

**WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL****Report by the Chief Officer, Housing and Employability****Housing and Communities Committee: 2 February 2022**

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**Subject: “Home at the Heart 2019-24” West Dunbartonshire’s Rapid Rehousing 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 in terms of the progress and challenges in delivering Year 3 of “Home at the Heart”, our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP)
- Outline the key findings from the review of our residential supported accommodation
- Provide an update on Scottish Government funds to assist in the delivery of the RRTP
- Provide an update relating to our local response to the recommendations made by the national Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG) and wider information on new approaches to homelessness.

**2. Recommendations**

**2.1** It is recommended that the Housing and Communities Committee:

- (i) Note the progress and challenges in delivering Year 3 of our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan;
- (ii) Note the key findings from the review of residential supported accommodation highlighted within section 4.17- 4.22 of this report;
- (iii) Note that Scottish Government funding of £238k has been awarded for 2022/23 for the specific delivery of the West Dunbartonshire Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan;
- (iv) Approve that the Council’s housing allocation letting target for homeless households is amended to 69% for 2022/23 as set out in paragraph 4.20 and 4.21 of this report and note the Chief Officer, Housing and Employability will keep this target under close review based on current modelling projections;
- (v) Note the continued uncertainty around future funding and specifically the risk to our Housing First approach;

- (vi) Note that a full annual update and progress report will be provided to the Housing and Communities Committee in Autumn 2022, including a fully updated Year 4 plan based on the identified 2022/23 funding.

### **3. Background**

- 3.1** Our current approach to tackling homelessness is outlined in our RRPT “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 2017/20, 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.
- 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.

**4.2** Work is currently being undertaken to fully review Year 3 activities and refresh our plan for Year 4 and a full progress report will be provided to the Housing and Communities Committee in September 2022. However, progress on some key aspects of the plan and some challenges being faced are outlined below.

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

**4.3** 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 £12,500 and has helped ensure that 35 existing tenancies were sustained.

**4.4** We plan to make this post permanent within our wider service delivery and are exploring options to identify longer term funding for the pilot prevention fund.

**4.5** The overall number of approaches to our Housing Options service has increased significantly during 2021/22 with 291 approaches being made by the end of November 2021 and homelessness has been prevented in 54% of all cases closed.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22 (YTD Nov 2021)
Prevent1 approaches	178	240	332	291
Prevent1 closures	177	221	249	248
<b>% homelessness prevented</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>54%</b>
<b>% closed with presentation</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>32%</b>

**4.6** Given that the temporary eviction ban has now been lifted and we await the full economic impact of the pandemic the expectation is that the number of households approaching the service for assistance will continue to rise.

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

**4.8** 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 from 23 weeks at the start of Year 1, to 13 weeks by the end of Year 5.

- 4.9** 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.
- 4.10** The modelling determined that around 55% of all social lets during 2021/22 would need to be made to homeless households in order to meet our target of reducing the time spent in temporary accommodation to 17 weeks (119 days). 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.
- 4.11** Not all of our RSL partners have signed up to the lettings target and in addition we have seen a higher levels of homeless presentations than projected and letting activity has not fully recovered to pre-pandemic levels.
- 4.12** As a result, whilst we continue to deliver a quick and efficient assessment process, at the end of November 2021 we had 112 homeless households on this pathway that had been opened for longer than our 17 week target.

Live cases with no/low support needs (target 17 weeks/119 days)	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
Under 90 days	159	164	148	181	175	194	157	164
90-119 days	33	38	22	28	41	37	50	34
Over 119 days	90	91	84	73	65	82	93	112
<b>Total open</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>281</b>	<b>313</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>310</b>

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

- 4.13** 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.
- 4.14** 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.
- 4.15** A key action for Year 3 was to commission a full review of our provision of residential supported accommodation within the context of the updated Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan, the updated Unsuitable Accommodation Order and a range of new policy and legislative standards on temporary accommodation arising from the Covid-19 pandemic and national policy agenda.

**4.16** In July 2021, Arneil Johnston was commissioned to carry out this review. A six-stage project methodology was delivered to complete the review including a performance diagnostic, lived experience primary research, stakeholder engagement, service redesign, temporary accommodation modelling and financial impact assessment.

**4.17** Some of the key findings of the review include:

- Whilst Residential Supported Accommodation should continue to be delivered as an option for those with moderate-complex needs, there is likely to be less required in future years;
- All supported accommodation projects should be founded on a trauma-based care model;
- Current supported accommodation projects should be reshaped to provide opportunities for gender specific provision and should be smaller units;
- The length of stay in trauma informed supported accommodation should be based around a structured support planning journey enabling independence;
- There is a gap in current supported provision for a small but significant population of service users;
  - For those who are unwilling/unable to engage with support but who need a safe place to stay for intermittent periods of time (rapid access accommodation); and
  - For those who may need permanent supported accommodation not homeless accommodation (will require partnership working and potentially joint commissioning with the HSCP);
- Current provision is contributing to bottlenecks in terms of households not being able to move to settled accommodation and to a backlog of homeless households in temporary accommodation.

**4.19** Whilst this will be a crucial element in helping to deliver our wider objectives, the proportion of lets to homeless households, equally crucial to reduce the overall time in temporary accommodation to prevent a growing backlog and the need for additional provision.

**4.20** Currently modelling suggests that over the next five years, on average across West Dunbartonshire, 69% 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.

**4.21** To understand the implications of not delivering on this target, a scenario was tested in the RRTP model where the number of lets to homeless households remained at current levels. This showed that this would require an additional 374 dispersed units to provide accommodation for homeless households, more than doubling current provision and the backlog of households waiting to be housed.

**4.22** To deliver the optimum service model, 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 planning 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** A key objective in Year 3 of our RRTP was the upscaling of our Housing First approach for those households with the most complex needs. Our plan was to use our RRTP funding to increase the staff resource within the dedicated Housing First Support Team by three fixed term posts (18 months) from April 2021 and create a further 35 new Housing First tenancies in 2021/22.
- 4.25** By the end of November 2021, we had created 19 new Housing First tenancies, a further 6 clients have been offered a property and 8 clients were awaiting an offer of settled accommodation being made.
- 4.26** Delays to the start date of one of the additional fixed term Housing First posts has impacted on further progress and has led to a waiting list of assessments to be carried out.
- 4.27** Whilst our Housing First approach continues to have a high tenancy sustainment rate. All these tenancies have been sustained apart sadly from the death of three tenants. However, long term future funding for the initiative is still to be clarified.

#### Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan funding update

- 4.28** All local authorities were asked to provide the Scottish Government with a written report outlining how they had spent their allocation of Year 2 funding and progress to date.
- 4.29** West Dunbartonshire Council submitted this report in June 2021, which included our refreshed RRTP for 2021/22 based on the funding available. These plans were approved by the Housing and Communities Committee in September 2021.
- 4.30** In September 2021, 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 each of the next two years (2022/23 and 2023/24).
- 4.31** The formula currently 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.
- 4.32** 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.

- 4.33** The same formula has therefore been used for the funding allocation for 2022/23. This formula has resulted in an allocation for West Dunbartonshire Council of £238,000 to deliver Year 4 of our RRTP which was announced on 20 December. In addition the Scottish Government also on the same date confirmed the funding allocation of £541k to West Dunbartonshire Council for the provision of homelessness prevention and response services.
- 4.34** Whilst the additional RRTP funding is welcome, a shortfall for Year 4 is still being projected. Work is currently being undertaken to fully review Year 3 activities and refresh our plan for Year 4 to take account of available funding.

#### New approaches to homelessness and impacts of Covid-19

##### HARSAG2

- 4.35** HARSAG2 developed and published a detailed set of 105 recommendations in response to the following four questions:
1. What needs to be in place right now for the ongoing emergency?
  2. What do we need to do so that people don't get back to sleeping on the streets or staying in homeless shelters?
  3. How can we accelerate the pace of work to prevent homelessness?
  4. What needs to change in the national Action Plan to end homelessness to recognise the changing circumstances caused by coronavirus?
- 4.36** The Scottish Government agreed in principle to all the recommendations within the HARSAG report and subsequently published an updated Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan on 8 October 2020 and progress report in October 2021.
- 4.37** The Scottish Government's Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group oversees the implementation of this plan. Whilst some of the key recommendations are directed towards Scottish Government future policy, some recommendations, such as those around benefits and support for people regardless of their immigration status, are urgent requests of the UK Government.
- 4.38** In addition, many of the recommendations will require to be delivered by each individual local authority. Work has been on-going to develop and implement an action plan in response to these recommendations and the current version of our "HARSAG2 recommendations tracker" is available as a background paper to this report.
- 4.39** Progress in terms of the on-going development and implementation of this comprehensive response continues to be reported regularly to the Housing and Communities Committee and to the Housing Solutions Partnership to ensure the full delivery of these recommendations.

## Changes to the Local Connection provisions

- 4.40** The policy intention of suspending local connection referrals between Scottish local authorities is to remove barriers to support for people who are homeless 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.
- 4.41** The pandemic has delayed this legislation and it is now due to be laid during this session of parliament. The Scottish Government will monitor the impact of these changes and respond to any local authorities that report undue pressure on service provision.

## Public Sector duty to prevent homelessness

- 4.42** Another proposal from HARSAG being taken forward by the Scottish Government is to look at developing legislation focussed at introducing a Public Sector duty to prevent homelessness.
- 4.43** The Scotland Prevention Review Group was convened and worked with public bodies, housing providers and other partners to develop proposals for a new duty on public bodies and delivery partners aimed at the prevention of homelessness.
- 4.44** Their report was published in February 2021 with a series of recommendations around actions that could be taken to prevent homelessness and that these should start up to six months before someone faces losing their home.
- 4.45** A joint Scottish Government and COSLA consultation on these proposals opened on 17 December 2021 and officers are currently developing our response. A briefing on this consultation was provided to members as part of January's elected member briefing.

## **5. People Implications**

- 5.1** Any 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.

## **6. Financial and Procurement Implications**

- 6.1** The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning wrote to West Dunbartonshire on 20 December 2021 advising of the Council's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan funding allocation for 2022/23 of £238k. This funding will be included in the weekly payment of the 2022/23 General Revenue Grant.
- 6.2** In addition the Scottish Government also on the same date confirmed the funding allocation of £541k 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, with the first payment in 2022/23 made on 1 April 2022.

- 6.3** Whilst the Scottish Government has now announced they will provide £8 million to fund RRTP's for 2023/24, no confirmation of the allocation of this funding for West Dunbartonshire is expected to be provided until the Autumn of 2022.
- 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 2022/23.
- 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 4 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 June 2021.

## **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: 20 January 2022**

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**Appendices:** None

**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 1<sup>st</sup> September 2021 "Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan and new approaches to homeless update" [Report](#)

Letter from Shona Robison, MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government on Distribution of Funding for Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans for 2022/23; 20 December 2021

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