

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**Report by the Chief Officer, Housing and Employability****Housing and Communities Committee: 22 November 2023**

Subject: “Home at the Heart 2019-24” West Dunbartonshire’s Rapid Re-housing Transition Plan update and new approaches to homelessness progress report

1. Purpose

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to provide members with an update on “Home at the Heart” our Rapid Re-housing Transition Plan (RRTP) for the period 2019-24 and new approaches to homelessness, including;
- Progress update for Year 4 and Year 5 plans,
 - an update on Scottish Government funds to assist in the delivery of the RRTP
 - Lettings requirements for Year 5 of the plan, 2023/24 seeking agreement.
 - Changes to local connection
 - Update on the Scottish Government Response to the recommendations of the Temporary Accommodation Task and Finish Group

2. Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that the Housing and Communities Committee:

- (i) Note the progress and challenges made in the first four years of “Home at the Heart”, which will inform a report to the Scottish Government at the end of August 2023 and note the main objectives for Year 5 in 4.16 - 4.26;
- (ii) Note that the Council’s housing allocation letting target for homeless households is 69% for 2023/24 as set out in paragraph 4.20 of this report and note the Chief Officer, Housing and Employability will keep this target under close review based on current modelling projections;
- (iii) Note the continued uncertainty around future funding and specifically the risk to our Housing First approach;
- (iv) Note and approve that the Scottish Government funding of £251,146 has been awarded for 2023/24 for the specific delivery of the West Dunbartonshire Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan;
- (v) Approve the new Monitoring template of our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan including spend attached as Appendix 1 to this report;
- (vi) Note impacts of legislative changes around Local Connection

3. Background

- 3.1** Our current approach to tackling homelessness is outlined in our RRTP “Home at the Heart” and reinforced within the new Local Housing Strategy approved by the Housing and Communities Committee in November 2021. This approach builds on the good progress made within West Dunbartonshire by previous strategies, most recently our “More than a Roof” approach which covered the period 2017/2020, whilst also acknowledging the challenges set by the renewed Scottish Government national commitments to tackle homelessness, to end rough sleeping and to transform temporary accommodation.
- 3.2** “Home at the Heart” was developed in response to a key recommendation from the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG) that was adopted by the Scottish Government, for Local Authorities to develop and submit a RRTP for the period 2019-2024.
- 3.3** It was developed in partnership with key stakeholders, including HSCP and the wider Housing Solutions Partnership, which includes local Registered Social Landlords. It was submitted to the Scottish Government on 31 December 2018 and retrospectively approved by the Housing and Communities Committee on 6 February 2019.
- 3.4** The feedback received from the Scottish Government in relation to our RRTP has been positive and has highlighted a number of areas of good practice including:
- The comprehensive temporary accommodation modelling undertaken as part of our wider “More than a Roof” approach;
 - The strategic approach to tackling homelessness;
 - The introduction of the supported tenancy model;
 - Prioritising Housing First as a housing solution;
 - Our award winning Leaving Care Housing Protocol; and
 - The fact that WDC has never breached the Unsuitable Accommodation Order. (prior to 2022/23)
- 3.5** Regular reports have been provided to the Housing and Communities Committee, initially detailing and seeking approval for our RRTP and subsequently providing updates in terms of progress being made and approving the use of Scottish Government funding in order to deliver our key objectives.

4. Main Issues

- 4.1** The aims of “Home at the Heart” in terms of tackling homelessness are influenced by the Scottish Social Housing Charter and consistent with the Scottish Government’s “Ending Homelessness Together” approach and are structured around the following four strategic objectives:
- Deliver a whole systems approach to the prevention of homelessness;

- Enable service users with low or no support needs to access settled housing quickly;
- Develop interim housing options which enable independent living and tenancy sustainment; and
- Implement a Housing First model which enables the most excluded service users to secure sustainable housing.

“Home at the Heart” Year 4 Progress

Objective 1: Deliver a whole systems approach to the prevention of homelessness.

- 4.2** The Prevention Officer has continued to engage with households at risk of homelessness. This has included managing the pilot prevention fund which has made payments direct to households totalling £20,600 and has helped ensure that 53 existing tenancies were sustained.
- 4.3** The overall number of approaches to our Housing Options service had increased significantly in 2021/22 linked to the Tenant Hardship Fund but we have continued to see high demand 2022/23. We have prevented 72% of cases from becoming homeless.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Prevent1 approaches	178	240	332	576	455
Prevent1 closures	177	221	249	378	654
% homelessness prevented	64%	57%	51%	52%	72%
% closed with presentation	24%	26%	27%	31%	18%

- 4.4** There has been an increase in Section 11 notices since changes to the cost of living emergency powers on evictions, going from 20 in 2020/21 to 144 in 2022/23. Of those where contact was made and there was engagement with the household, homelessness was prevented in 80% of cases up from 62.5% last year.

Objective 2: Enable service users with low or no support needs to access settled housing quickly.

- 4.5** One of the key objectives of our RRTP is to ensure that homeless households are able to access settled accommodation as quickly as possible. Our key target is reducing the length of time homeless households with no/low support needs spend in temporary accommodation.
- 4.6** We have developed a RRTP model which takes into account the level of new homeless decisions, the backlog of homeless households, projected future demand, the number of lets made to homeless households and projected letting activity. The RRTP model uses this data to determine the number of lets that will be required for homeless households on an annual basis and determines a projected lettings % target.

Calculation of homeless lets required and % of expected letting activity required to meet need - split by LA & RSL		
	Year target	Year 4 actual
Lets required to meet demand	986	727
Split LA	641	465
Split RSL	345	262
% Allocation of lets required		
LA	69%	60%
RSL	69%	49%*

* Percentage may alter as we were unable to get the all letting in Q4 for one RSL

- 4.7** The turnover of available properties was lower than projected and we still have high numbers of voids due to issues affecting void times.
- 4.8** As a result we now have 66 households who have been waiting to be housed longer than a year, of which 28 are in temporary accommodation. There are now 269 households in temporary accommodation including 100 children as at the end of October 2023. This is a 16% increase in the corresponding date in 2022.
- 4.9** As a result, our average times for 2022/23 increased and failed to meet the target of 15 weeks, we reported 17.5 weeks.

Objective 3: Develop interim housing options which enable independent living and tenancy sustainment.

- 4.10** We continue to provide a range of interim housing options for those homeless households with more complex support needs. This includes supported tenancies in the community, as well as residential supported accommodation where this need is identified.
- 4.11** Residential supported accommodation offers temporary accommodation and on-site support to alleviate homelessness and enable homeless households to make a planned transition to settled accommodation. Due to recruitment delays we were unable to take forward the recommendations of the review of supported accommodation as planned.

Objective 4: Implement a Housing First model which enables the most excluded service users to achieve housing sustainment.

- 4.12** A key objective in Year 4 of our RRTP was the upscaling of our Housing First approach for those households with the most complex needs. The available funding allowed to fund the 8 housing first workers but did not allow to expand the service further.
- 4.13** By the end of 2022/23, we had created 15 new Housing First tenancies, a further 4 clients are awaiting an offer of settled accommodation being made.
- 4.14** Due to several households "Stepping Down", meaning a planned exit from the Housing First Service has meant we have there has been additional capacity created therefore an additional 4 tenancies can be created in Year 4.

- 4.15** Whilst our Housing First approach continues to have a high tenancy sustainment rate at 91%. Sadly four of these tenancies have ended due to the death of tenants and for the first time two ended due to tenancy management issues. However, long term future funding for the initiative is still to be clarified.

Year 5 main objectives

Objective 1: Deliver a whole systems approach to the prevention of homelessness.

- 4.16** To enable the prevention fund to be a tool to prevent homelessness allocated £10,000 from this years' RRTP Scottish Government funds to top up the carry-over of £1,263 not spent last year.
- 4.17** The changes to the allocations policy with the creation of a youth priority has now been fully rolled out and will begin to have a positive impact by reducing homeless presentation for those who now benefit from the youth priority list.

Objective 2: Enable service users with low or no support needs to access settled housing quickly.

- 4.18** The time spent in temporary accommodation has been adjusted to account for an increase last year and the supply of properties declining to 15 weeks.
- 4.19** Currently modelling suggests that due to an increased backlog, increased demand and reduced available turnover that for 2023/24 for West Dunbartonshire, 103% of all available social tenancies inclusive of conversions and housing first will require to be allocated to homeless households to ensure targeted reductions in temporary accommodation and faster access to settled accommodation is achieved.
- 4.20** While this cannot be achieved, and recognising other housing need factors it would not be practical to have 100% allocation of lets to homeless households. Therefore we asked our partners to agree to a 69% lettings target to homeless households. This objective was supported by the Housing Improvement Board in terms of lets made by WDC and a similar commitment was sought from our RSL partners via their annual RRTP Contribution Statements.

Calculation of homeless lets required and % of expected letting activity required to meet need - split by LA & RSL	
	Year 5
Lets required for to meet demand	932
Split LA	621
Split RSL	311
Projected turnover	Year 5
Split LA	900
Split RSL	450
% Allocation of lets required	Year 5
LA	69% (include 5% youth priority list applications)

RSL	69%
-----	-----

- 4.21** As 69% isn't enough to fully meet demand and clear the increased backlog of households in temporary accommodation, and will result in a shortfall of around 354 lets and 76 additional units required for temporary accommodation. If we require additional temporary accommodation units this means reduces lets available for mainstream offers and would also require additional staff resources to manage the additional units.

Objective 3: Develop interim housing options which enable independent living and tenancy sustainment

- 4.22** It is expected that the keys findings of the review of Residential Supported Accommodation will begin to be taken forward in Year 5, 2023/24 once staff resources are in place.
- 4.23** To deliver the optimum service model for residential supported accommodation, it is anticipated that a three year plan will be required. This will include the decommissioning of some existing services, the commissioning of new provision in order to better meet identified need and a full financial impact assessment. In order to develop and lead on the development and implementation of this plan we are seeking to recruit an additional resource to lead on the delivery of new residential supported accommodation.

Objective 4: Implement a Housing First model which enables the most excluded service users to achieve housing sustainment.

- 4.24** The available funding does not allow to expand the service further but ensure we operate with 8 housing first support workers enabling support to continue to be provided to the 47 active tenancies and the 2 waiting to be housed carried over into Year 5.
- 4.25** As we have 3 vacancies we are going to explore the option to procure additional support from the Third sector as a one off exercise to be able to create an additional 7 housing first tenancies during 2023/24
- 4.26** A full review of the housing first service will also be carried out during Year 5.

Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan funding update

- 4.27** In December 2022, the Scottish Government confirmed in its Programme for Government that £8 million would be provided to local authorities to support rapid rehousing plans and scale up the Housing First approach nationally for 2023/24.
- 4.28** The formula still being used to allocate local authorities share of this funding is based on the number of homeless assessments made in a local authority area over a three year period. There has been some criticism of this approach as it does not take into account homelessness prevention work within the assessment. It can therefore act as a disincentive to make the wider system changes advocated within Ending Homelessness.

- 4.29** The Scottish Government and COSLA had hoped to explore the possibility of joining up the funding stream for preventing and responding to homelessness with the rapid rehousing funding stream and to look at alternative distribution formulas. However, this work has been delayed due to conflicting Covid-19 responsibilities.
- 4.30** The same formula has therefore been used for the funding allocation for 2023/24. This formula has resulted in an allocation for West Dunbartonshire Council of £251, 146 to deliver Year 5 of our RRTP which was announced on 20 December. In addition the Scottish Government also on the same date confirmed the funding allocation of £649k to West Dunbartonshire Council for the provision of homelessness prevention and response services.

RRTP Year 5 funding	
Year 4 underspend	£1,263
SG funding for Year 5	£251,146
Housing and Homelessness contribution	£210,000
Year 4 total funding	£462,409

- 4.31** Whilst the additional RRTP funding is welcome, a shortfall for Year 5 is still being projected. A full review of Year 4 activities and refreshed our plan for Year 5 to take account of available funding.

RRTP Year 5 costings	
Housing First West Dunbartonshire	£384,00
Pilot Prevention Fund	£11,263
Conversion Programme	£90,000
Year 5 total cost	£485, 263

As there are 3 housing first support worker vacancies this will create a small underspend in Housing First costs therefore balancing the available funds to spend.

Changes to the Local Connection provisions

- 4.32** The pandemic had delayed the legislation to suspend local connection but was enacted on 28th November 2022.
- 4.33** The policy intention of suspending local connection referrals between Scottish local authorities is to remove barriers to support for people who are homelessness or rough sleeping so they can resettle successfully, and avoid repeat homelessness. If people are living in an area of their choosing, they are more likely to integrate successfully into a local community and access the services and support they require.
- 4.34** The Scottish Government have begun to monitor the impact of these changes and respond to any local authorities that report undue pressure on service provision. Our initial impacts is we have started to see larger families from other areas present which is adding pressure to our temporary accommodation provision.

- 4.35** The Scottish Government have acknowledge there has been anecdotal impacts therefore local authorities have been asked to report impacts along with breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order.

Scottish Government response to the Temporary Accommodation Task and Finish Group recommendations

- 4.36** On 19th July 2023 the Scottish Government responded to the 15 recommendations made by the Temporary Accommodation Task and Finish group needed to address the increasing use of temporary accommodation.
- 4.37** The Scottish Government has stated they will;
- invest at least £60 million through the Affordable Housing Supply programme in 2023-24 to support a national acquisition plan
 - maintain momentum in delivering our Affordable Housing Supply Programme
 - work with social landlords to deliver a new programme of stock management
 - implement targeted partnership plans with the local authorities facing greatest pressure
- 4.38** The West Dunbartonshire response and impact assessment is included as Appendix 2 of this report.

5. People Implications

- 5.1** An additional post required to strengthen the team will be recruited in line with the Council's existing recruitment policy and will be funded from the Scottish Government funding for the provision of homelessness prevention and response. We expect the recruitment to be completed before the end of 2023.

6. Financial and Procurement Implications

- 6.1** The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government wrote to West Dunbartonshire on 16 December 2022 advising of the Council's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan funding allocation for 2023/24 of £251,146. This funding will be included in the weekly payment of the 2023/24 General Revenue Grant.
- 6.2** In addition the Scottish Government also on the same date confirmed the funding allocation of £649k to West Dunbartonshire Council for the provision of homelessness prevention and response, this funding will be paid as part of the General Revenue Grant payment.
- 6.3** This is due to be the 5th and final year of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan and dedicated funding. However, conversations have begun about the future but no confirmed decisions have been made but Committee will be updated at a future meeting once we received confirmed plans beyond Year 5.

6.4 We are aware of some national discussions looking at reviewing funding to deliver homelessness and housing option services, however there remains some financial uncertainty in terms of how the Housing First approach can be funded in the longer term.

6.5 The delivery of the wider Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan will be within existing budgets noting the increases in such as a result of the Scottish Government funding for 2023/24.

6.5 There are no procurement implications in terms of this report.

7. Risk Analysis

7.1 There are financial and regulatory risks associated with not being able to fully deliver our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan, including the Housing First element of the approach.

7.2 The decision to award funding in Year 5 was based again on a formula which focuses on homelessness assessments (and not the content of the RRTP's), arguably benefits larger local authorities who receive a higher proportion of homeless assessments and could discourage local authorities from implementing initiatives aimed at preventing homelessness.

7.3 There is no confirmation of funding for RRTP past Year 5 (2023/24) therefore long term funding is required to be sourced to continue our Housing First service.

8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

8.1 There are no negative equalities impacts due to this update to our RRTP however preventing and responding to homelessness has a significant positive impact on individuals and communities. There are some potential positive impacts for some groups as noted in the EIA carried out when our RRTP was updated in July 2023 EIA 766.

9. Consultation

9.1 The first draft of our RRTP was developed in collaboration with key partners, including the Health and Social Care Partnership, local Registered Social Landlords and third sector organisations, via a series of well attended stakeholder events held in November and December 2018.

9.2 Consultation and communication have continued since the submission of the first iteration of the RRTP through the Housing Solutions Partnership. Further engagement has also taken place with other local landlords via the Strategic Housing Providers Forum, engagement has continued with the Health and Social Care Partnership and also a dialogue with the WDTR0 regarding the implementation of the RRTP and Housing First has also taken place.

10. Strategic Assessment

10.1 Having considered the Council's strategic priorities, this report contributes significantly to all strategic priorities.

Peter Barry
Chief Officer, Housing and Employability

Date: 8 November 2023

Person to Contact: John Kerr – Housing Development and Homelessness Manager, Housing Development and Homelessness Team, Housing and Employability, telephone: 07793717981, email: john.kerr@west-dunbarton.gov.uk

Appendices:

1. RRTP Monitoring Report 2023/24
2. Temporary Accommodation Task and Finish Group Impact Assessment, October 2023

Background Papers: HARSAG2 recommendations tracker, West Dunbartonshire Council Housing Development and Homelessness Team, December 2021

West Dunbartonshire Council's Revised Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan including Action Plan and Equalities Impact Assessment, [Home at the Heart](#)

Housing and Communities Committee Report 24th August 2022 "Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan and new approaches to homeless update"

Letter from Shona Robison, MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government on Distribution of Funding for Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans for 2023/24; 16 December 2022

Ending Homelessness Together – High Level Action Plan; Scottish Government/COSLA
<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/publication/2018/11/ending-homelessness-together-high-level-action-plan/documents/00543359-pdf/00543359-pdf/govscot%3Adocument>

Wards Affected: All