

## **WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**

### **Report by Executive Director of Housing, Environmental and Economic Development**

**Housing, Environment and Economic Development Committee: 5 March 2008**

---

**Subject: Homeless Services: Length of Time between Presentation and Completion of Duty**

#### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to provide Committee with information on the actions which are being taken to reduce the average time between presentation and completion of duty by the Council for those cases assessed as homeless or potentially homeless.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1** A report on the performance of the Housing, Environmental and Economic Development Department was submitted to the meeting of the Housing, Environment and Economic Development Committee on 9 January 2007. The Committee agreed that, with regard to Homeless Services, a report should be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee specifying any measures which could be taken to reduce the average time between presentation and completion of duty by the Council for those cases assessed as homeless or potentially homeless.
- 2.2** The length of time between presentation and completion of duty by the Council for those cases assessed as homeless or potentially homeless is a Statutory Performance Indicator - HS6B. Quarterly reports are submitted as part of the Quarterly Performance Review process and the situation is carefully managed and monitored.
- 2.3** The time between presentation and completion of duty has continued to increase in the first three quarters of 2007/08. This is in line with the National trend which has seen this measure continually increase since 2003/04. West Dunbartonshire continues to compare favourably with other local authorities in regard to this measure, despite the fact that in percentage population terms, West Dunbartonshire has the highest incidence of homeless presentations in Scotland.
- 2.4** Homelessness is rarely just a housing problem and Homeless Services deal with individuals who have reached a crisis point in their lives. Lengthy stays in temporary accommodation are avoided where possible. However, it is important that in advance of homeless applicants moving on to permanent tenancies, any support needs are fully assessed and addressed. Support packages require to be tailored to meet the needs of the individual and this can in itself be a fairly lengthy process.

- 2.5** The importance of ensuring that support packages meet the needs of individual clients is recognised by the two 24 hour supported accommodation projects within West Dunbartonshire. Whilst NCH prefers clients to move on after 6 months, Blue Triangle places no restrictions on the length of time that clients can remain in the project. Homeless Services has no difficulty with this approach as staff are closely involved in the care planning process. However, lengthy stays in supported accommodation do have an impact on the overall timescales.
- 2.6** It should be noted that in terms of Statutory Performance Indicators, Homeless Services also report on the level of repeat homelessness i.e. the number of applications re-assessed as homeless or potentially homeless within 12 months of the previous case being completed. This indicator compares very well with the Scottish average and within WDC the percentage of repeat applications has continued to decrease not only by comparison to the same period last year but also throughout the current year. It would, therefore, appear that whilst the length of time being taken to resettle homeless applicants is increasing, the housing solutions are sustainable in the longer term.

### **3. Main Issues**

- 3.1** Care has to be taken to ensure that a speedy offer of permanent re-housing is, in fact, a realistic solution to the problem and does not, in itself, exacerbate the difficulties that an individual is experiencing. This is particularly relevant for applicants who present as homeless following a relationship breakdown but who are able to reconcile with their partners/families within weeks of their initial presentation.
- 3.2** To ensure that homeless clients can move in to their permanent tenancies as quickly as possible, the Homeless Services section has targeted the resources of the in-house Support Team on resettlement activities. The Support Workers work closely with individuals to ensure that all services are connected, Housing Benefit is in payment and if eligible they have received a Community Care grant to assist with tenancy sustainability in the longer term.
- 3.3** To address the difficulties homeless clients have accessing furniture etc., Homeless Services are continuing with the conversion of temporary accommodation units to permanent tenancies in areas where we have identified that there is a concentration of temporary accommodation units and the client is settled. This not only means that homeless applicants can move in to a permanent tenancy with all the basics provided but it also helps stabilise existing communities.
- 3.4** In recognition of the issues surrounding housing supply, Homeless Services continue to work closely with the local Registered Social Landlords to improve performance on Section 5 referrals.

**3.5** In order to manage and monitor the length of time between presentation and completion of duty more effectively, an exception reporting system has recently been introduced for all cases over 14 weeks. The process is being led by the Homeless Officers and in discussion with the individuals concerned and their support agencies, clear planning mechanisms have been put in place to ensure that if possible homeless clients are resettled in permanent accommodation as quickly as possible. Initially all cases are being reviewed on a fortnightly basis.

**4. Personnel Issues**

**4.1** There are no personnel issues

**5. Financial Implications**

**5.1** There are no financial implications associated with this report.

**6. Risk Analysis**

**6.1** If the timescales between presentation and completion of duty were to continue to increase, it could mean that to meet our statutory obligations, we would have to increase our supply of temporary accommodation units.

**7. Conclusion**

**7.1** This report specifies a range of measures which are being taken to reduce the average time between presentation and completion of duty by the Council for those cases assessed as homeless or potentially homeless. Evidence available would suggest that West Dunbartonshire continues to compare favourably with other local authorities and that while the length of time taken to re-settle homeless applications is increasing, consistent with national trends, the housing solutions adopted are sustainable in the longer term.

**8. Recommendation**

**8.1** The Committee is invited to note the contents of this report.

**Elaine Melrose**

**Executive Director of Housing, Environmental and Economic Development**

**Date: 20 February 2008**

**Person to Contact:** Margaret Caldwell - Manager of Housing Operations,  
Garshake Road, Dumbarton, G82 3PU, telephone:  
01389 737874, e-mail: [margaret.caldwell@west-dunbarton.gov.uk](mailto:margaret.caldwell@west-dunbarton.gov.uk)

**Appendices:** None

**Background Papers:** Report to Housing, Environment and Economic  
Development Committee 9 January 2008 - Performance  
Report

**Wards Affected:** All