to all providers.

- Most staff said that their own organisations had the capacity to scale up the pilot but had some concerns about others' capacity. There was also recognition that building effective working relationships with other staff groups and tenants took time to do well.

- Staff at all levels put forward ideas about how to improve the pilot or general approaches to support people into social housing, which suggests a need for more involvement of all staff across the partnership.

- Staff noted other work in the city, both during and since the pilot, and tenants spoke about receiving support from other organisations. This points to a complex landscape of housing and housing support, which any extension of this work, or future work, would need to navigate.

Key learning

This pilot and the subsequent evaluation were both situated within a rapidly changing landscape: COVID-19, cost-of-living crisis, and more recently, record numbers across Scotland living in temporary homeless accommodation, and a significant short fall in social housing lets for homeless households in Glasgow alongside sizeable budget constraints.

Recognising these challenges, the wider learning from this pilot could support the call for more uniform responses and faster support measures to ensure the longer-term aim of more sustainable tenancies.

Learning from the pilot

The learning from the pilot, such as the fast-tracking of grant decisions and delivery of goods, and offering a two-week grace rent period during transition, should be shared more widely, and include the alliance of organisations working to end homelessness and rough sleeping in Glasgow city by 2030.

Undertaking this type of complex work across organisations, with different roles and responsibilities, and workforces operating at different levels, will require effective communication across all partner agencies and at all staff levels.

Local responses to hardship

There is a need to map localised responses to hardship across all of Glasgow's housing providers to demonstrate the nature and extent of this type of need. Gathering intelligence could support decisions as to how best to respond to this need and with whom responsibility should sit.

Issues with data

To support more equitable access to support measures for all households, there is a need to improve reporting on ethnicity data, both within pilots and more generally, which is linked and comparable to national equalities and homelessness data.

Testing future approaches to tackle rent arrears will involve collecting specific data on arrears levels over time. The Department for Work and Pensions could ensure that local partners have updated access to data on Universal Credit sanctions and deductions to support efforts to prevent homelessness and sustain tenancies.

Developing the partnership and future partners

Strengthening shared leadership, ownership and accountability across welfare benefits, housing, homelessness and Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) services could ensure that the responsibility for flexibly supporting people with multiple support needs is not placed on those least qualified, or those facing the greatest workload constraints.

Although clear leadership is often needed to instigate new partnerships, promoting a more shared approach as partnerships develop could help prevent placing the burden on one team or individual.
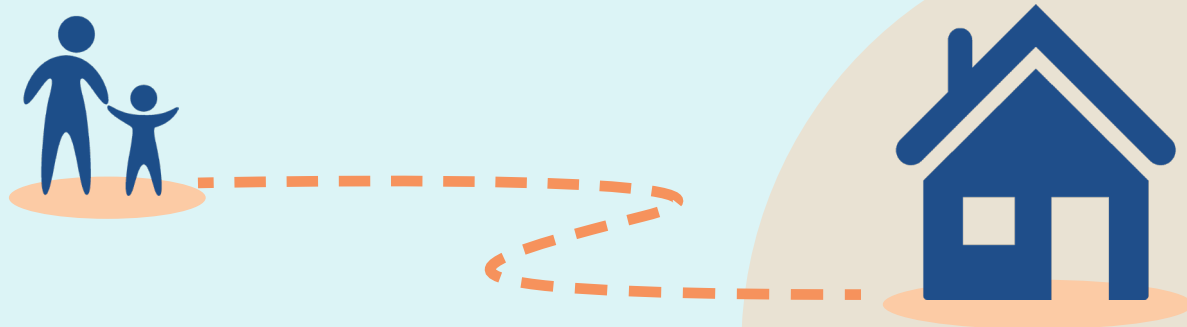
Partnership work could usefully be expanded in various ways: engaging organisations already supporting tenants, such as the Scottish Refugee Council; strengthening points of contact between the housing sector and specialist mental health and addictions teams; and, including Department for Work and Pensions staff in wider efforts to sustain tenancies and prevent homelessness.

Scaling up and innovation

Whether the pilot is scaled up or not, continuing investment in homelessness outreach services, addressing rent arrears, and providing Scottish Welfare Fund support and furniture delivery will all be required to prevent homelessness.

The Glasgow Alliance to End Homelessness and Glasgow City Council should support dialogue with the Local Letting Communities operating across the city as to how this pilot, or the key learning, would be applicable within this very challenging context.

Staff at all levels in homelessness and housing services should routinely be engaged in the process of developing ideas for pilots and other innovative approaches.

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to this project

Annual data up to the end of September 2022 showed that in Glasgow city, there were 2,972 homeless households living in temporary accommodation, which included 2,665 children. This is the highest recorded number of children living in temporary accommodation among Scotland's 32 local authorities[1]. A survey of people experiencing homelessness in Scotland found that they repeatedly spoke about having low expectations, not asking for much, and not wanting to spend too long in (often unsuitable) temporary accommodation[2].

When moving from temporary into permanent accommodation, people can apply to the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) for a Community Care Grant to help furnish their new home. The grant application can only be made when the person has signed their new tenancy lease. This can lead to entry delays of several weeks when waiting for a grant decision, and then further delays waiting for the delivery of furnishings. People can be liable to pay rents in both their temporary accommodation and new tenancies, as available benefits only cover one of the tenancies. As a result, people can either start a new tenancy with hundreds of pounds of rent arrears or move into their new home with minimal, if any, furnishings.

These delays can have negative impacts on wellbeing and increased risk of an abandoned tenancy, as was noted in a national review of the Housing First approach[3], and a national task group recently recommended changing SWF guidance to allow faster provision of funds, white goods, or furniture[4]. Others have urged for a more uniform approach to minimise the need for local authorities and housing providers to absorb the cost of rent arrears when people wait for their new homes to be furnished[5]. Although many of these challenges were highlighted through Housing First, which aims to support people with complex support needs that require intensive support, similar challenges exist among homeless households not accessing Housing First support. This pilot looked at adapting a similar approach for those households.

The pilot began when, in 2018, partnership meetings were held between a range of managerial representatives from Glasgow City Council (GCC) homelessness casework teams, four Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), Flexible Homelessness Outreach Support Services (FHOSS), the local SWF team, and a furniture provider. Already recognising some of the above barriers, this new working group agreed to test new ways of supporting people during the transition into social housing.

> The primary aims of the pilot were:
>
> ▶ To 'fast-track' the SWF Community Care Grant decisions within one week (the mainstream SWF target was three weeks).
>
> ▶ The RSLs would provide a two-week discretionary housing payment during the move into the new home.
>
> ▶ To ensure people moved from their temporary accommodation into a furnished home within the two-week period to prevent the build-up of rent arrears in the new tenancies.

By reducing delays and arrears during this critical stage, in turn this could improve tenant-landlord relationships and increase the likelihood of a sustained tenancy.

Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH) was invited by Glasgow City Council to carry out an evaluation of the new approaches being tested in the context of the ongoing roll-out of Universal Credit across the city.

▶ 1.2 Project delivery

Local authorities have a legal obligation to re-house any household found to be involuntarily homeless. In Glasgow, this obligation is met by working in partnership with 61 RSLs. This pilot involved four RSLs.

The GCC homelessness casework teams are often the first point of contact for someone presenting as homeless. Households are generally offered accommodation, such as a temporary furnished flat (TFF), or supported accommodation, until a RSL tenancy is available. Tenants in temporary accommodation were included in the pilot as soon as they accepted an offer of a tenancy from one of the four participating RSLs.

If a new tenancy was available and the offer was accepted, the process of applying for SWF support to furnish the tenancy was started. During this transitional stage, households received the two-week RSL discretionary rent payment to prevent arrears, and support from FHOSS and RSL staff to complete grant applications and manage the move into new tenancies. The SWF team aimed to complete the grant award decision within one week to speed up the move-in.

Alongside these measures, the FHOSS would provide a range of supports to households throughout the journey: from applying to moving into the tenancy, and afterwards if required. More generally, the FHOSS was commissioned to support people in Glasgow city living in temporary accommodation, or at risk of homelessness whilst living in their own homes.

The pilot project was expected to run from April 2019 to April 2020. However, the pilot was stopped mid-March 2020 due to the initial COVID-19 restrictions (see Section 2.3 for more details).

Figure 1 outlines the key delivery processes to support tenants in the pilot.

Figure 1: *Summary of the delivery processes*
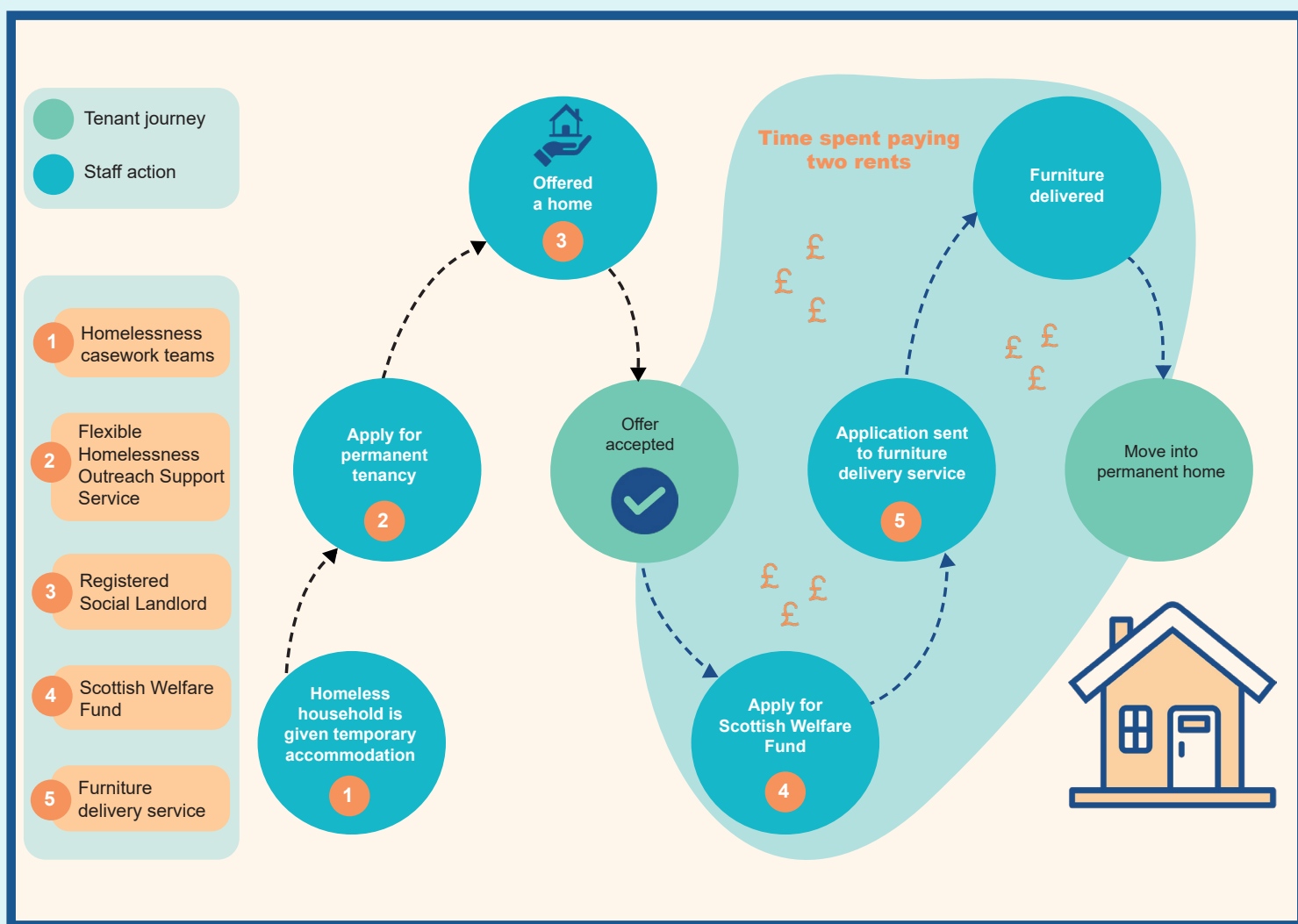
2. EVALUATION

2.1 Methods and research questions

The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach, involving quantitative and qualitative research. The three research questions were:

- How do tenants experience the support offered by the pilot project, and what are its impacts?

- What is the experience of delivering this type of support for the four RSL teams and other partners?

- What factors will enable or act as barriers in sustaining and scaling up this work?

The participating tenants took part in audio-recorded telephone interviews and staff groups took part in online one-to-one interviews and focus groups, using Microsoft Teams or Zoom.

Secondary household data was provided by the four RSLs and the SWF team provided separate data covering Community Care Grant awards over a four-month period. Both datasets were anonymised.

2.2 Sampling and recruitment

2.2.1 Study recruitment

Participating staff were emailed or telephoned and provided with an information sheet outlining the aim of the study and how the results would be used. They were informed that taking part was voluntary, they could withdraw at any point, and that data would be protected according to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Prior to interviews and focus groups, consent forms were issued and either signed digitally or consent was received by email.

Participating tenants were contacted by housing staff initially and, if agreeing to take part, were sent a tenant information sheet, with additional details of how they would be contacted by text and telephone. During the telephone interviews, the same assurances were given to tenants on their rights regarding anonymity and data protection, before verbal consent was gained.

2.2.2 Tenants

Three sets of tenants' data, which were anonymised, were provided by the RSLs and SWF team.

The four RSLs provided data on the 137 tenants participating in the pilot. The data included demographic and household details, delivery timelines of when tenants signed up for the pilot, applied for and received SWF Community Care Grant decisions, and when they became liable to pay council tax in their new RSL tenancy, which was indicative of when the move-in process began.

Sustainment data up until March 2023, which included official move in dates and whether the tenant remained in the tenancy, were provided by three of the four RSLs. (The staff member from the other RSL who collected the data during the pilot was no longer contactable.)

Sixteen telephone interviews with tenants were planned, with the aim of speaking to four tenants from each of the participating RSLs and collecting data from different types of family and single households. Due to the subsequent impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (see Section 2.3), only 12 tenants could be contacted, with six agreeing to take part in telephone interviews which lasted between 30 minutes and one hour.

Separately, the SWF team submitted anonymised data covering a four-month period. The data detailed the number of applications from tenants, whether these were successful, and how much funding applicants received.

2.2.3 Staff

A total of 24 staff were recruited across the partner agencies to take part in online interviews, grouped by organisation and role. They comprised two GCC casework managers, three FHOSS managers and three staff, five RSL managers and eight staff, two SWF managers, and one furniture delivery manager.

The number of organisational staff interviews were determined by who had worked on the pilot and organisational structures. However, each partner organisation was included in at least one interview, with interviews lasting between one and one-and-a-half hours.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic led to revised evaluation timescales (see Section 2.3). The online individual and group staff interviews were held between November 2020 and November 2021. The telephone interviews with the six tenants were held between August 2021 and January 2022.

Details on the study limitations are described in Section 4.

2.3 COVID-19 restrictions: impacts on project delivery and evaluation

2.3.1 Project delivery changes due to COVID-19 restrictions
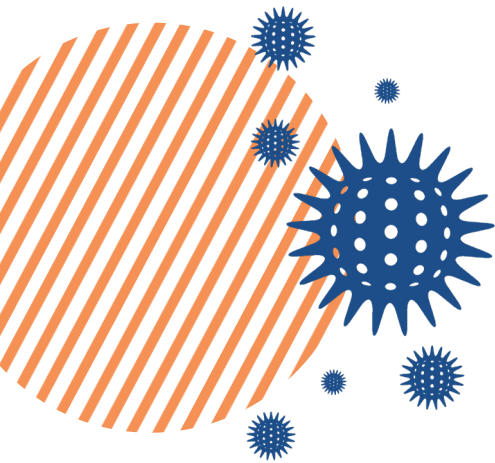
The initial COVID-19 restrictions in March 2020 had an impact on the latter stages of the project delivery. There was a shift in housing priorities to get everyone into accommodation and to limit movements between housing. Many teams supporting the pilot were now working remotely, which meant that tenants entering the pilot after late February 2020 faced a different set of circumstances to those who had engaged earlier. Staff groups were also responding to rising levels of need and others had moved into new roles.

2.3.2 Evaluation changes in response to COVID-19 restrictions

The start of the evaluation took longer than initially anticipated, as two of the GCPH researchers were temporarily seconded to the NHS COVID-19 Contact Tracing Programme. When the evaluation resumed, with restrictions still in place, important changes in the methods led to a move from face-to-face to online video interviews with staff groups and, to avoid digital exclusion, telephone interviews with tenants.

The delay had an impact on recruitment, as some staff had moved on or changed roles, or were no longer available. This meant that there were more interviewees from some organisations than others, however every organisation supporting the pilot was represented among the staff interviewed. For some, recruitment took several months and, in one case, over a year, as organisations prioritised pandemic responses.

The plan to recruit tenants through accessible housing venues was replaced with housing staff acting as intermediaries to contact tenants. Staff could not share any contact details with the researchers without tenants' consent. This more restricted approach and the ongoing pandemic may have led to tenants being less inclined to engage with the study.
The delay impacted on data gathering from staff and tenants. Study participants' recall was challenged by delays and the pandemic, which was evident in how much interviewees spoke about COVID-19, particularly when thinking about how the pilot could be extended or expanded.

The delay and workforce changes also impacted on the quality of, and access to, secondary data. The research team were unable to have face-to-face meetings with key staff who were responding to COVID-19-related priorities. The secondary data was available after most of the staff interviews were completed, which made it difficult to seek further clarification or improvement to the data. The staff who collected the secondary data during the pilot were also often no longer contactable. Other staff changes led to only three of the four RSLs providing tenancy sustainment data.

Throughout the COVID-19 restrictions, the research team worked remotely when collecting data and completing analyses, which was unanticipated and, at times, challenging.

Despite the above challenges, the problems that the pilot aimed to address pre-existed the pandemic and continue to exist. Therefore, the findings and learning from this study can contribute towards ongoing efforts to end homelessness.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 How do tenants experience the support offered by the pilot project, and what are its impacts?

Before exploring the household and project delivery data, to provide a wider context, the staff groups' views on the aims of the pilot are considered.

3.1.1 Staff views on the aims of the pilot

Although tenancy sustainment was considered a longer-term outcome, staff noted that this could be achieved by focussing on reducing rent arrears by fast-tracking the SWF grant decisions and furniture delivery, alongside providing the two-week discretionary housing payment. The harmful impacts of rent arrears were vividly captured by an RSL manager:

> *If someone gets to a certain level of arrears, they start to avoid you. And it's normally around the £700-800 mark. They normally start to withdraw. It seems to them a big noose around their neck. They then avoid speaking to you about everything and anything. They don't let you know about repairs that are needed around the house. They avoid telling you that they have no food in their house, and they won't come and ask you for a food parcel. They avoid telling you that they are sitting in the dark because there's no electricity. They just avoid you full stop because they're worried about their rent."*

(RSL Manager)

Some staff emphasised how the new support measures could create space to ensure that people did not feel rushed into signing a tenancy or moving into their new home without any floor coverings and white goods in place.

3.1.2 Data on participating tenants

The submitted data covered household demographics, project processes and tenancy sustainment. However, not every entry, or household, had data on each of these aspects. This section will report on the data covering the 137 participating households, and the following subsections will note how much data was available for analyses.

Some of the reported gaps and absences in the data explored in this section, such as a lack of equalities data and an absence of rent arrears data, will be discussed later in the study limitations (see Section 4).

All 137 households had RSL data, and the majority of the 137 participating households were housed by RSL four (n=72), followed by RSL one (n=28), RSL three (n=28) and RSL two (n=9). See Figure 2, which provides a breakdown of the number of tenancies, different referral criteria, and housing stock sizes across the four RSLs.

Figure 2: RSL tenancies provided across the four RSLs

No. of tenants by RSL (total: 137)

- RSL 1: Temporary furnished flats (4,000 - 5,000 homes)
- RSL 2: Temporary furnished flats (3,000 - 4,000 homes)
- RSL 3: All homeless households (3,000 - 4,000 homes)
- RSL 4: All homeless households (5,000 - 6,000 homes)
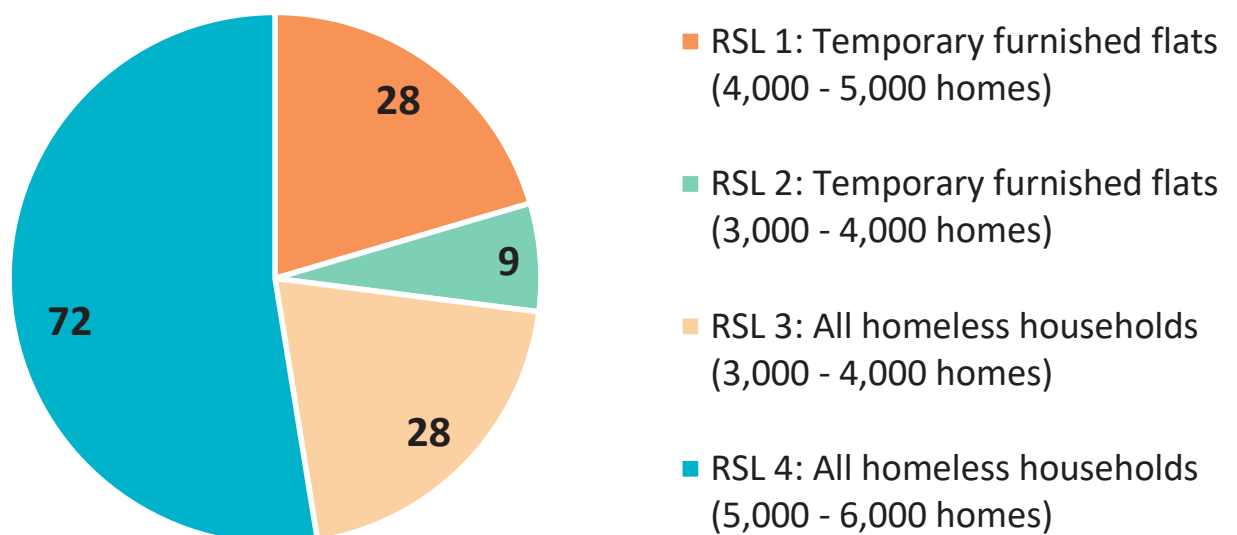
These differences across the RSLs may be explained by the adoption of different referral criteria and/or the availability of empty homes, as each of the four RSLs had different housing stock sizes.

RSLs one and two had stock sizes of 4,000-5,000 homes and 3,000-4,000 homes respectively, and only accepted referrals from temporary furnished flats (TFF). They accounted for 27% (37 out of 137) of all new tenants being housed.

RSLs three and four had stock sizes of 3,000-4,000 homes and 5,000-6000 homes, respectively. Both RSLs extended their criteria by accepting referrals from all homeless households and not just from TFFs. More than half (52.5%) of all new tenants were housed by RSL four, rising to 73% (100 out of 137) when combined with RSL three tenancies.

▶ 3.1.3. Household data

The tenant data covered household type and ethnicity, with some limited data on welfare and housing benefits.

Household type

Across the 137 households, 68 were headed by female applicants and 69 by male applicants. In terms of household type, most were single person households (82 out of 137), of which most (66%) were men. Single parent households (34 out of 137) were overwhelmingly headed by women (94%). Together, single person and single parent households accounted for 85% of all tenants, and both groups mainly comprised adults older than 25 years. Data on the specific numbers of adults and children within each household were not available.

Some differences were evident when comparing household types from the sample with available Scottish homeless data in 2019[6]. The study sample had an above average rate of '*female single parents*' (23.4% vs. 17.5%) and of '*couples with children*' (11.7% vs. 4.5%), when compared with the national data. The sample also had a higher overall proportion of '*all families with children*' (36.5% vs. 28.9%), as is highlighted in Table 1.

Table 1: *Comparison of homeless household type by averages*

Household type	Pilot study	Scottish homeless data (2019)
Total Single Person	59.9%	65.4%
Single Male	39.4%	45.0%
Single Female	20.4%	20.4%
Total Single Parent	24.8%	22.2%
Single Parent – Male	1.5%	4.8%
Single Parent – Female	**23.4%**	**17.5%**

Household type	Pilot study	Scottish homeless data (2019)
Couple	2.2%	3.4%
Couple with Children	**11.7%**	**4.5%**
Other	1.5%	2.4%
Other with Children	0.0%	2.1%
All with children	**36.5%**	**28.9%**

Ethnicity

Only 40% (55 out of 137) of the participating tenants' ethnicity was recorded. The most common response was 'Scottish' (12.4%), followed by 'Chinese' (5.1%). African categories accounted for 8.8%, with Asian categories comprising 16.8%.

The responses suggest higher ethnic diversity than the average recorded for homeless households across Scotland[6]. Combining the household data with the data collated during the telephone interviews with tenants, 20 distinct nationalities were recorded.

Welfare benefits

The recorded data showed that 69% (94 out of 137) were receiving Universal Credit with 22% (30 out of 137) receiving housing benefit.

3.1.4 Project outcomes and delivery processes

Sustainment

Tenancy sustainment data covering 108 of the 137 households was provided up until March 2023. The data was provided by three of the four participating RSLs. Of the 108 records, four were removed as the accompanying notes stated that the tenancies had ended due to the death of the tenants.

Among the remaining 104 households, 73 (70%) had remained in their tenancy for at least 2.5 years after moving in. Looking at the minority of households that had moved out of their tenancies, 16 (15%) moved after over two years, 11 (11%) after one to two years, and four (4%) moved out after less than one year (see Figure 3).

Between 2017-18, across Scotland, 88% of tenancies to statutory homeless households were still being sustained after 12 months. In other words, 12% had moved out of the tenancy after less than one year[7]. In comparison, the pilot showed that 96% had remained in their tenancies after 12 months, with only 4% moving out within the first year.

Figure 3: *RSL tenancy sustainment as of March 2023*

Sustainment (total: 104)

- Still in tenancy
- In tenancy for over 2 years
- In tenancy 1-2 years
- In tenancy less than 1 year
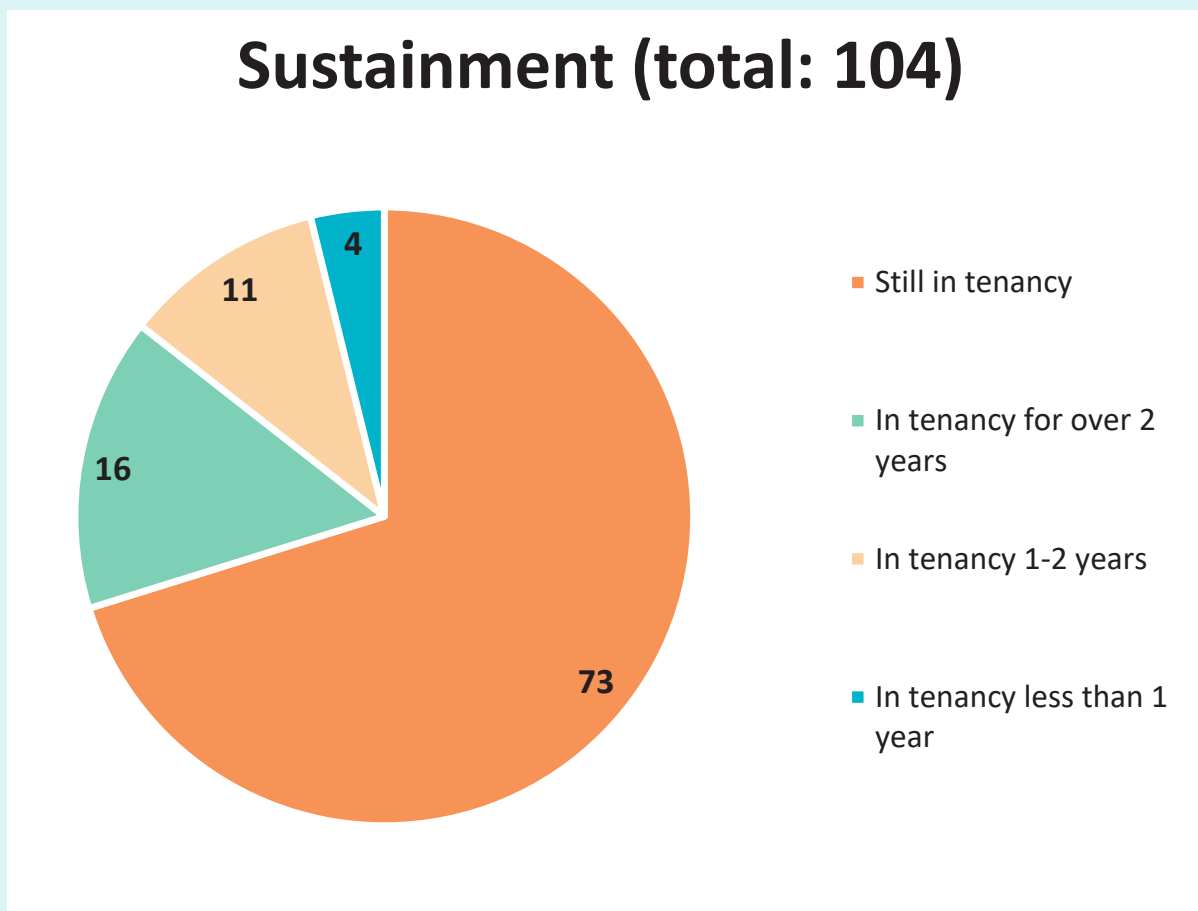
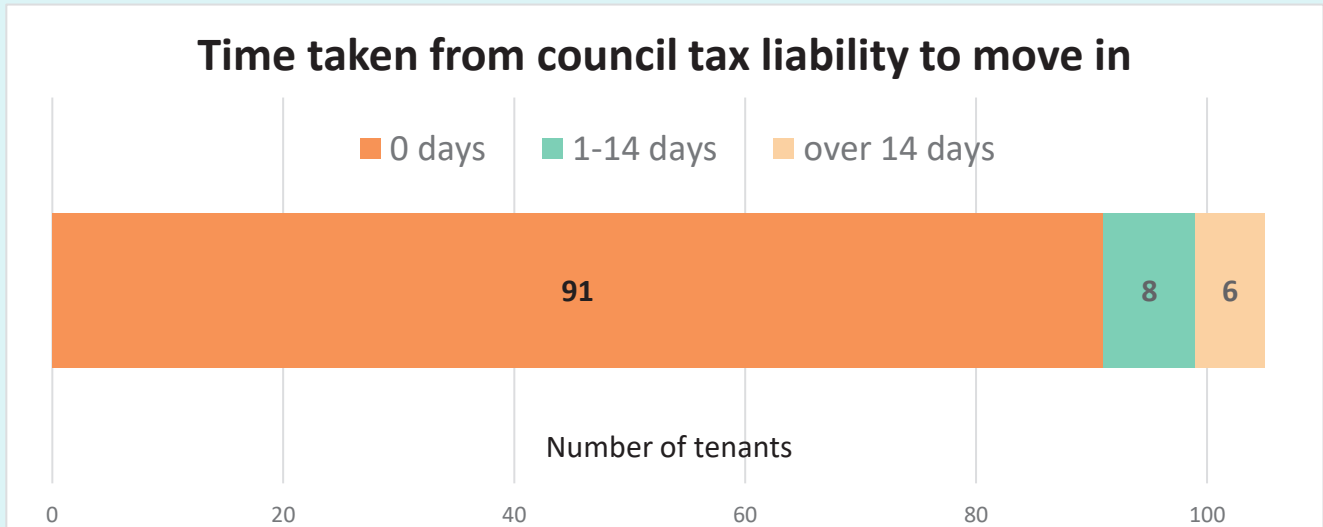The remainder of this sub-section will look at project delivery timescales and grant award amounts. As noted earlier, these were key objectives to help reduce rent arrears and support tenancy sustainment.

Time between securing a new home and the official move-in date

The date a tenant was liable to pay council tax on their new home was used as an indicator of when they signed up for the new tenancy. This, and the official move-in date recorded by the RSLs, were used as measures to assess if the fast-tracking of SWF applications and subsequent furniture delivery were completed within the two-week discretionary housing payment timescale.

Data on both time points was available for 107 tenants, but two of these cases were removed from analysis because they coincided with the COVID-19 lockdown and so were delayed by factors beyond the pilot. Overall, the average length of time was five days. As shown in figure 4, the majority of the 105 included (99, or 94%) households had moved into their new tenancy within the two-week cover period. For 91 (87%) households, the move was on the same date they were liable to pay council tax on their new home. For six (6%) households, the process took longer than the two-week target, with three households waiting a month or longer to move into their new home.

Figure 4: *Timescales of accepting and moving into a new tenancy*

Time taken from council tax liability to move in

Legend: ■ 0 days ■ 1-14 days ■ over 14 days

91 | 8 | 6

Number of tenants

(x-axis: 0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100)

Rent arrears and housing benefit data

There was no project data collected on rent arrears and payments, either at the point of moving in or later in the RSL tenancy. However, for those households on housing benefit, the date that the housing benefit payment was switched from the temporary accommodation to the new tenancy can serve as a proxy indicator for rent arrears.

Using data for 22 households in receipt of housing benefit, we looked at the differences in time between the recorded RSL move-in date to the new tenancy and the date that housing benefit payments were switched over to the new tenancy.

Among the 22 households, there was some variation during this transition period. Seven households (32%) moved in on the same day as housing benefit was switched over to the new tenancy. A further 13 (59%) moved in within two weeks and only two (9%) moved in after two weeks. The average time to vacate the temporary accommodation after moving into the new tenancy was 5.6 days.

Although a small subsample, it was encouraging that 20 out of the 22 moved in within the two-week period covered by the discretionary rent payment. Looking at the two households facing delays beyond two weeks, the allowance could have had a mitigating effect by reducing arrears from 17 to 3 days and from 32 to 18 days, respectively.

Overall, if the 22 households had not had recourse to the discretionary two-week allowance, the delays could have resulted in a combined total of 124 days rent arrears (see Table 2).

Table 2: Impact of two-week discretionary allowance on households in receipt of housing benefit

	Number (%)	Pilot two-week Discretionary Rent Payment (DRP)	Outcome if households were not offered the two-week DRP
Tenancy entry: same day as housing benefit start date	7 (32%)	No arrears	No arrears
Tenancy entry: 1 - 14 days.	13 (59%)	No arrears	Arrears: 75 days
Tenancy entry: after 14 days.	2 (9%)	Arrears: 21 days	Arrears: 49 days
Total	**22 households**	**Total arrears: 21 days**	**Total arrears: 124 days**

Tenancy entries, Social Welfare Fund Community Care Grant awards and furniture deliveries

Data for SWF Community Care Grant processes and move-in dates were available for 90 out of the 137 households. For many, the delivery processes did not appear to proceed in the originally intended order. Most tenants had moved into the tenancy before applying for or receiving an award, rather than waiting until the application was completed, and furniture and/ or white goods were delivered.

In practice, only 35 out of 90 (39%) completed the process in the agreed order – in other words, receiving an SWF award decision *before* they moved in.

Twenty-two moved into their new tenancy before receiving an award decision, of which 11 moved on the same day that they applied for support. Thirty-five moved in before an application was even submitted.

In summary, 55 out of the 90 (61%) had not received the full furniture support package before moving into a new tenancy. These cases were spread between the four RSLs, geographical areas, and across time (see Figure 5). The implications of this irregularity, both for tenants and for the functioning of the pilot, will be discussed further in Section 5.

Figure 5: *Moving into tenancies before or after SWF award applications*

Moving in and applying for SWF timings

35	10	10	35

■ Moved after decision　■ Moved before decision　■ Moved same day　■ Moved before applying

Number of tenants
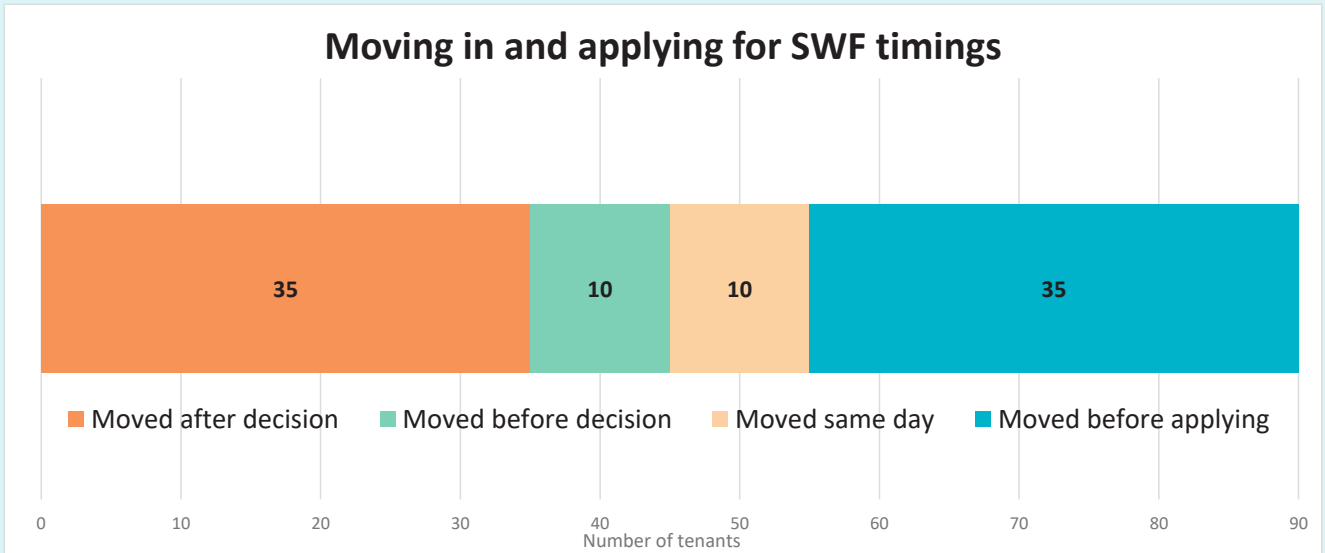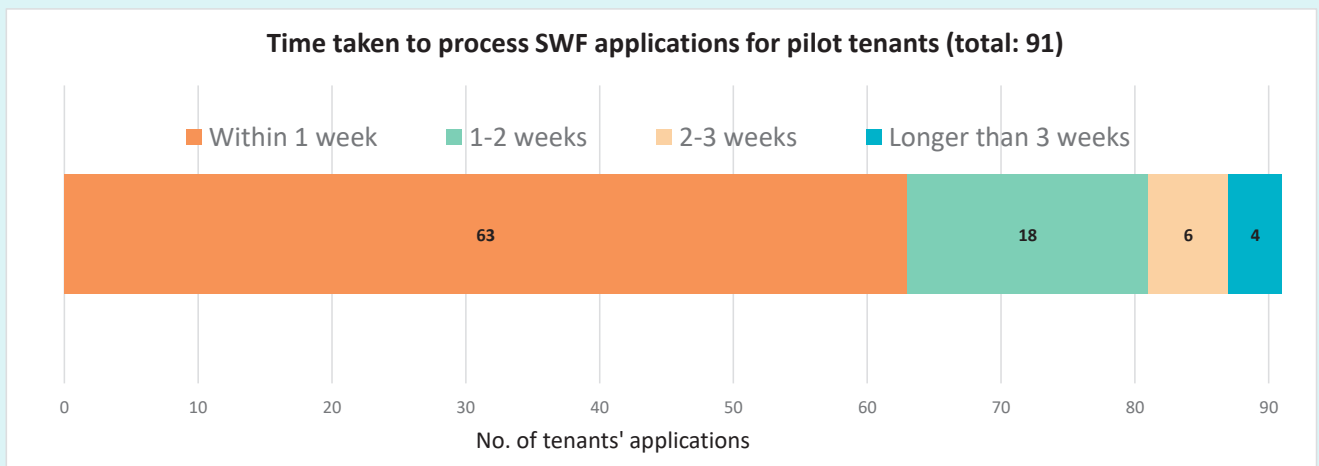
Community Care Grant – award timescales

Community Care Grant award data was available from 114 of the 137 households. Additional notes showed that the SWF team were unaware that 22 households were participating in the pilot. This led to the fast-tracking process not being applied. Among the remaining 92 applications, one case was opened in the week in which the first COVID-19 lockdown restrictions occurred, and the application was postponed by the RSL until restrictions rules allowed for the tenant to move in, which took 71 days.

Therefore, excluding the 22 eligible households not fast-tracked and the delayed single application, a total of 91 households were included in the fast-tracking process.

During the pilot, the target for completing the fast-tracking of the SWF application process was one week (compared to the mainstream SWF target of three weeks). Of the 91 households analysed, 63 (69%) were completed within one week, rising to 81 (89%) within two weeks and 87 (96%) within three weeks. Figure 6 below shows the timescales for the applications.

Figure 6: *Social Welfare Fund application timescales*

Time taken to process SWF applications for pilot tenants (total: 91)

■ Within 1 week　■ 1-2 weeks　■ 2-3 weeks　■ Longer than 3 weeks

63	18	6	4

No. of tenants' applications

The 22 households not recorded as 'fast-track' represented 16% of the total pilot households. Processing the SWF applications of these households took, on average, 21.2 days (three weeks), meaning that they were mainly still processed within the mainstream SWF target of three weeks. One household had their application processed in under one week, with 15 (68%) taking over two weeks.

Comparing the fast-tracked timescales with mainstream grant applications, between October and December 2019 (a quarter in which the pilot was operational), only 35% of mainstream applications were processed within the three-week target, compared with 96% in the pilot. Over a quarter (28%) of mainstream applications took longer than four weeks to process.

SWF Community Care Grant – award amounts

The SWF team also provided separate data on the amounts awarded to pilot tenants for five months: from January to March 2020; and September to October 2020. The data from 48 participating households showed the numbers receiving an award and award amounts. The data was not linked to other demographic or administrative tenant data. As the applications were processed as Community Care Grants, the data was compared with mainstream grant outcomes over similar timeframes, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: *Comparison of SWF award outcomes*

Timescales	Community Care Grant applications	Acceptance rate	Average accepted award
Jan – Mar 2020, Sep – Oct 2020	Pilot project data	87.5%	£1,171.95
Jan – Mar 2020	Glasgow city mainstream applications	47.7%	£474.14
Jul – Sep 2020	Glasgow city mainstream applications	44%	£587

The limited data showed a high acceptance rate (87.5%), which was around 40% higher than the average rate for mainstream applications over similar timeframes. Not all participating tenants received an award payment, and none received the full amount applied for. However, the average awards were around double the average for mainstream awards between July and September 2020, and more than double the awards between January and March 2020.

Looking beyond the quantitative data, Sections 3.1.5 and 3.1.6 will draw on interviews with tenants and staff to explore views on the benefits of the pilot. Other themes including property size and location, local hardships, food insecurity, and COVID-19 will also be considered.

3.1.5 Tenants' views of the pilot

Although the number of interviewed tenants (six) was smaller than planned, there was a noticeable degree of agency, self-reliance, and active involvement during the process among those interviewed. One tenant, who had been an asylum-seeker, spoke of not being aware of the RSL providing money advice services, instead seeking help from Citizens Advice. The tenant also spoke about receiving the furniture package but paying someone to paint their home.

Another had started working and managed to sort out welfare benefits themself. Three others described moving furniture with the help of friends or by hiring assistance or a van. However, even when intensive support was not required, having access to a contact number was welcomed, as was the offer of FHOSS contact after taking up a new tenancy.

Most tenants also spoke positively about the value of FHOSS input, particularly when completing SWF grant applications and the subsequent delivery of goods.

> *It didn't take a long time. I think … the same time we moved in, that was when the furniture came."*
>
> **(Tenant)**

> *They got me my fridge and washing machine and the sofa, and they came to do the carpets, as well. And later I got the curtains fitted. [He] was helpful."*
>
> **(Tenant)**

Among the six tenants, there was a sense of appreciation at being offered a tenancy. However, there were some mixed views on the fast-tracking processes. One spoke of a smooth process taking place within a week or two, including applying for schools. Another described a delayed process lasting three months, due to factors beyond the control of the partnership. However, this tenant also praised RSL and FHOSS staff for keeping them regularly informed. Within the context of COVID-19, another experienced the process as rushed and spoke of limited support due to pandemic restrictions.

Property size and location

Any negative views expressed tended to focus on the size and location of allocated properties, including tenancies not meeting families' needs. One tenant spoke of their efforts to move from a two-bedroom flat to a three-bedroom house. Another with no access to a garden or play area commented on the impact on the family:

> *Flooring is poor. It stops children from playing because we have neighbours, and they complain about the noise."*
>
> **(Tenant)**

For another, the issue of location, which some housing staff also considered important to sustain tenancies, had impacts on their mobility and health:

> The house is cool [good], but because of my condition I find it difficult walking up the hill and I am up two floors. I get tired easily."
>
> **(Tenant)**

An RSL manager echoed the need to view location choice as an important factor in sustaining tenancies and said that more work on preferences could ensure positive outcomes:

> I think having a conversation with people about the areas where they want to live is also crucial because [sustainment is] not just about house, it's about where it is, it's locality, and it's accessibility."
>
> **(RSL manager)**

Staff groups' views on the benefits for tenants

Staff were asked for their views on how the pilot impacted on tenants' experiences. Some FHOSS staff spoke of the fast-tracking process freeing up space to offer other support measures, such as helping people with utilities, council tax, registering with a GP and/or dentist, and linking in with local services (welfare advice, addiction, pharmacies). Supporting tenants to complete SWF forms made the process easier, particularly when English was a second language and translation services were not always readily accessible.

Both RSL and FHOSS staff felt that the more seamless processes contributed to better mental health outcomes for tenants by preventing added stresses, which was important when engaging people with multiple support needs.

The furniture delivery interviewee welcomed the opportunity to telephone other organisations, instead of the applicant or family member, as this was perceived as leading to faster responses and reduced waiting times for the delivery and led to positive feedback from tenants.

These positives elements were viewed by staff as contributing towards improving tenants' relationships with their landlords, reducing anxieties and stresses, and contributing to longer-term sustainment.

3.1.6 Local welfare hardships, food insecurity and COVID-19

Both RSL and FHOSS staff spoke about providing a range of support measures to address local welfare hardships and food insecurity, many of which were already in place before the pandemic and continued or increased during it.

There was some recognition that the local SWF fund could not always reach and support all tenants in need. In response, one RSL provided a recycle shop based on staff and tenant donations, another provided sofas, carpets, and fridges directly to tenants. An RSL sustainment team and FHOSS team both spoke about having access to small budgets, from staff donations, which was used to respond to emergencies and provide funds for utilities, furniture, and white goods. Some staff spoke about occasionally accessing vans to help people move into a new tenancy. Another noted that social workers could access the Lord Provost's hardship fund, and asked if this could be extended, for example to FHOSS or RSL staff.

COVID-19 – identified needs and responses

Throughout the pandemic, staff were in contact with new groups in crisis who required emergency support. A homeless caseworker spoke about new groups, previously unknown to social work, presenting as homeless because of the pandemic, which led to increased levels of unmet needs. An SWF interviewee noted that during the first lockdown, there were decreasing numbers of Community Care Grant applications but increasing numbers of Crisis Grant applications.

It was noted that between March and June 2020, there were more first-time SWF applications from people who had lost work or income or were required to self-isolate. Housing staff spoke of an increase in the numbers with no past contact who were seeking advice and support on issues such as domestic abuse, neighbour disputes, and anti-social behaviour following lockdown restrictions. These issues were seen as contributing towards poorer mental health among tenants.

Food insecurity was also a concern before the pandemic, with some RSLs providing in-house food banks, food parcels and weekly delivery services. This situation was exacerbated during the pandemic, as noted by a FHOSS worker:

> " *We never used to do it as much … but … 1258, or something food parcels in the last year between two different cars."*
>
> **(FHOSS worker)**

Another FHOSS worker spoke about delivering parcels on average to 16 families each week during the pandemic, as families were spending more income on utilities and food due to children being home-schooled.

> *… because they're at home more often, they're spending more money on electricity, their children are at home, they're feeding them more, they've got nowhere else to go for that."*
>
> **(FHOSS worker)**

3.2 What is the experience of delivering this type of support for the four RSL teams and other partners?

This next section explores the benefits of the new approaches identified by staff and some of the tensions and challenges that emerged. Views on the project leadership are also examined, before considering the impacts of COVID-19.

3.2.1 Organisational benefits

All the partners reported organisational benefits, with some describing mutually beneficial relationships and developing trust between RSLs and council partners. Others spoke about the new processes supporting more joined-up council functions, akin to a 'one-stop shop' that interlinked departments, such as homelessness casework, discretionary housing payments and the SWF. This was seen as helping to ensure that housing claims were processed in a timely fashion, which created space to focus more on people moving into their tenancy. Others spoke about more space for listening to the issues that RSLs raised: "*A lot of trust has been gained".*

Staff were generally positive about the fast-tracking processes, with a FHOSS worker comparing them to past processes which often took up to five weeks:

> *[The application could go in on the] Monday, [and] I would usually have a delivery date by the Thursday or the Friday that week."*
>
> **(FHOSS worker)**

This helped ease the pressure of large caseloads:

> *I can do that in two or three days … depending on my caseload … linked in with all the appropriate services. In the past, massive lag of waiting … for the goods to come. [I might have] a caseload of 25 but seven could be waiting for SWF awards. So, it was just … it added additional pressure."*
>
> **(FHOSS worker)**

Given the local efforts to address hardships, some FHOSS staff spoke about feeling overwhelmed at times, but at the same time the pilot was seen as easing pressures.

Some staff reported spending less time following up arrears, and RSL staff spoke of more constructive and positive relationships when tenants started their tenancy without rent arrears. Sustained tenancies were important to RSLs because of the costs associated with re-letting if tenancies failed, and the risks of vandalism and ongoing maintenance of void tenancies.

Closer working relationships between SWF staff processing applications and other agencies led to deeper insights into service provision and the tenant's journey. This was a catalyst for further training:

> *[Partnership working on the pilot] brings the [SWF] decision-making level up a bit … knowledge on guidance, knowledge on homelessness cases … They're liaising, communicating with these RSLs more, so they get contacts in there and that becomes beneficial. You know … someone to speak to if there's issue with an RSL … go have a chat with them, so it's good for the decision makers."*
>
> **(SWF manager)**

Although some homelessness caseworkers saw the pilot as being additional or separate work which could be time consuming, they welcomed the extra FHOSS input. Equally, FHOSS workers reported improved working relationships with the caseworkers and council property and revenue staff around fast-tracking SWF applications.

▶ *3.2.2 Partnership working*

It was clear that most partners had a shared vision of the project aims and key outcomes. At the same time, each agency worked towards achieving their own objectives, within different roles, and different working cultures. At times, this meant that different sets of values were evident across each staff group. For some, working together helped to deepen communication and understanding of each other's roles and perspectives. However, on occasion tensions could emerge, particularly when flexibility was required, for example when engaging with people facing severe and multiple disadvantage.

The different roles and values of staff and organisations, how communication during the pilot helped resolve tensions, and how relationships were impacted when the tenant journey did not always follow a linear path will all be explored in more detail below.

3.2.3 Organisational values and roles

One interviewee described past approaches to address homelessness as being like a "*minefield*", and several spoke of improved working relationships during the pilot. There was also some evidence of tensions around different value systems, both across and within organisations, which is perhaps inevitable in new partnerships. Staff groups spoke about placing emphasis on a flexible, person-centred approach, fulfilling statutory duties, or focussing on financial obligations and collecting rents.

Negotiating different roles and values could influence engagement with each other and tenants. For example, legislative requirements and duties were more to the fore among the SWF and homelessness casework teams, whereas, among RSL staff there was more emphasis on supporting tenants and meeting financial obligations around rent payments. Some commissioning requirements were apparent among the FHOSS staff who focussed on flexible, tailored approaches, while the furniture delivery organisation had perhaps a more transactional, product-orientated focus.

There was evidence of internal tensions around values within some organisations, as illustrated by comments from staff from two RSLs:

> *I think the whole pandemic has probably shown [what our key values are] even more with all of the support we've put in place [for vulnerable tenants] … ensuring that each and every tenant was cared for if they didn't have the supports necessary."*
>
> **(RSL worker)**

> *Priority is rent, obviously, to secure your tenancy."*
>
> **(RSL worker)**

Some acknowledged that managing tensions between such priorities could manifest differently, depending on each organisation's structures, teams, and job roles. On occasion, this could lead to tensions across the partnership, as illustrated by this interviewee:

> *Our priority is to let houses. We can't hang about for two weeks for availability for a FHOSS worker because we lose rent money … financially it wasn't an option for us."*
>
> **(RSL worker)**

Different geographical remits were also noted, with RSLs working in local areas, whereas FHOSS, casework teams and the furniture delivery organisation work across wider city localities. The SWF team spoke of their citywide remit within the wider Scottish local authority context.

As noted in the introduction, the pilot was established following a series of strategic meetings between local partners. As the pilot developed, the partnership meetings between managers continued, with members discussing both the strategic direction and the day-to-day running of the pilot. The meetings were seen as a supportive space for building connections, sharing good practice, and managing differences. For some, the meetings encouraged a more open culture that allowed a degree of freedom to learn and comment on areas previously "*outside their jurisdiction*" and to address challenges. The environment was described as professional and accountable, with recognition that "*we don't always get it right*". The introduction of an element of monitoring during the meetings provided opportunity to address difficulties, for example communication around fast-tracking grant decisions. Although the meetings had ended when the pandemic began, some staff suggested resuming them even without an ongoing pilot, as a good space to communicate with one another.

Despite these good lines of communication being reported between managers, staff from some organisations found it difficult to get in touch with others, which at times could be mutual. Some felt that the lines of communication between managers and staff groups could be improved, alongside ensuring wider commitment to, and awareness of, the pilot.

Several respondents across different organisations spoke of the pilot helping to increase their understanding of others' roles, responsibilities, constraints, and goals:

> *I think for me it was good for us to see for ourselves what the RSLs are faced with, and for them hopefully to see what our guys are faced with. You know, so that better understanding of roles and responsibilities."*
>
> **(FHOSS manager)**

> *… it gave everybody an insight into what other people's challenges were."*
>
> **(RSL manager)**

For some staff, improving partnership working was an important aim of the pilot. Two RSL interviewees described greater access to other agencies and opportunity to test whether this created stronger relationships. Unexpected new relationships emerged, particularly among managers, which in some instances opened direct access to council departments. Some FHOSS staff reported improved relationships and more RSL contact than previously. Some RSL staff called FHOSS staff for advice even when they did not have a shared client. A new working relationship between RSL and council staff prevented the eviction of a young family (not participating in the pilot), which demonstrates that the partnership approach had benefits beyond the pilot itself.

3.2.4 Complexity and flexibility

Supporting people experiencing severe and multiple disadvantages, which could include homelessness, mental ill-health, and addictions all at once, did highlight some systemic challenges. Some staff spoke of the challenges of making connections between homelessness and specialist services. Others spoke about the lack of specialist resources to address such needs, while another described someone moving back and forth between hospital admission and homelessness, due to intermittent mental health conditions.

Others cautioned against making offers to someone "*not tenancy ready*", as they can "*abscond*" from the tenancy due to not having the necessary wraparound support:

> *It's really difficult, somebody could have five, six, seven different problems … they're in the situation they are because of these complex issues, not just there because they want to be."*
>
> **(SWF manager)**

Clarity around roles and boundaries was seen by some as a response to address such complexities and to manage tensions. Some welcomed how the pilot provided such clarity:

> *One of the benefits from us as a service is that we knew exactly where our boundaries were. I think just now working with clients outwith the pilot, there can be blurred lines between what's the role of the caseworker, housing officer and the FHOSS worker."*
>
> **(FHOSS worker)**

This could be difficult for FHOSS staff when a central part of their role involved offering flexible support:

> *… anything from benefits, to accessing free food, free clothes, right across the thing."*
>
> **(FHOSS worker)**

The so called "*sticky*" role of keeping in contact with tenants, regardless of support needs, until settled in their new home was valued, as illustrated by someone who had previously found maintaining contact with some tenants difficult:

> *It was good, if I couldn't get a hold of the tenant, then I had someone else to ask if they have heard from them."*
>
> **(GCC casework manager)**

On occasion, however, this role could be challenging and anxiety-provoking, with one FHOSS worker feeling like a "*member of the CID [police]*" contacting family members, case workers and concierges to stay in contact with someone. If someone suddenly disengaged during a move into a new tenancy, this could lead to (perceived or real) frustrations. In one situation, a tenancy offer was withdrawn and offered to someone else, due to the RSL's letting demands and targets. The pressures of maintaining contact were illustrated by a FHOSS worker:

> *… it was outwith anyone's control, there was occasionally a person referred as part of the pilot scheme that suddenly just went off the grid. We couldn't make contact, therefore SWF can't get done and left everyone at a loose end including the housing officer because they're not showing up to viewings. You would get a hold of them one minute, and they'll agree to be at a viewing, then not show up. I would say that was challenging."*
>
> **(FHOSS worker)**

Although this was a rare example, there was some concern that if it happened more frequently when engaging larger numbers, then it could strain relationships, particularly with SWF teams:

> *If we mess them around by saying, we want to order something, then we postpone it … it would push us back to the timescales that you have just now … things wouldn't change".*
>
> **(FHOSS worker)**

3.2.5 Leadership

As noted earlier, the managerial meetings were a valued leadership forum which supported the strategic direction and day-to-day delivery of the pilot. For some managers, the meetings facilitated a more open culture of learning that extended beyond their agency's remit. There was a clear consensus that the GCC manager, supporting the partnership meetings, provided good leadership to strengthen communication, problem solve and promote a facilitative environment. Several staff spoke of this role as providing an intermediary across organisations, and an important focal point:

> *I think you do need that kind of [GGC manager role] – that you're able to pick up the phone … jump in [the] car and drive out to FHOSS … just respond very quickly … You really would want to make sure that it was successful and that there was a point of contact, and that everybody knew who the point of contact was, and that this person was really available."*
>
> **(GCC casework manager)**

One manager had concerns about placing such a degree of burden and responsibility on one individual. If the pilot continued, then there was a need to strengthen other relationships to ensure less exclusive emphasis on the GCC role.

3.2.6 Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

The pandemic was an important context in which relationships improved. There was an appreciation of "*how much we all rely on one another's services to get the end result*". The nature of the COVID-19 restrictions led to variation in ways of working:

> *… folk were doing different things and at the very start of it obviously there was question marks over what we should be doing and what we shouldn't be doing."*
>
> **(RSL manager)**

Some described usual work patterns with social distancing in place, while others moved into furlough, and others spoke of working from home except in emergencies. Those reporting the most positive experiences described focussing on staff needs as well as tenants:

> *Primarily it was the safety of our workforce, the safety of tenants, safety of members of public, anybody you're encountering."*
>
> **(Furniture organisation manager)**

Apart from the SWF teams, who did not previously work face-to-face, most staff groups described some degree of loss when switching to remote working. Opportunities to glean vital information through informal conversations during home visits were no longer available.

Moreover, telephone contact prevented staff from noticing tenants' body language which could help flag up any concerns that tenants were experiencing.

Finally, some highlighted the positive aspects of remote working, such as tenants having to spend less time in busy, potentially stressful, or risky, waiting rooms. Others found it easier to speak about issues on the telephone and felt that they had more time to support tenants when working from home.

3.3 What factors enable or act as barriers in sustaining and scaling up this work?

Due to data limitations, and the ways in which the housing and homelessness contexts continue to change since the pilot, this section cannot offer a definitive answer on the merits of scaling up. Nevertheless, some of the important learning which was identified by staff groups centred around: criteria and fairness, organisational capacity, partnership communication, adapting aspects of the pilot, including learning from other initiatives, and who was missing from the partnership.

3.3.1 Project criteria and fairness

As noted in the overview of the pilot, the RSLs applied two different sets of referral criteria for households to participate in the pilot. There was a general view that applying different criteria could result in an *"unfair roll of the dice"* for those assigned to the RSL which did not include their referral type in the pilot, or people being referred to other RSLs that were not part of the pilot.

> *… we [two different RSLs] share streets, so depending on number you got allocated in the street would depend on whether or not you got that, and that's not fair."*
>
> **(RSL worker)**

Tenants' access to support was also dependent on financial circumstances. For example, the pilot was designed for households accessing benefits, and different processes would be required for those in paid work. One RSL interviewee thought this was unfair, since working households would miss out on extra support, and paying the weekly rent in a temporary furnished flat would make it very difficult to save up to buy goods for a new tenancy, despite being in paid work (temporary homelessness accommodation charges for an average two-bedroom apartment in Glasgow are around £168 per week).

Scaling up the fast-tracking processes without increasing the SWF staffing resource could lead to longer waits for non-fast-tracked SWF applicants. Some felt that, given the increasing levels of need and demand, any continuation of the pilot would need to be citywide. This was counterbalanced with fears that staff needed to be realistic about what could be achieved to avoid giving *"false hope"* that tenancies would be available more quickly than was possible.

Given the potential resource constraints, many felt that any scaling up would involve inclusion criteria that would compel decision-makers to choose between different, potentially vulnerable, groups.

An RSL manager noted:

> **"** *I don't want to say I want it to be applied to everyone because of the cost implications but it's about, how fair is that? How do you fully determine who is worthy of that? And I think that this could end up being quite topical."*
>
> **(RSL manager)**

Overall, most were largely supportive of any future scaling up, with some expressing a sense that the waiting times faced by tenants were unfair, since people experiencing homelessness were often in poorer financial positions and in the lowest income groups.

3.3.2 Organisational capacity

Most staff groups were optimistic about their ability to scale the project up, as many saw the work as part of their role but were unsure about other partners' capacity.

The SWF capacities and resources were mentioned by most, with some questioning if existing resources were sufficient for scaling up. The casework staff expected increased demand for SWF applications, regardless of the pilot, due to the Rapid Re-housing Transition Plan, which aims to ensure people spend as little time in temporary accommodation as possible, and have access to flexible support throughout the journey into settled housing. However, SWF respondents did not expect demand to significantly change regardless of referral source, although they noted that setting up a dedicated SWF team for these types of awards might help with resources. One SWF respondent wondered if allocating scaling up funds could be seen as being unfair among other local authorities.

There were also a range of views on scaling up the FHOSS input. The FHOSS staff did not expect major workload changes and did not anticipate the need for a staffing increase but noted that commissioning might play a role around future capacity and delivery goals. Other staff groups wondered if scaling up could dilute FHOSS support and working relationships. Others questioned if reducing large FHOSS workloads could allow them to work more closely with RSL colleagues. Finally, some RSL staff spoke about the need for extra FHOSS investment, to be flexibly allocated to respond to the changing levels of demand across the city, since much of the pilot work depended on FHOSS staff.

Some RSL staff reported that changes to their workload and time had been minimal during the pilot with one respondent stating incorporating pilot practices into their routine would reduce workloads. More generally, various staff groups questioned whether other RSLs not taking part in the pilot would want to commit (note: if it required having to provide the two-week rent allowance). Some RSL staff said that extra funding would be needed to provide the rent allowance when scaling up support to the rising numbers moving into a new tenancy, especially since RSL income had already dropped during the pandemic. However, others spoke of RSLs already having to *"write off arrears"* when a tenancy failed and questioned how much this was having a negative impact on wider resources. Putting aside the allowance, engaging RSLs with larger numbers of housing stock was considered a vital step if scaling up

was to gather momentum. However, some SWF respondents questioned whether all RSLs should be required to participate, noting that the pilot may be less relevant to some smaller RSLs which support specific population groups and so have different application criteria and processes.

There were some views that scaling up could stretch casework teams workloads, which were already viewed as being high compared to surrounding local authorities. This view was partially acknowledged by the casework staff who said that a dedicated team and a single, coordinating point of contact would be needed, if the pilot expanded.

Although some questioned if the furniture delivery organisation could meet increased demands, because of delays during the pandemic, the interviewee from the organisation said that these delays were due to external factors during the pandemic and did not express any scaling up concerns. The interviewee noted that the pilot was too small to fully test internal system processes but mentioned that a move to a more robust IT system, and contractual changes, would be required if the pilot was to scale up.

▶ 3.3.3 New ways of working

In talking about the potential for scaling the pilot up, staff discussed the various elements that could be developed, including improving communication amongst staff and between staff and tenants, changing processes of grant applications and furniture deliveries, and better integration with other pilot work going on in the city.

There was an expressed risk among some that scaling up could lessen the likelihood of building closer partnerships like the ones that emerged during the pilot. Some RSL staff spoke about the need to improve wider relationships with council staff and departments, alongside the need for commitment across all RSLs and council resources in place to ensure that the pilot was part of routine practices. Scaling up would require more clarity between and across teams. The involvement of casework and commissioning teams during any planning stage was seen as being helpful to clarify roles in the pilot, with some staff welcoming the future strategic involvement of the furniture delivery organisation.

Some RSL staff emphasised the importance (both now and in scaling up) of maintaining and sharing up-to-date information to support new tenants. This was of particular concern when trying to engage tenants who avoid opening or reading important housing correspondence or had literacy problems. FHOSS staff also spoke of a need for clear lines of communication between partners when engaging with tenants, and guidance/protocols to avoid over-reliance on a single point of contact.

Staff from different organisations suggested that the SWF grant application could be completed in advance of a new tenancy offer being made to ensure furniture delivery within a couple of days of the tenancy sign-up date, instead of two weeks. Others spoke of freeing up time by simplifying the grant form, which some saw as being lengthy, repetitive, and requiring justification of single items.

Standard furniture packages or home starter kits (e.g., white goods, furnishings, bedding) for families and single people were suggested by FHOSS staff. Some FHOSS staff also

suggested replacing the all-day (8am to 4pm) window to deliver furniture with a flexible "on the way" telephone call, which might free up FHOSS staff from spending lengthy periods waiting with tenants for the furniture delivery.

Finally, there was a minority view from an RSL interviewee who noted that the discretionary rent allowance would not be required if *"everybody did their bit"* and fast-tracking systems worked well.

Interviewees spoke about integrating any future scaling up with other partnership work across the city, both during and since the pilot. One project, which was described by several interviewees, involved caseworkers and staff from one of the largest RSLs. This project moved housing allocation from an online bidding process, which some tenants found difficult to access and engage with, to a process of offers being made directly to prospective tenants. This involved better sharing of data between different staff groups, so that the housing offered was appropriate to the household's needs. One respondent said that this project had *"worked brilliantly"* and led to an increased acceptance of tenancy offers.

3.3.4 Who was missing from the partnership?

Most staff did not identify a need to involve other organisations, if the pilot was scaled-up, although there were some suggestions. The largest RSL (Wheatley Group) in the city was considered as being a key partner in scaling up, with some interviewees also mentioning input from the Scottish Government and the Scottish Housing Regulator[a].

With most of the participating tenants claiming Universal Credit payments, housing staff spoke about the provided support, when making online claims and maintaining online journals, as being akin to jumping through hoops. More generally, digital exclusion was seen as being a much bigger challenge beyond this pilot:

> *We've come across all the people with no digital skills, that's been a big issue."*
>
> **(RSL worker)**

Yet, despite these challenges, only a small number spoke directly about future engagement with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). This could partially be explained by some staff views on UK welfare legislation, which was seen as being constraining and unresponsive to local need.

Others wondered if the ethos of the DWP could be aligned with the partnership.

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[a] The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) is an independent regulator of Registered Social Landlord and local authority housing services in Scotland. The SHR was established on 1 April 2011 under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010.

> **"** *… they don't have the same ethos that we have in the community and again I think it's because they are displaced from the community, they don't work face-to-face with people."*
>
> **(RSL manager)**

Although not reflected in the staff interviews, two of the tenants spoke positively about the support they received from the Scottish Refugee Council (SRC):

> **"** *I went to the Refugee Council for help with the application … They were making calls for appointments with housing."*
>
> **(Tenant)**

> **"** *Yes, they [the Refugee Council office] were very helpful. She said that she would contact different accommodation agencies, and then she would come back to me with the results. And she called me, she said that, yeah, the [Housing Association] will accept it, your profile and then they will find you a flat … as a service it is very good."*
>
> **(Tenant)**

It is unclear if this level of SRC involvement was representative, given the small sample. However, there may be merit in exploring if other third sector groups are already engaged with tenants and could be included in this type of partnership work.

4. STUDY LIMITATIONS

In section 2.3, the impacts of COVID-19 on the pilot and the evaluation were described in detail. Therefore, this short section will consider the study limitations with a particular focus on collecting primary and secondary data.

An important primary data limitation centred around the low number of tenants that engaged in the study. The initial plan was to recruit 16 tenants, comprising four diverse household types from each of the four participating RSLs. Although only six tenants took part in the study, and the reasons were explored in section 2.3, it was important to include the voices of those taking part, whilst acknowledging the sampling limitations.

A lack of secondary data on equality groups and absence of data on rent arrears were important limitations. The challenges of collecting consistent data on equality groups and rent arrears to test different outcomes during this critical transition stage extends beyond this pilot. Tackling arrears remains an important factor linked to more sustained tenancies, but does not appear to be widely measured and reported elsewhere.

Other data on aspects of the pilot, such as time taking to move into a new tenancy, could not be compared, as data from elsewhere was not available to measure effectiveness.
Finally, although there was a degree of consistency on the household data provided by the four RSLs, the data could not be linked to the household grants data provided by the Scottish Welfare Fund team.

Although COVID-19 restrictions were undoubtedly a key barrier, when testing future collaborative pilot approaches, there needs to be a shared understanding about what data are required to test outcomes, and when, how, and by whom it will be collected and processed. Including research partners at the outset would help achieve this.

5. DISCUSSION AND KEY LEARNING

Before moving on to discuss the findings and key learning from this study, it is important to recognise that we are in an increasingly different environment from when the pilot was conceived and delivered.

During the pandemic, there was a temporary rise in Universal Credit payments and a pause in housing evictions[9], extended during the cost-of-living crisis, and a rent freeze that ended in March 2023[10]. Millions of adults across the UK are still struggling to afford goods, heating, or food[11]. Record numbers continue to live in temporary homeless accommodation with social housing in Scotland experiencing unsustainable pressures amid a critical lack of supply[12]. In Glasgow, a reported shortfall of 1,600 lets from the 4,500 required annually from all RSLs to address homelessness, and reliance on bed and breakfast accommodation, has contributed to an overspend of about £16.6 million to the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) Homelessness Services budget[13].

Even before the current difficulties, the estimated total debt owed by people to Scottish local authorities for the costs of temporary accommodation was over £33 million[14]. More uniform responses and faster provision of welfare funds and delivery of goods will be required if we are to avoid further build-up of arrears when people move out of temporary accommodation.

In the remainder of this final section, the key learning from the impacts of the pilot, responses to hardship, development of the partnership, and views on scaling up will be considered.

5.1 The key impacts of the pilot

Tenancy sustainment data from the pilot showed that 96% remained in their tenancies after 12 months, higher than comparable data from 2017/18 which showed that 88% of homeless tenants in Scotland had remained in their tenancies[7]. Although the COVID-19 restrictions and subsequent lack of movement within the housing sector were important factors, the high percentage remaining in their tenancies was encouraging.

It was also encouraging that most moved into their new homes within the two-week target period, and that providing the discretionary rent payment helped to avoid rent arrears for most in receipt of housing benefit. This suggests that early intervention to prevent arrears and providing wrap-around support measures can help towards more sustainable tenancies[15]. Providing free furnishings or white goods has also been associated with improving recipients' mental and physical health[16].

There was also evidence that the pilot Community Care Grant applications were processed more quickly and were more likely to result in successful awards, which were on average higher than mainstream applications, all of which suggests that the pilot enabled timely access to vital support. A recent national review of the SWF found that those receiving third party support when applying were more likely to receive a positive outcome[17], which reinforces the observations from some interviewees that the application process could be a barrier for those unable to access the support provided.

At the same time, there was scope to improve, as 16% of applications were not 'fast-tracked' due to a miscommunication, and 61% were not completed in the intended order, with people moved in before their tenancy was furnished, which could negatively impact on tenancy sustainment. Looking at the wider barriers to sustainment, both tenants and staff spoke of the importance of housing size, type, and quality. Others have also highlighted the need to ensure adequate supply of affordable housing to address homelessness[18].

> **The learning from the pilot, such as the fast-tracking of grant decisions and delivery of goods, and offering a two-week grace rent period during transition, should be shared more widely, and include the alliance of organisations working to end homelessness and rough sleeping in Glasgow city by 2030.**
>
> **Undertaking this type of complex work across organisations, with different roles and responsibilities, and workforces operating at different levels, will require effective communication across all partner agencies and at all staff levels.**

5.2 Local responses to hardship

The SWF continues to provide vital support for those on low incomes, in crisis, or needing help to set up a home or remain in the community. Yet, the fund's limitations were evident when staff described local efforts to address hardship and food insecurity during the pilot and, increasingly, since the pandemic. Figures from 2021 estimated that 5.3% of Glaswegians had experienced hunger due to a lack of money for food in the last month[19], and foodbank data shows that since 2014-15 there has been a 67% increase in the provision of food parcels citywide[20].

The responses to the hardship identified in this study were localised and non-statutory. Access to this type of local support could vary widely across the city, which in turn could impact on the shared aims of Glasgow's Poverty Leadership Panel[21]. More broadly, commenting on the SWF, local authority managers across Scotland have expressed strong concerns about the adequacy of national funding levels in the context of increasing pressures on the cost of living[17].

> **There is a need to map localised responses to hardship across all of Glasgow's housing providers to demonstrate the nature and extent of this type of need. Gathering intelligence could support decisions as to how best to respond to this need and with whom responsibility should sit.**

5.3 Issues with data

Data gathered during the pilot showed that there was a slightly higher proportion of households with children than the overall homeless household average. There was also higher ethnic diversity among tenants taking part in the pilot, compared with the national average for homeless households. At the same time, data on ethnicity was very limited and there was no data about other equalities groups, or about the level or type of support needs.

As Universal Credit (UC) data is processed differently from Housing Benefit data, it was not possible to calculate likely arrears levels among most tenants in receipt of UC. This remains a key issue, as Universal Credit sanctions in Glasgow between June and August 2022 led to households losing a combined total of £937,000[22]. Others have shown that families in Glasgow were facing monthly UC deductions of around £70-90, mainly from council tax and rent arrears[23]. With rent arrears across Scotland approaching £170 million, the highest level since the introduction of the Social Housing Charter[24], there is a need to prioritise collecting arrears data when trying new approaches.

The data challenges described within this report are part of a wider set of issues around collecting and reporting data. An absence of reliable and routinely collected data about equalities, such as ethnicity, which can be linked to other data on outcomes, such as levels of rent arrears, limits our understanding of whether the housing system is operating equitably.

> **To support more equitable access to support measures for all households, there is a need to improve reporting on ethnicity data, both within pilots and more generally, which is linked and comparable to national equalities and homelessness data.**
>
> **Testing future approaches to tackle rent arrears will involve collecting specific data on arrears level over time. The Department for Work and Pensions could ensure that local partners have updated access to data on Universal Credit sanctions and deductions to support efforts to prevent homelessness and sustain tenancies.**

5.4 Developing the partnership and future partners

Partnership processes

Shared responsibility and accountability are crucial when engaging with complex and challenging work[25]. Elements of a shared approach were evident throughout, particularly in the managerial meetings which supported closer working relationships and an enhanced understanding of others' goals and values. The meetings also created space to negotiate and define roles and build clearer boundaries around responsibilities. However, the approach was not evident across all levels of staff. There were some breakdowns in communication with delivery staff who were not engaged in the managerial meetings. And although the leadership role provided by GCC was highly valued, it was suggested that more collaborative leadership could prevent placing too much pressure on a single person or agency.

Establishing clearer boundaries and responsibilities was effective when supporting tenants with relatively low support needs, however on occasion this was more difficult when tenants had multiple support needs. Tensions were evident between some housing staff with more defined roles and outreach staff with flexible roles. Although these types of episodes were limited, others have described 'role-creep' among housing staff engaging tenants with multiple support needs that can lead to an increased sense of responsibility, and staff feeling unqualified to provide such specialised support[26]. Equally, staff working in homeless settings with high workloads and time constraints are also at risk of burnout, if expected to work flexibly across rigid organisational structures[27].

Extending and embedding a shared approach across all levels within a partnership, such as Housing First, could help reduce concerns around role blurring, role creep and staff burnout. It has been estimated that the demand for Housing First in Glasgow could involve 538 tenancies per year, up until 2031[5]. Responding to this level of demand and supporting people with multiple and complex needs, who may have a history of rough sleeping and repeat homelessness, will require shared responsibility and accountability across key areas including: welfare benefits, HSCP, homelessness and housing services, including the Local Letting Communities designed to engage services and RSLs to work together to rehouse homeless people in settled tenancies.

> **Strengthening shared leadership, ownership and accountability across welfare benefits, housing, homelessness and HSCP services could ensure that the responsibility for flexibly supporting people with multiple support needs is not placed on those least qualified, or those facing the greatest workload constraints.**
>
> **Although clear leadership is often needed to instigate new partnerships, promoting a more shared approach as partnerships develop could help prevent placing the burden on one team or individual.**

Possible future partners

Both staff and tenants welcomed the additional support provided when English was a second language, with some tenants valuing the housing support that they received from the Scottish Refugee Council. This is perhaps unsurprising as over 14% of Glasgow citizens were born outside the UK in 2020-21[28] and thousands of asylum seekers and refugees have been offered tenancies in the city over the last decade. This type of support beyond the pilot could be strengthened by considering which other agencies are engaging with tenants and inviting them into future partnerships.

The wider impacts of homelessness and unsuitable housing on mental health identified by interviewees reflected other research showing how arrears, difficulties paying bills, and negotiating Universal Credit (UC) can all contribute towards poor mental health[29, 30] and that mental health and inequalities worsened during the pandemic[31]. Some staff spoke about the difficulties of engaging mental health services, which were described in a Housing First evaluation as being comparatively inflexible[32]. In response, others have suggested locating a housing liaison officer within the HSCP to act as a point of contact and bridge between the sectors to improve links[26].

Given the household impacts of benefits sanctions and third-party deductions, it was surprising that few staff mentioned the DWP as having any future role in this type of work, although some spoke about how legislative restrictions made partnership working more challenging for DWP staff. Finding ways to engage will be required, as up until February 2023 just over 66,000 households in the city were on UC, of which two-thirds were receiving a housing entitlement[33].

Partnership work could usefully be expanded in various ways: engaging organisations already supporting tenants, such as Scottish Refugee Council; strengthening points of contact between the housing sector and specialist mental health and addictions teams; and including Department for Work and Pensions staff in wider efforts to sustain tenancies and prevent homelessness.

5.5 Scaling up and innovation

Staff groups were mainly positive about scaling up the pilot but raised valid questions. First, who would be eligible and how could fairness be ensured? Second, where would additional investment come from if the FHOSS role was extended, and would additional SWF funding to support the work result in reduced access to the funds for others? Recognising the current limitations of the SWF, Scottish charities have called for a substantial increase in investment at a national level to support all those in crisis with no recourse to other funds[34].

Whether the pilot is scaled up or not, continuing investment in homelessness outreach services, addressing rent arrears, and providing Scottish Welfare Fund support and furniture delivery will all be required to prevent homelessness.

Some reservations were expressed as to how consistency could be achieved scaling up this type of approach across all RSLs in the city, which varied in size, geography, and remit. It was noted that some RSLs prioritise specific groups, such as older people or those experiencing domestic abuse. Additionally, if the reported differences in delivery found among the four RSLs taking part in the pilot was mirrored across more than 60 RSLs citywide, robust systems would be required to ensure consistent and equitable support. Although some RSLs saw the discretionary rent payment as a positive response to prevent failing tenancies and unpaid arrears, it was noted that other RSLs not taking part in the pilot might find it difficult to provide the resource or consider it unfair on other tenants to use resources in this way.

Scaling up any aspects of the pilot would involve recognising the existing major shortfall in social housing lets and reliance on bed and breakfast accommodation within Glasgow, which has led to senior HSCP management writing to all RSLs across the city requesting 60% of all social housing lets for the resettlement of homeless households[13].

The Glasgow Alliance to End Homelessness and Glasgow City Council should support dialogue with the Local Letting Communities operating across the city as to how this pilot, or the key learning, would be applicable within this very challenging context.

The staff groups taking part in the study shared a range of views about how services could be improved. The ideas put forward by staff at all levels suggest an untapped energy for innovation, which is a key principle of how the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan seeks to achieve the aim of ending homelessness in Glasgow by 2030[35].

Staff at all levels in homelessness and housing services should routinely be engaged in the process of developing ideas for pilots and other innovative approaches.

6. CONCLUSION

This pilot helped tenants to move into secure housing with minimal delays and good access to the supports required to make their new houses feel like homes. This type of positive start can only help improve sustainment of tenancies. Given the scale of temporary accommodation use in Glasgow, and the pressing need to reduce reliance on this type of accommodation, the learning presented in this report is valuable for understanding how the pilot worked – and what challenges it faced.

There was clear willingness across the different agencies to support quicker grant applications, quicker award decisions, and quicker entry into furnished tenancies. Despite the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, outcomes were mainly positive. In the minority of cases in which staff discussed difficulties, it was often because of heightened levels of unmet need, such as complex mental health issues.

Shared leadership that promotes effective delivery and communication across sectors could reduce the risks of placing excessive burden on one person or agency. Equally, opportunities exist to build, or strengthen, shared approaches with mental health and drug and alcohol services, the DWP and the Scottish Refugee Council.

Whether or not this work goes forward, the scale and complexity of addressing homelessness in Glasgow will require the type of bold collaboration and willingness to take risks that were evident in this pilot.

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