

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 – implementation in Watford

Overview & Scrutiny Committee
– 19 July 2018

Ayaz Maqsood – Head of Housing



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Overview

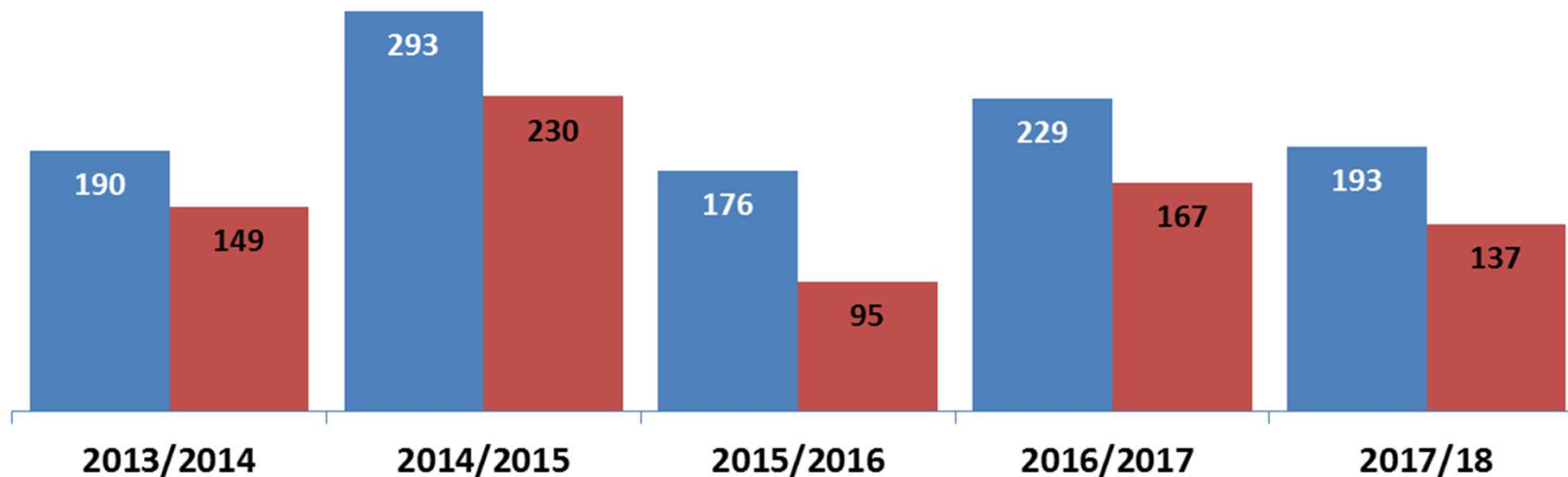


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Homeless Applications and Acceptances

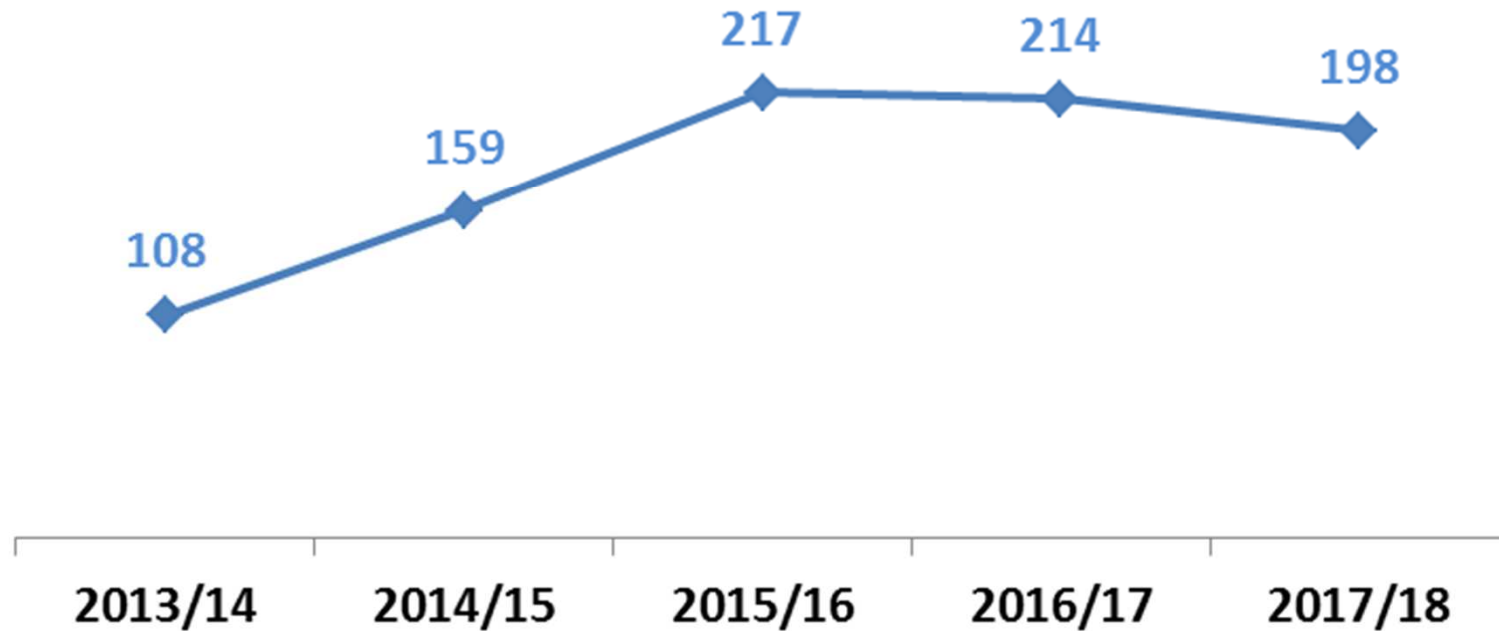
Actuals 2013/14 to 2017/18 (half year) and total projected for 2017/18

■ Total number applied for homelessness assistance ■ Total number accepted as statutorily homeless



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**Average numbers of households placed in
temporary accommodation 2013/14 to 2017/18
annually**

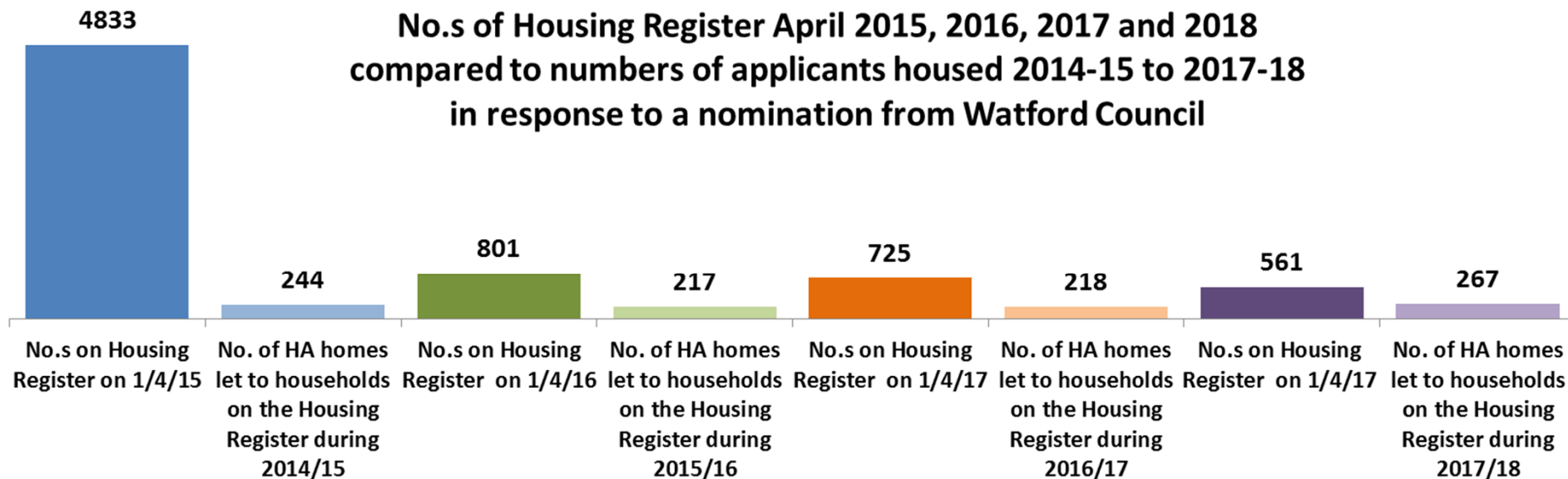


Lowest numbers in TA in 2017/18: 179 as at 16/3/2018



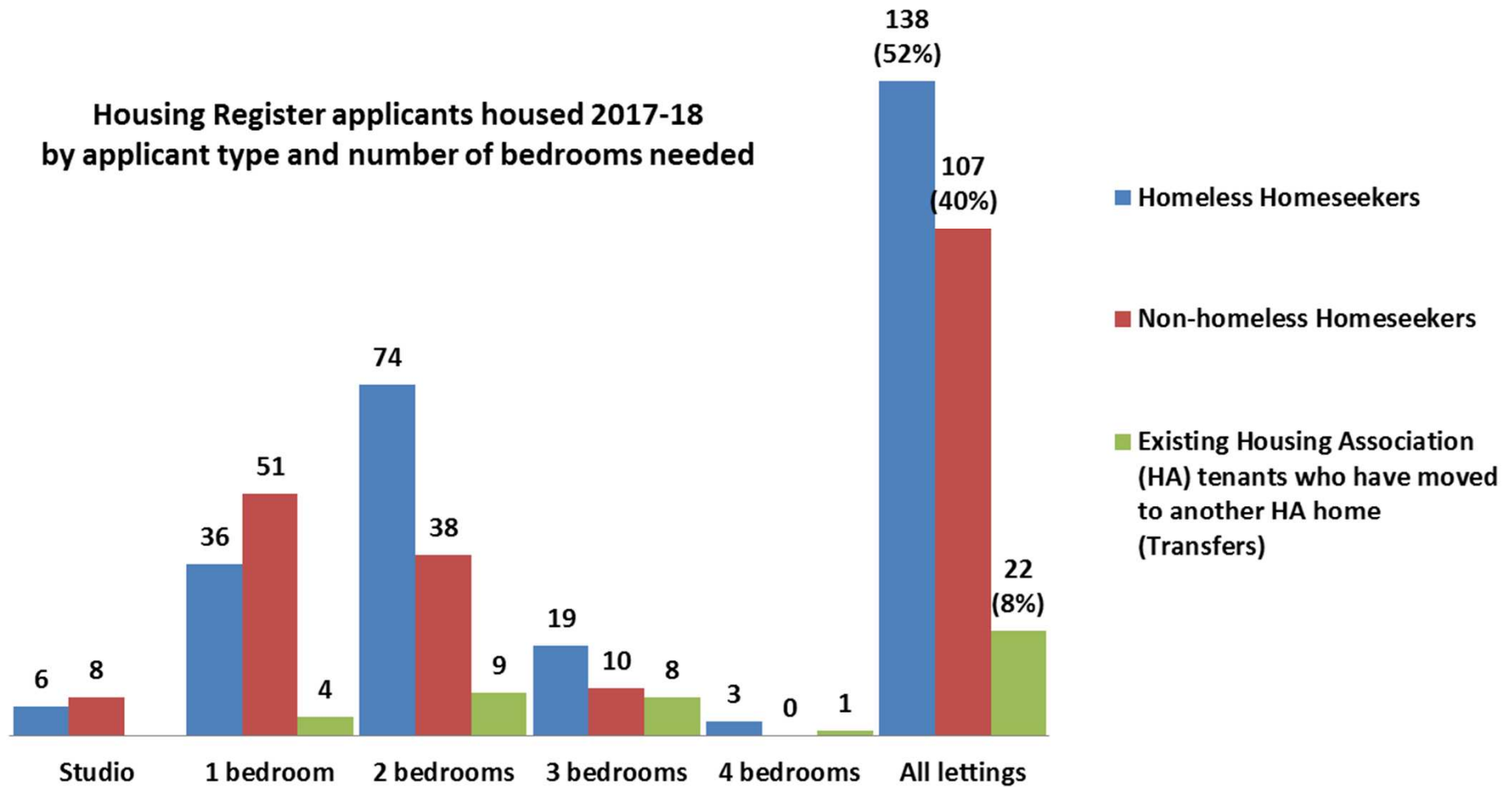
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**No.s of Housing Register April 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018
compared to numbers of applicants housed 2014-15 to 2017-18
in response to a nomination from Watford Council**



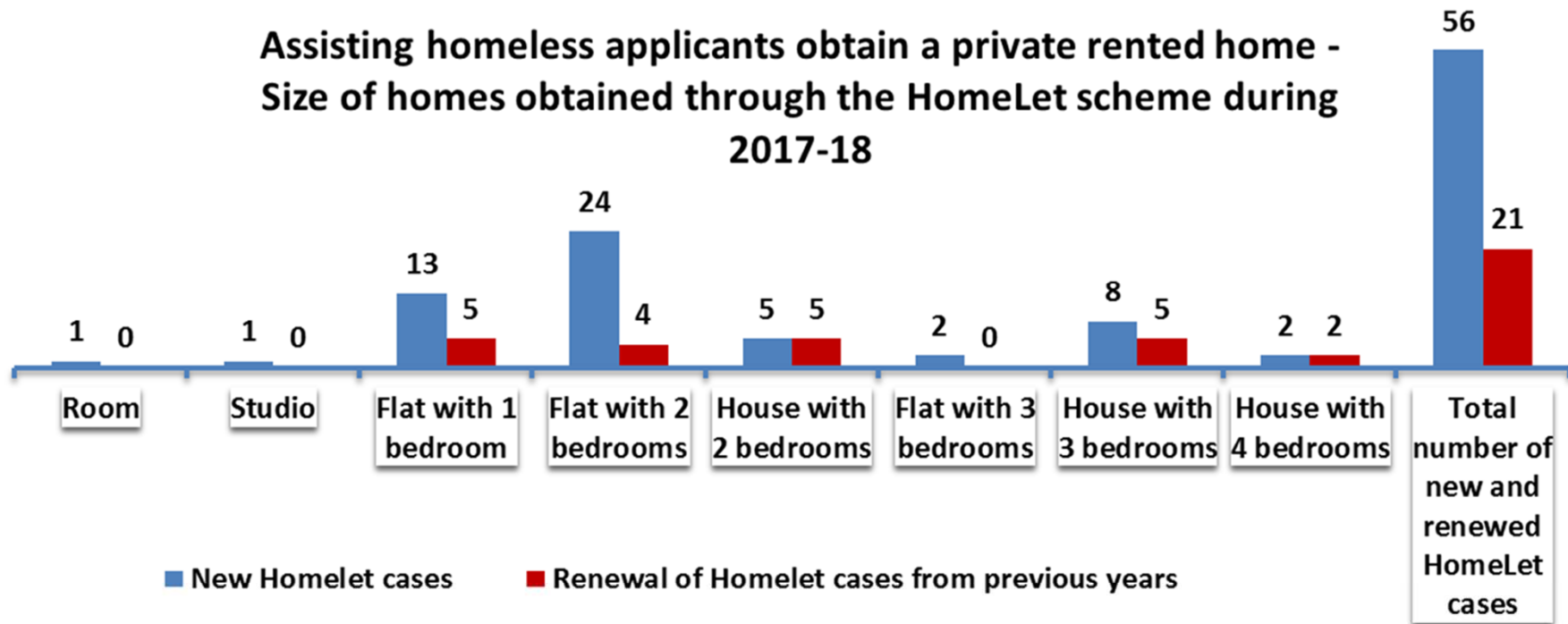
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**Housing Register applicants housed 2017-18
by applicant type and number of bedrooms needed**



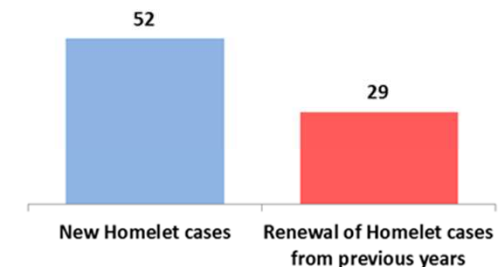
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Assisting homeless applicants obtain a private rented home - Size of homes obtained through the HomeLet scheme during 2017-18



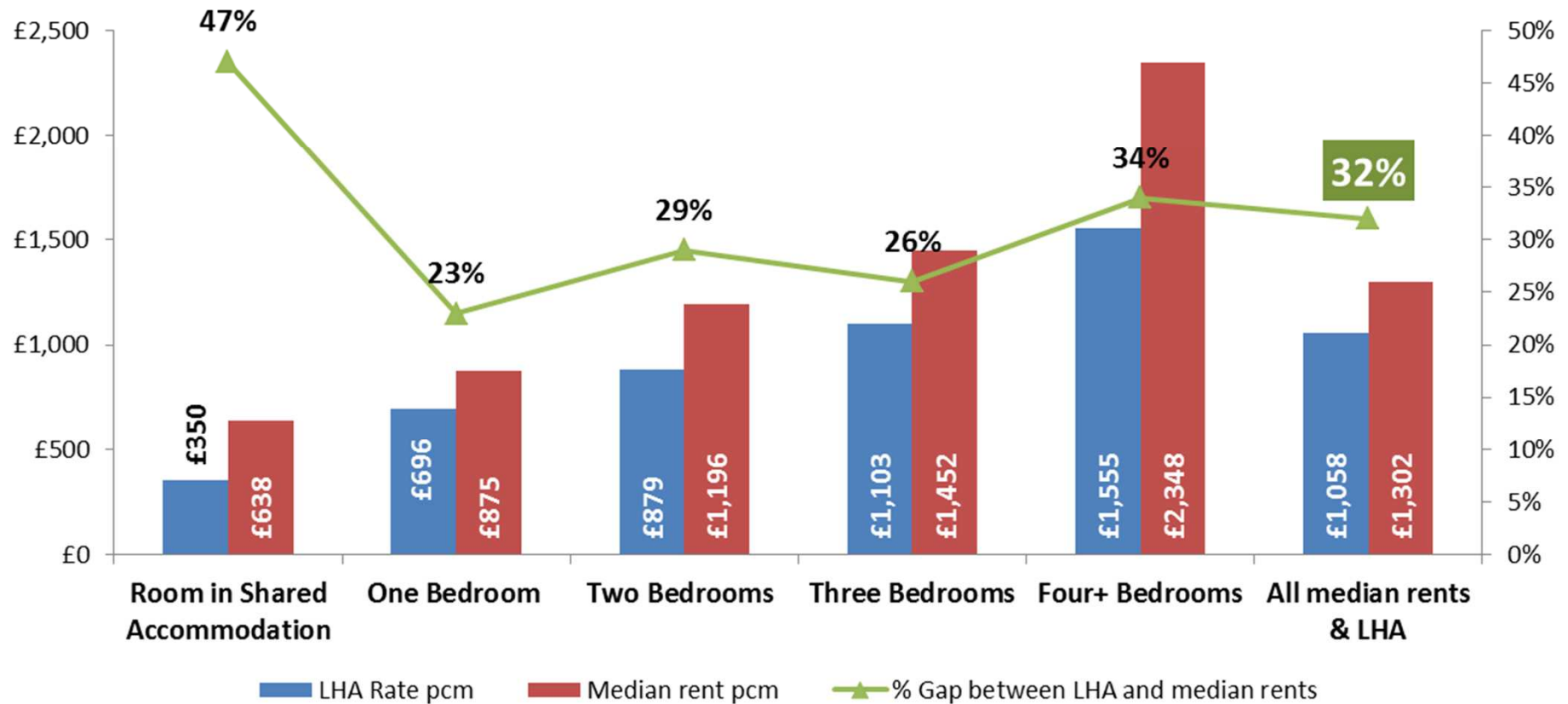
During 2017/18, the areas to which new Homelet applicants moved from Watford included London, St Albans, Berkhamsted, Birmingham, Croydon, Hemel Hempstead, Ilford, Lowestoft and Norwich. Tenancies obtained were for not less than 12 months and several were for 2 years

Total number of new and renewed HomeLet cases 2016-17



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% Gap between LHA and median private rents in Watford as at end April 2018



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Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 – **GAME CHANGER**

- Biggest change in a generation in how LAs deliver homelessness services
- Purpose of HRA17: empowering people to solve their own housing issues through
 - A strengthened duty on LAs to provide advice and information about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness
 - Extending the period of “threatened with homelessness” from 28 days to 56 days and a new duty to prevent homelessness for households in this situation
 - A new LA duty to relieve homelessness where it has not been prevented for all eligible people regardless of priority need and intentionality over a further period of 56 days
 - Personalised housing plans setting out the actions local authorities and individuals will take to secure their existing home or find a new home
 - Encouraging public bodies to work together to prevent and relieve homelessness through a duty to refer



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HRA17 overview cont'd

- Started 1 April 2018
- Three stages to every housing application (rather than one as before):
 - **Prevention** of threatened homelessness – 56 days
 - **Relief** of actual homelessness – 56 days
 - **Decision** on duty to house – either after 112 days (Prevention & Relief) or after 56 days (Relief only)
- Highly supportive in-depth approach to clients required: coaching, mentoring, enabling, proactive
- A lot more review of LA decisions involved – up to 6 potential review points per applicant
- Anyone can request any LA for assistance
 - Local connection still applies to homelessness decisions
- A revised Homelessness Code of Guidance put in place by the government
- No new supply of housing to assist



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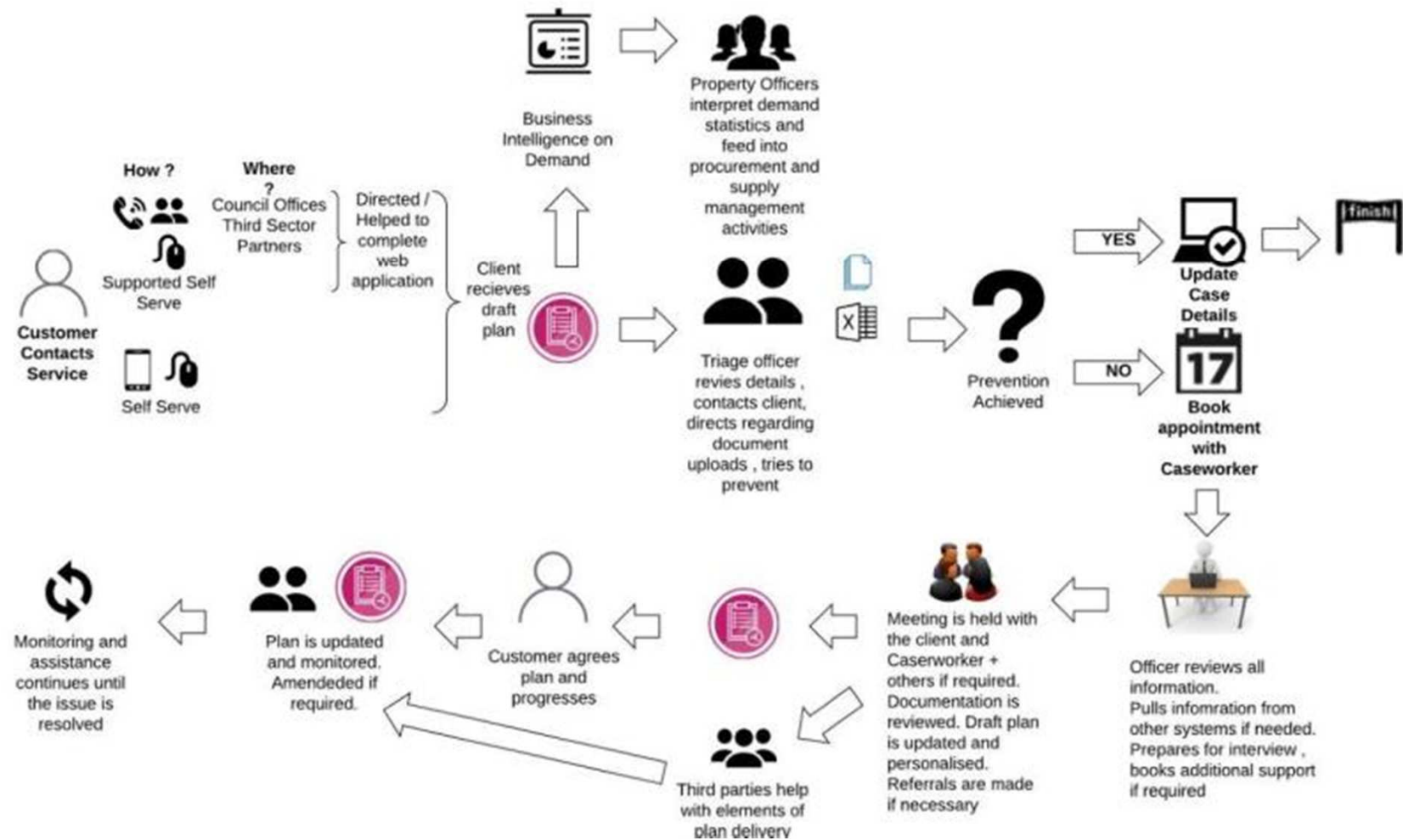
HRA17 preparations

- New integrated end to end Housing IT system
- New Customer Journey defined
- New Housing Team structure put in place and recruited to
- All with Watford 2020 principles in mind
- Staff training
 - Culture change ongoing
 - Coaching
- Overhaul of council's housing web pages
- Products, tools and resources (knowledge and finance) for staff to help deliver PHPs and maximise homelessness prevention options
- Changes to Housing Nominations Policy made in response to HRA requirements
- NPSS Gold Standard Challenge – Bronze award obtained July 2018 – Corporate Commitment to preventing homelessness



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New Customer Journey



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What we expected

- Volumes of requests for assistance to increase
 - Single people – biggest increase
 - No local connection needed
- Volumes of work per applicant much greater
 - Personal Housing Plans (PHPs) – statutorily required – elements included:
 - What is the housing problem?
 - What support applicant needs to help resolve (eg, financial, referral)
 - What housing option is wanted (eg, remain or find new place)
 - PHP Tasks allocated to applicant and caseworker; caseworker constantly monitoring and updating PHPs within statutory timeframes
 - Reviews of LA decisions made – up to 6 reviews possible per application

What's happened in practice

- Pre-HRA Backlog
- 12 Housing advice cases
 - Under-reported
- 76 applications dealt with under HRA (3/4/18 to 11/7/18)
 - 34 at Prevention stage, of which:
 - 30 are still being assisted
 - Two cases were brought to an end because they were housed
 - One prevented by putting in place a rent repayment agreement
 - One enabled to maintain their original home after tests confirmed it was safe to live in
 - 17 at Relief stage, of which
 - 14 are still being assisted; Two were discharged ; One has been housed and the Relief duty brought to an end
 - 25 at Homeless decision stage
 - 20 ongoing investigations; one found intentionally homeless; four agreed homeless and duty to house accepted



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