

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Executive Director of Housing, Environmental and Economic Development

Housing, Environment and Economic Development Committee:
2 November 2011

**Subject: West Dunbartonshire Homelessness Strategy 2008 - 2013
Progress Update**

1. Purpose

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to advise members of the progress that the Council has made towards achieving the aims and objectives of the West Dunbartonshire Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013 and the Scottish Governments Homelessness target that by December 2011 all unintentionally homeless households will have a right to settled accommodation.

2. Background

- 2.1** The West Dunbartonshire Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013 was submitted to the Housing, Environment and Economic Development Committee on 6 August 2008. It detailed the actions the Council and its partners intended to take to tackle homelessness and to achieve the Scottish Government's 2012 target as set out in the Homelessness etc., (Scotland) Act 2003.
- 2.2** On 6 October 2010, the Housing, Environment and Economic Development committee approved that from 1 December 2010 all applicants who are assessed as homeless, regardless of age and vulnerability will be considered to be in priority need. This effectively ensured that West Dunbartonshire Council was one of the first local authorities to have achieved the 2012 homelessness target.
- 2.3** West Dunbartonshire's Homelessness Strategy is structured around the following strategic aims:
- Prevention - To prevent homelessness occurring in West Dunbartonshire;
 - Housing Options - To improve the range of housing options available in West Dunbartonshire and to respond effectively to households in homelessness crisis;

- Sustainable Solutions - To ensure a sustainable solution for individuals who have experienced homelessness; and
- Commitment - To ensure a commitment to continue to develop and improve services to tackling homelessness through a partnership approach.

2.4 The Strategy provides the strategic framework for the future development of services to tackle homelessness within the parameters of the Local Housing Strategy. Progress with the Strategy is monitored through the Homelessness and Housing Access Forum which consults with partners and receives feedback on relevant issues

3. Main Issues

3.1 Progress against the strategic aims within the Homelessness Strategy has been good. A full progress report against the actions contained within the Homelessness Strategy is attached as Appendix 1. Since the introduction of the West Dunbartonshire Homelessness Strategy the following service improvements have been achieved in a period of reduced Scottish Government grant funding for new affordable housing and within a general economic downturn.

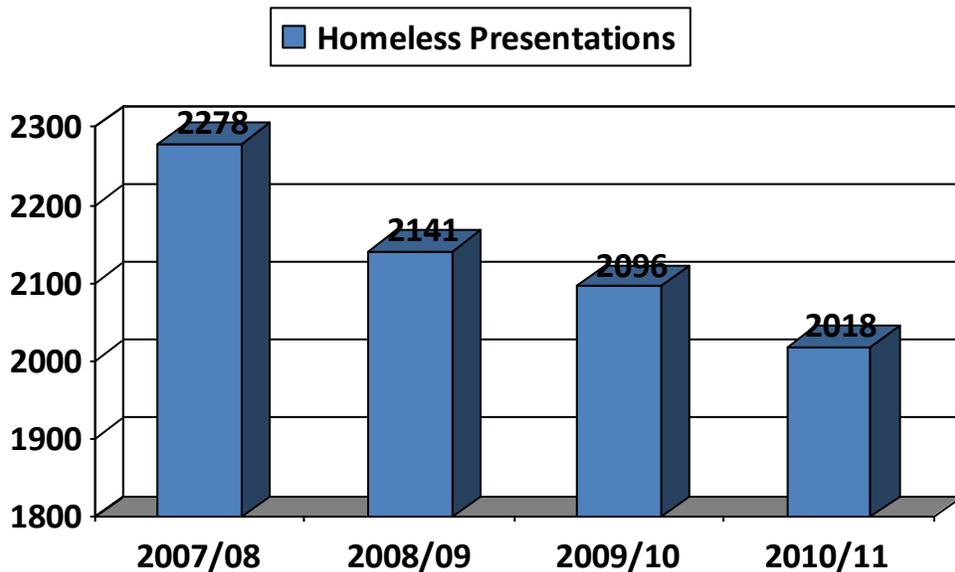
- All unintentionally homeless households have had a right to settled accommodation since January 2011 - making WDC one of the first local authorities to achieve the Scottish Governments 2012 homelessness target.
- An improved homeless prevention and advice and assistance service shown by an overall reduction in the number of homeless presentations.
- There has also been a reduction in the number of presentations from young people throughout West Dunbartonshire.
- The introduction of a Homelessness prevention and mediation pilot.
- Extended use of Short Scottish Secure tenancies to promote successful independent living.
- An increase in temporary flats offering more choice homeless households.
- A new Blue Triangle supported accommodation project has been opened as a response to increased numbers of homeless households with support needs.
- A revised allocations policy.
- Income Maximisation through the Welfare Rights Team.
- Increased use of the private rented sector to provide sustainable housing solutions.

- Improved standards in temporary accommodation.
- West Dunbartonshire have established a Homelessness and Housing Access Forum which meets on a regular basis and consists of internal and external partners.
- The introduction of an housing education pilot in partnership with our Education partners.
- West Dunbartonshire Council has had no breaches of unsuitable accommodation order.
- A number of discharge protocols have been put in place successfully.

3.2 The implementation of this wide range and innovative approach contributed the Council obtaining a 'C' grade from the Scottish Housing Regulator for Housing Management in 2010 along with 'B' grade already applied to the Homelessness Service.

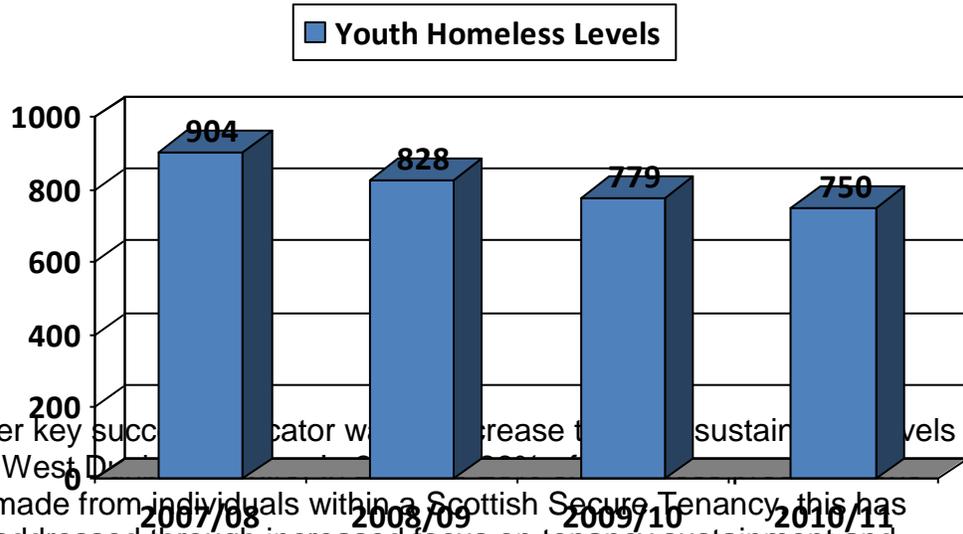
3.3 West Dunbartonshire's Homelessness Strategy developed a range of success indicators which are monitored to assess the impact of the Homelessness Strategy. One of which illustrates a decrease in homeless presentations of over 11% since the strategy was implemented.

Table 1:- Homeless presentation in West Dunbartonshire



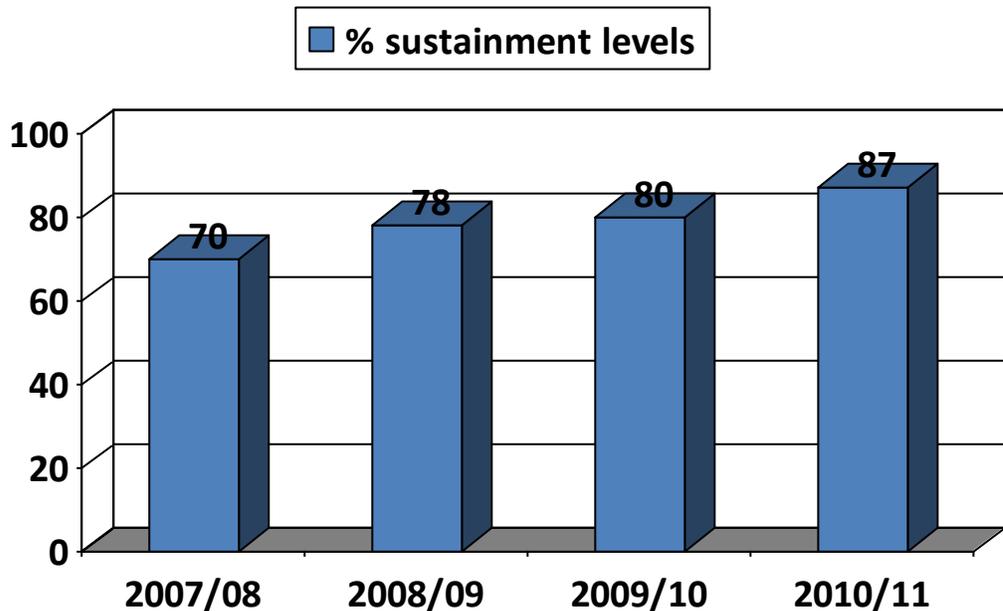
3.4 Another success indicator which was developed in response to high levels of youth homelessness in West Dunbartonshire shows a drop of 17% in the number of presentations from those aged 16-25 within West Dunbartonshire

Table 2:- Youth Homeless presentation in West Dunbartonshire



3.5 Another key success indicator which has increased tenancy sustainment levels within West Dunbartonshire were made from individuals within a Scottish Secure Tenancy, this has been addressed through increased focus on tenancy sustainment and successful independent living. As a result tenancy sustainment levels have increased in West Dunbartonshire by 17% since Homelessness Strategy was implemented.

Table 3 - Tenancy sustainment levels in West Dunbartonshire



3.6 In line with the main aims of the 2008-2013 Homelessness Strategy, West Dunbartonshire Council and our strategic partners will continue to:

- Provide advice, assistance and support to prevent homelessness from occurring in the first place.
- Provide a range of good quality, affordable housing options across a range of tenures including the development of a private sector leasing scheme.
- Ensure that people are appropriately supported according to their individual needs.
- Ensure that homeless people are treated with respect and kept informed about the progress for their application for housing.
- Ensure that the use of bed and breakfast is minimised and that no child or pregnant woman is placed in bed and breakfast accommodation.
- Ensure that homelessness services are consistent with the aims and objectives of the Homelessness Strategy and other housing, economic, health and employability strategies.
- Work in partnership with a wide range of community planning partners including health, education services, drug and alcohol services, employability services, criminal justice services, adult services, other housing providers and external accommodation and support providers.

3.7 It is further proposed that:

- The Homelessness and Housing Access Forum continues to meet on a quarterly basis and will continue to monitor the implementation of the West Dunbartonshire Homelessness Strategy.
- The Council will host their fourth homelessness conference in early 2012 to inform partners and service users of progress with the Homelessness Strategy.
- A final evaluation of the homelessness strategy 2008-2013 be undertaken in early 2012, in consultation with key stakeholders, not only with regard to its stated aims and objectives, but with regard also to the overall impact that the strategy has had locally, and the future anticipated challenges including the Welfare Reform Bill. This evaluation will indicate the direction of subsequent service development and identify priorities for a new West Dunbartonshire Homelessness Strategy 2012-16 in line with the period which will be covered by the forthcoming Local Housing Strategy.

4. People Implications

4.1 There are no direct people implications in relation to this report.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 There are no direct financial implications.

6. Risk Analysis

6.1 Failure to monitor and evaluate the impact of West Dunbartonshire's Homelessness Strategy and to respond appropriately to a rapidly changing social and economic landscape through the development of a new Homelessness Strategy could have an adverse effect on the communities that we serve and also prompt a negative reaction from the Scottish Housing Regulator and could have wider consequences for the Council in the context of Best Value.

7. Equalities, Health and Human Rights Impact Assessment (EIA)

7.1 West Dunbartonshire's Homelessness Strategy has been subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment.

8. Strategic Assessment

8.1 The Council has identified four main strategic priorities for 2011/2012, namely Social & Economic Regeneration, Financial Strategy, Asset Management Strategy; and Fit for Purpose Services.

8.2 West Dunbartonshire's Homelessness Strategy will contribute to the Local Housing Strategy which is the overarching document setting out the strategic direction for housing across all tenures and informs the future investment in housing and related services across West Dunbartonshire.

8.3 The LHS places regeneration at the heart of local outcomes contributing greatly to all four of the Council's main strategic priorities for the communities of West Dunbartonshire.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

9.1 This report updates the Housing, Environment and Economic Development Committee on progress the Council and our partners have made in achieving the objectives of the West Dunbartonshire Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013 including meeting the Scottish Government's homelessness target in advance of the 2012 target.

- 9.2** The Homelessness Strategy has made significant and lasting improvements to the quality and delivery of homelessness services throughout West Dunbartonshire in relation to prevention, accommodation and support. The delivery of homelessness services will, however, continue to present the Council with significant challenges which is projected to become more acute in the following months and years as a result of the impact of both economic instability and welfare reform.
- 9.3** Levels of homelessness are projected to increase nationally this will dictate the need to ensure resources are focussed on homelessness prevention activity and the provision of affordable sustainable housing solutions for homeless and potentially homeless people in the forthcoming years. Some of the innovative approaches we will take will include developing a housing options approach, remodelling temporary accommodation provision and the delivery of a private sector leasing scheme.
- 9.4** West Dunbartonshire's Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013 will be reviewed again in early 2012, in consultation with key stakeholders, not only with regard to its stated aims and objectives, but with regard also to the overall impact that the strategy has had locally, and the future anticipated challenges including the Welfare Reform Bill. This evaluation will indicate the direction of subsequent service development and identify priorities for a new West Dunbartonshire Homelessness Strategy 2012-16 in line with the period which will be covered by the forthcoming Local Housing Strategy
- 9.5** It is recommended that the Committee:
- i) note the progress to date towards achieving the aims and objectives of West Dunbartonshire's Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013;
 - ii) note the achievement that WDC has achieved the Scottish Government's homelessness target some two years in advance; and
 - iii) agree that authority be delegated to the Executive Director of Housing, Environmental and Development to continue to work with partners partner agencies to implement the strategy and secure the outcomes as defined.

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Date: 3 October 2011

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Appendix: Homelessness Strategy Progress Report

Background Papers: West Dunbartonshire Homelessness Strategy 2008-13
<http://www.wdcweb.info/housing/homelessness/homelessness-strategy/>

Wards Affected: All