

**The Highland Council**  
**Community Services Committee**

**5 February 2015**

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| Agenda Item | <b>7</b>        |
| Report No   | <b>COM 4/15</b> |

**Update on Homeless Initiatives**

**Report by the Director of Community Services**

**Summary**

This report updates Members on homelessness services and initiatives including the Temporary Accommodation Re-provisioning Project, housing support services for homeless clients, and consultation on future arrangements for delivering homeless services.

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 A number of 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 private sector rooms used to provide temporary accommodation to invest in building and procuring Council owned self-contained one-bedroom flats across the Highlands. Increasing the provision of better quality accommodation will help improve the life chances of homeless people in Highland.
- 1.3 Members previously agreed that the preferred model for providing housing support was through independent support providers. We have been negotiating changes to current housing support contracts against a background of achieving budget savings on housing support costs.
- 1.4 The Scottish Housing Regulator published a national report on its enquiry into housing options and homelessness prevention services in May 2014. As reported to Committee on 21 August 2014 this highlighted the need to review how we currently deliver homelessness services.
- 1.5 This paper gives Members an update on current initiatives.

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

- 2.1 This initiative was approved by the Finance, Housing and Resources Committee in January 2013, and aims to deliver 200 new one bedroom units over 4 years to 2017. To date 47 new one bedroom units have been built or acquired across Highland as a result of this project with 64 further units

currently secured in the new build programme.

- 2.2 The business plan for the project is based on numbers in temporary accommodation remaining at or below the baseline figure for 2012/13. An increase in homelessness is one of the major risks to the successful delivery of the project. Homeless presentations have remained stable over the period of the project with 943 presentations in 2013/14 compared with 1,100 in 2012/13. There have been 494 presentations in the first two quarters of 2014/15, maintaining the trend from last year.
- 2.3 Over the past 3 years the number of households in temporary accommodation has been decreasing. However, figures for the last 2 quarters do indicate an increase. Further work needs to be done to make sure that we are minimising the length of time people are spending in temporary accommodation. This links to a proposed review of operational arrangements outlined below.
- 2.4 We have reduced the number of framework rooms by 67 since the start of the project, as well as reducing the purchase of ad hoc bed and breakfast rooms. Financial monitoring is on-going on a monthly basis and current predictions are that we will achieve the required year two saving. However, there is a risk that we will not meet the overall target if homeless presentations increase, and/or we are unable to maintain or improve on current average length of time spent in temporary accommodation.
- 2.5 The other significant risk to the project is considered to be development constraints in Inverness, meaning that there are fewer opportunities to build new units where the majority existing rooms are located. Discussions are ongoing with the Development and Infrastructure Service regarding the housing development programme.
- 2.6 As well as building new units, the project is also adding to our stock of one bed units through open market acquisition. This has been essential in areas such as Inverness where development constraints are impacting on our ability to build new units. To date 15 new one bedroom properties have been purchased through the project: 6 of these in Inverness, 4 in Lochaber and 5 in Ross-shire.
- 2.7 There are concerns that the impacts of Welfare Reform, particularly the roll-out of Universal Credit in Highland, may result in increased homelessness and affect affordability of temporary accommodation. Further analysis is being undertaken to establish whether we should change arrangements for providing affordable temporary accommodation in future.

### **3. Homeless Housing Support Services Review**

- 3.1 Housing support is important to reduce homelessness and increase tenancy sustainment. There is now a requirement to assess and provide access to housing support for all homeless and potentially homeless people in need of it. The Council is in the process of undertaking a review of the way Housing Support Services are delivered.

- 3.2 Changes to arrangements for delivering housing support services are being introduced against a background of budget savings agreed by the Council on 18 December 2014. We are currently in the process of amending current housing support contracts to reflect this budget saving.
- 3.3 We will continue to liaise with housing support providers and stakeholders to ensure the implementation of improved systems of service delivery which will focus on outcomes for clients.
- 3.4 The Council also agreed to reduce the in-house resource funded from the homelessness housing support budget in December 2014, reflecting the earlier decision of the Community Services Committee in August 2014 that housing support should be provided by external providers. Consultation is taking place with existing staff regarding changes to roles and remits which should focus more on the management of temporary accommodation rather than providing housing support services.

#### **4. Scottish Housing Regulator Thematic Enquiry**

- 4.1 As previously reported to Committee the Scottish Housing Regulator has recommended that local authorities review their delivery of homelessness services to ensure that they are focussed on achieving outcomes that meet peoples' needs; that they are person centred; that they prioritise early intervention; and that they provide balanced and appropriate case specific advice and information.
- 4.2 Since the previous report consultation has taken place with staff and stakeholders on their views of current service delivery in Highland. A total of 64 staff members and 51 stakeholders were surveyed in late 2014. Service users have also been issued with a survey. In addition the annual Homeless Action Inverness "speak-out" event held in Inverness on 4 December 2014 also provided an opportunity for service users to provide feedback.
- 4.3 From the results so far some of the common themes are emerging:
- the need to focus on a person's needs rather than the homelessness process;
  - a strong view that prevention and homelessness assessment should be integrated rather than treated as separate functions / activities;
  - each client should have a single "case officer" who would deal with them from start to finish;
  - we should aim to offer help and advice earlier than we currently do; and
  - we need to identify and provide support to service users.
- 4.4 Although we have not yet completed the survey and undertaken full analysis there does appear to be a high level of consensus about how homelessness services should be delivered in future. It is now intended to have further consultation with staff and trade unions to develop detailed proposals for changes to operational arrangements for service delivery reflecting the positive feedback received.

## 5. Implications

- 5.1 Resources – resource issues were identified and analysed and form part of the detailed business plan for temporary accommodation. Overall this project is cost neutral for the Council but uses resources more effectively and provides long term assets.
- 5.2 Legal – legal issues were identified and analysed and form part of the detailed business plan. There are a number of contractual issues with current providers which will be dealt with during 2014.
- 5.3 Equalities - an Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for this proposal. No group will be disadvantaged by the proposal.
- 5.4 Climate Change/Carbon Clever – no impact arising from this report.
- 5.5 Risks to the proposal were identified and analysed and form part of the detailed business plan. Current risks are detailed in the report.
- 5.6 Gaelic and Rural implications - no impact arising from this report

### Recommendation

Members are asked to:

1. note the progress and risks identified on the Temporary Accommodation Re-provisioning Project;
2. note the action being taken to implement new arrangements to achieve agreed budget savings on housing support services; and
3. agree to develop detailed proposals for changes to operational arrangements for delivering homelessness services based on the following principles:
  - the service should focus on a person's needs;
  - prevention and homelessness assessment should be integrated rather than treated as separate functions / activities;
  - each client should have a single "case officer" who would deal with them from start to finish;
  - we should aim to offer help and advice as early as possible; and
  - we should identify and provide housing support services to service users.

Designation: Director of Community Services

Date: 23 January 2015

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