

Agenda Item	5.
Report No	PEO 16/18

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: People Committee

Date: 15 March 2018

Report Title: Homelessness and Temporary Accommodation

Report By: Director of Community Services

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an update on homelessness and temporary accommodation in Highland and on emerging national policy on homelessness.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are invited to note developing national policy on homelessness

3. Background

- 3.1 The People Committee Policy Group considered homelessness at their meeting on 19 September 2017.
- 3.2 The People Committee received an update on homelessness initiatives in December 2017.
- 3.3 This report provides an update on homelessness and temporary accommodation in Highland and on emerging national policy on homelessness.
- 3.4 Main areas of work on homelessness over the last year have involved:-
- Increasing use of HRA / RSL stock
 - Retendering our temporary accommodation framework with private sector providers
 - Developing our Housing Options approach to homeless prevention in line with national guidance.
- 3.5 In Highland the number of people presenting as homeless has been relatively stable over the last 5 years, but the number of households in temporary accommodation has increased. This is largely due to the lack of suitable housing available to make offers of permanent accommodation. This pressure is also illustrated by figures for case duration in Highland, which is 42 weeks on average.
- 3.6 Highland also has a far higher reliance on private sector Housing in Multiple Occupation (HMO) rooms with shared facilities for temporary accommodation than other parts of Scotland.

4 National Policy Objectives

- 4.1 As previously reported the Programme for Government includes the following new commitments to tackle Homelessness in Scotland:-
- Set a clear national objective to eradicate rough sleeping, recognising that it requires more than just the provision of housing;
 - Establish a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group to develop responses on the actions and legislative changes required to transform the use of temporary accommodation; and
 - Create an 'Ending Homelessness Together' Fund of £50 million over a five year period to support anti homelessness initiatives and pilot solutions to drive faster change.
- 4.2 The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG), chaired by Jon Sparkes, Chief Executive of Crisis, has been meeting regularly since October 2017. It will report its recommendations on rough sleeping, transforming the use of temporary accommodation, and what needs to be done to fix homelessness, by late Spring 2018.

4.3 The Group is currently preparing initial recommendations for Kevin Stewart, Minister for Local Government and Housing. These will be around the following principles:-

- Preventing homelessness and rough sleeping – ensuring that as few people as possible have to endure the indignity of sleeping rough, not least by ensuring that groups at particular risk, such as people coming out of prison or hospital, have clear routes to mainstream accommodation built into the system;
- support on the frontline – making sure those working on the frontline having the training, skills, flexibility and freedom to do the best they can for the person in front of them without unnecessary delays;
- access to accommodation – getting people into settled accommodation, with the right types of support in place, as soon as we can;
- legal reform – to underpin shifts in culture and make sure local authorities and other public and voluntary sector bodies have the best framework to help people facing homelessness; and
- measurement – making sure we know how many people are rough sleeping, and where and who they are, so that we can put in place the right support and make sure our interventions are working to end rough sleeping.

5 Housing First Model

5.1 An emerging recommendation from the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group is for a “Housing First Model” approach to homelessness. More information is available at: <https://housingfirstguide.eu/website>. A recent Local Government and Communities Committee Report into homelessness in Scotland also recommended that a Scottish style Housing First approach be implemented.

5.2 Traditional models of homelessness services for those with complex needs involve a process of people moving through different form of temporary accommodation with support until they are considered to be “ready” to take up a tenancy. Once in a mainstream tenancy people will often receive short term housing support. In some cases this approach to temporary accommodation can be an obstacle to people addressing their needs, trigger a recurrence of previous difficulties and create a ‘snakes and ladders’ pathway to independent living.

5.3 The housing first model of supported accommodation emerged in the USA in the early 1990’s. The approach stemmed from initiatives to meet the needs of the substantial population of chronically street homeless people with multiple and complex needs. The model has grown and developed across Europe due to its effectiveness.

5.4 The housing first model is based on the following premises:-

1. housing is a basic human right, not a reward for clinical success, and
2. once the chaos of homelessness is eliminated from a person’s life, clinical and social stabilisation occur faster and are more enduring.

5.5 The model has been tested in Glasgow through the charity Turning Point Scotland. “Glasgow Housing First” provides mainstream social housing and 24 hour support to individuals who are homeless, aged 18 or over and involved in drug misuse.

- 5.6 The project involved a three-year pilot running from October 2010 until September 2013. It involved providing housing and support to 22 individuals who were homeless and actively involved in substance misuse (drugs, alcohol, or poly-substance misuse). The pilot was funded by Turning Point Scotland, the Big Lottery Fund (for one year), and Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board. The project team consisted of 6 full time staff.
- 5.7 People were placed directly into independent tenancies in Glasgow with no requirement to progress through traditional temporary accommodation. Within tenancies the approach to drug and alcohol use was based on harm reduction rather than full abstinence which is normally associated with traditional temporary accommodation. People were offered a choice of support, including tenancy management, budgeting, personal safety, cooking and food shopping. Peer support workers who had similar personal experiences also worked with people to encourage trust, friendship and engagement with local recovery services.
- 5.8 The project achieved impressive outcomes for the clients involved, but perhaps not surprisingly at a high running cost. Nonetheless, whilst detailed costs are not currently available, research in 2015 which evaluated nine Housing First services in England concluded that for those long-term and repeatedly homeless people with high support needs who spend significant time in supported housing, Housing First may offer a lower cost alternative.
- 5.9 A Housing First Approach in Highland could mean relying much less on temporary accommodation in hostels, bed and breakfast and supported housing. As well as improving people's outcomes, this could significantly reduce the time spent in temporary accommodation and associated cost. Obviously this would need to be balanced against the actual availability of permanent housing and consideration of the cost and capacity for meaningful multi-agency commitment to support clients with multiple / complex needs in mainstream accommodation.
- 5.10 It is likely that one of the recommendations from the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group will be that all Councils will be asked to develop local plans in relation to this approach.
- 5.11 In the meantime the Scottish Government has commissioned research to develop a "Rapid Rehousing Transition" Framework and toolkit, and we expect to discuss details of the Council's current supply and demand issues with the consultant over the next month.

6 Update on Temporary accommodation

- 6.1 As previously reported the Council provides temporary accommodation through a mix of our own housing stock, property leased from individual private landlords, or through a framework contract with a range of accommodation providers. Any additional accommodation required is purchased on an ad hoc basis. Unlike most other Councils the majority of our temporary accommodation is in private sector property, and we have a high use of bed and breakfast type accommodation.

- 6.2 The Community Services Committee agreed in April 2016 that we should move to a model where the majority of temporary accommodation is provided in Council owned (Housing Revenue Account) properties. We currently have 224 HRA properties used as temporary accommodation, an increase of 30% since April 2017. Given the shortage of 1 bed accommodation, we are also piloting an approach which enables 2 people to share temporary accommodation and this appears to be successful.
- 6.3 The Council's long term strategy for temporary accommodation is to increase the use of self-contained, furnished Council or Housing Association property, and reduce the reliance on private sector property. This provides the best quality for clients and at the least cost to the Council.
- 6.4 Whilst our use of Council owned temporary accommodation is continuing to increase steadily as planned, the use of private sector property has not been reducing at a corresponding rate.
- 6.5 Our current provision of private sector temporary accommodation tends to be dominated by HMO type accommodation which is expensive and does not always meet the needs and expectations of clients. We have completed a retendering exercise for private sector temporary accommodation. Despite significant changes to the specification aimed at widening the provider base, the tendering exercise has resulted in fewer providers than previously and will result in increased costs unless we significantly reduce the use of this accommodation.
- 6.6 Numerically the greatest pressure on temporary accommodation is in Inverness, where on average almost half of homeless presentations take place. With the aim of moving people out of homelessness onto positive solutions as quickly as possible, we are currently considering cases of homeless presentations in Inverness where we could meet our duties by providing accommodation (both temporary and permanent) within other areas of Highland. We are also reviewing staff roles, remits and workloads.

7 Implications

- 7.1 Resource: The resources issues involved are detailed in the report.
- 7.2 Legal: The Council's legal duties in relation to homelessness are summarised in the report. There are no specific implications arising from this report.
- 7.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural): Preventing and responding to homelessness has a significant impact on individuals and communities. Our overall strategy for homelessness aims to tackle current health and other inequalities. Although case numbers are concentrated in Inverness we recognise that there are different challenges in rural communities.
- 7.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever: There are no implications arising from this report.
- 7.5 Risk: There are financial and regulatory risks associated with current and proposed national policy in welfare reform and potential statutory guidance on the Housing First approaches.

7.6 Gaelic: There are no implications arising from the report.

Designation: Director of Community Services

Date: 2 March 2017

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