

The Highland Council
Community Services Committee

21 August 2014

Agenda Item	13
Report No	COM/21/14

Update on Homeless Initiatives

Report by the Director of Community Services

Summary

This report updates Members on three key initiatives currently in progress which will help to improve the lives of homeless people in Highland. These initiatives are the Temporary Accommodation Re-provisioning Project; the review of Homeless Support Services; and a proposed review of homeless processes as a result of the recent Scottish Housing Regulator thematic inspection of housing options and homelessness prevention nationally.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Three key initiatives have been identified to improve the way we provide services to homeless people in Highland.
- 1.2 The Temporary Accommodation Re-provisioning Project is using savings from the reduction in leased private sector rooms used to provide temporary accommodation to invest in building and procuring Council owned self-contained one-bedroom flats in small developments across the Highlands. This move to increase the provision of better quality, Council owned accommodation will help improve the life chances of homeless people in Highland.
- 1.3 The on-going review of housing support services for homeless clients is developing new arrangements for assessing and providing housing support to vulnerable clients across Highland in order to meet new legal requirements.
- 1.4 The recent Scottish Housing Regulator Thematic inspection into housing options has highlighted a need to review how we currently deliver homeless services in Highland.
- 1.5 These projects are inter-dependent and they are coordinated at officer level by the Homeless Initiatives Project Board chaired by the Head of Housing.
- 1.6 Until now regular reports have been provided to Committee on the temporary accommodation project. This paper gives Members an update on all three initiatives, and it is recommended that future update reports are presented on all homelessness issues.

2. The Temporary Accommodation Re-provisioning Project up-date

- 2.1 In April 2013, the Finance, Housing and Resources Committee agreed a new approach to the Council's provision of temporary accommodation for homeless

households. The last up-date on the project was considered by the Finance, Housing and Resources (FHR) Committee in January 2014, when it was agreed that regular progress reports would be provided to Committee.

- 2.2 A reduction in homelessness in 2012 allowed us to re-think how we provide temporary accommodation for homeless people in Highland. This project takes the savings generated by the reduction in the need for bed and breakfast type accommodation and uses it to fund the development of new one bedroom properties within housing development projects. The project also uses the savings to fund the acquisition of further one bedroom properties through the open market for use as temporary accommodation.
- 2.3 The project business case was based on a reduction in use of **50** private sector rooms per year across Highland to 2017. This was predicted to generate revenue savings of £1.8m over 4 years which would fund loan charges on borrowing required to build or acquire **200** new homes by 2017.
- 2.4 The project has met the year one business case aims. We reduced our use of framework rooms by **73** and generated savings of £391,000. To date **25** one bedroom units have been added to our HRA stock as a result of this project with **63** further units currently secured in the current development programme, either on site or at the planning stage. These new build properties are being funded through the overall HRA capital programme with associated loan charges met from the revenue savings generated.

3. Issues and constraints

- 3.1 Several risks to the success of the project were identified at the planning stage, and these are reviewed regularly by the Homeless Initiatives Project Board. The main current areas of concern are highlighted below.
- 3.2 An increase in homelessness is one of the major risks to the successful delivery of the project as this will impact on our ability to reduce the use of framework rooms. Homeless presentations remained fairly static with a slight decrease from **1,001** in 2012/13 to **990** in 2013/14. The number of homeless applicants in temporary accommodation waiting for permanent homes fell from **477** at the end of 2012/13 to **458** at the end of 2013/14. While this is a positive situation at this stage, there are concerns that the impacts of Welfare Reform may result in increased homelessness and this is being closely monitored.
- 3.3 Constraints on the availability of land for development in Inverness present a risk to achieving an adequate supply of new Council owned units in the main area where the reduction in the use of framework rooms required. The Inverness team reduced their use of framework rooms by **44** 2013/14, while only **16** one bedroom properties have been added to stock in Inverness. This will have to be balanced in future years.

4. Management and support services for temporary accommodation

- 4.1 Effective housing management and housing support arrangements are identified in the business case as crucial in mitigating some of the project risk factors. Good management of temporary accommodation is also crucial to:

- ensure the best outcome for the homeless person and allow them to move to their permanent home free of debt and with the skills to sustain their permanent tenancy.
- Ensure that temporary accommodation is managed as effectively as any other type of accommodation and issues such as rent arrears; anti-social behaviour; estate management and repairs are dealt with correctly and meet Scottish Social Housing Charter requirements.

4.2 At the Finance Housing and Resources Committee in January 2014, it was agreed that further consideration be given to arrangements to provide housing management and housing support services in relation to the additional HRA property used as temporary accommodation.

4.3 It is recommended that housing management in temporary furnished accommodation, for management tasks such as dealing with arrears, should be carried out in-house through Housing Management Officer level posts and that housing support should be provided by external support providers. This will give a consistency of approach with mainstream tenancies and help to ensure that homeless people are fully prepared to move on to a secure tenancy or other permanent housing outcome with seamless support provision.

4.4 Provision for the cost of managing new temporary accommodation units were identified within the business case for the project. Arrangements to establish additional Housing Management Officer posts will be progressed through the normal process for establishing posts and filling vacancies. Arrangements for providing housing support services will be included in the review of delivery of housing support services described below.

5. Homeless Housing Support Services Review

5.1 The Council is in the process of undertaking a comprehensive review of the way Housing Support Services are delivered. Currently housing support services for homeless clients are delivered through contracts with 9 independent providers with a total budget of £1,822,451 for 2014/15.

5.2 A review of current arrangements is being undertaken for a number of reasons:

- a) A requirement to meet new statutory duties introduced in 2012 to assess housing support needs and provide access to housing support for all homeless and potentially homeless people in need of it;
- b) Developing a housing support service tailored to meet the individual needs of homeless people;
- c) Implementing greater focus on outcomes and monitoring the success of housing support interventions;
- d) Integration of housing support services with other homelessness services, e.g. with the homelessness assessment, and with the work of the Homeless Prevention Team;
- e) To provide access to Housing Support across all areas of the Highlands;
- f) To implement improved systems of service delivery, monitoring and accountability;
- g) Exploring the potential for efficiency savings.

- 5.3 We have engaged with current housing support providers regarding these requirements for change. This has included one to one consultation sessions with each of the providers.
- 5.4 We have re-drafted the Service Specification which sets out consistent service delivery requirements; arrangements for referrals of clients to support providers; and reporting and monitoring of outcomes.
- 5.5 The proposed model for delivery is for the management of service contracts to be undertaken by 2 in-house Contract Monitoring Officers. Consideration is currently being given to funding for these posts and this will be subject to a further report to Committee.
- 5.6 We anticipate commencing a trial of the new service specification with our current providers in October 2014 with a view to beginning a formal procurement process during 2015.

6. Scottish Housing Regulator Thematic Enquiry

- 6.1 The Scottish Housing Regulator carried out a thematic inspection on housing options during 2013 and published their findings and recommendations in May 2014. Their main findings were that there was a lack of Scottish Government guidance for local authorities on housing options and homeless prevention and that until recently there was no consistent national monitoring of homeless prevention activity and outcomes. The regulator was concerned that there is too great a concentration on targets for reduced homeless presentations and that this is not the best measure for monitoring successful outcomes. In general the Scottish Housing Regulator was concerned that current models for homelessness prevention may not be focussed on the needs of clients.
- 6.2 As well as recommending that the Scottish Government provides enhanced guidance for local authorities the regulator recommends that local authorities review their delivery of homelessness services to ensure they are focussed on achieving outcomes that meet people's needs; that they are person centred; that they prioritise early intervention and provide balanced and appropriate advice and information.
- 6.3 Although the Council's Homelessness Prevention Team has undoubtedly had a positive impact in reducing homelessness and helping people access other housing options the current model does separate homelessness assessment from homelessness prevention in a way that is not considered to be best practice. It is therefore recommended that the current arrangements for delivering homelessness services be reviewed against the recommendations made by the Scottish Housing Regulator and that a future report on proposals for changes to delivery arrangements should be provided to Committee in the next report on Homelessness.

7. Implications

- 7.1 **Resources** – resource issues associated with re-provisioning temporary accommodation were identified and analysed as part of the detailed business plan. Overall this project is cost neutral for the Council but uses resources more effectively and provides long term assets. Resources for providing

housing management were factored into the business plan. Resource implications for monitoring housing support contracts are currently being considered and this will be subject to a further report.

- 7.2 **Legal** – legal issues were identified and analysed and form part of the detailed business plan for the temporary accommodation project. There are a number of contractual issues with current providers which are currently being considered. There are legal implications for the Council resulting from the requirement to assess and provide housing support services to all homeless people. The work currently being undertaken on housing support services aims to ensure the Council meets its legal duties.
- 7.3 **Equalities** - an Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for the temporary accommodation project and no group will be disadvantaged by the proposal. There are some equality issues associated with the findings of the Scottish Housing Regulator thematic inspection, which need to be addressed through a review of the Council's current service delivery.
- 7.4 **Climate Change/Carbon Clever** – no impact arising from this report.
- 7.5 **Risks** to the proposal were identified and analysed and form part of the detailed business plan, and current risks are highlighted in section 3 of this report.
- 7.6 **Gaelic and Rural implications** - no impact arising from this report

Recommendation

The Committee is asked to:

1. Note the progress of the Temporary Accommodation Re-provisioning Project;
2. Agree that housing management in temporary furnished accommodation should be carried out in-house through Housing Management Officer level posts and that housing support should be provided by external support providers;
3. Note that the next quarterly report will provide an update on housing support services and recommendations arising from the Scottish Housing Regulator Thematic Inspection of housing options services; and
4. Agree that future quarterly reports are presented on all homelessness issues affecting the Council.

Designation: Director of Community Services

Date: 4 August 2014

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Background Papers: