

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**Report by the Strategic Lead, Housing and Employability****Housing and Communities Committee: 1 September 2021**

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 a update on “Home at the Heart” our Rapid Re-housing Transition Plan (RRTP) for the period 2019-24 and new approaches to homelessness.

2. Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that the Housing and Communities Committee:

- (i) Note the progress made in the first two years of “Home at the Heart”, which has informed an update report submitted to the Scottish Government at the end of June 2021 and attached as Appendix 2;
- (ii) Approve that our Year 2 pandemic related underspend outlined at 4.13 is used to meet the objectives of the West Dunbartonshire Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan, together with the Year 3 funding allocated by the Scottish Government previously approved by the Housing and Communities Committee in February 2021;
- (iii) Approve our updated Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan attached as Appendix 1 and note the main objectives for Year 3;
- (iv) Note the uncertainty around future funding and specifically the risk to our Housing First approach;
- (v) Note that an annual update and progress report will be provided to the next Housing and Communities Committee in May 2022.

3. Background

3.1 Our current approach to tackling homelessness is outlined in our RRPT “Home at the Heart”. 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 commitment 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 2019-24.

- 3.3** It was developed in partnership with key stakeholders, including the West Dunbartonshire Health and Social Care Partnership and Housing Solutions Partnership, which includes local Registered Social Landlords and was submitted to the Scottish Government on 31st December 2018 and approved by the Housing and Communities Committee on 6th February 2019.
- 3.4** 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 4 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 achieve housing sustainment.

4.2 The feedback received from the Scottish Government in relation to our RRTP has been positive and 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;
- Our award winning Leaving Care Housing Protocol; and
- The fact that we have never breached the unsuitable accommodation order.

“Home at the Heart” Year 2 progress

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

- Carried out a service re-design to ensure key objectives could be met;
- Development and launch of “Help to Rent West Dunbartonshire” to assist homeless households and others in housing need to access the private rented sector;
- Recruited a FTE staff member to provide an enhanced proactive homeless prevention role;
- Established a pilot Prevention Fund which has helped households at risk of homelessness remain in their tenancies;
- Our prevention initiatives have led to a 37% increase in approaches being dealt with by our Housing Options Service during 2020/21, with over half of these resulting in homelessness being prevented.

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

- Reviewed and updated the lettings targets for homeless households with all social landlords across West Dunbartonshire;
- We continued to deliver a quick and efficient assessment process to help meet our targets;
- Reduced the number of homeless households losing contact with the service by 42% (from 120 to 69);
- Despite the impacts of Covid-19 and subsequent lockdowns and restrictions, 468 homeless households with no/low support needs were rehoused and were supported to move into settled accommodation;
- The average length of time these households spent in temporary accommodation was 19 weeks, meeting our key aim for to reduce this to 20 weeks by the end of the Year 2.

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

- We have carried out a service re-design and introduced our Supported Accommodation Service and established and implemented operational procedures to ensure that household needs are identified consistently;
- Implemented a Prison Discharge Protocol in line with the SHORE (Sustainable Housing on Release for Everyone) standards;
- Reviewed and updated our Leaving Care Housing Protocol;
- Reviewed and updated our Hospital Discharge Protocol;
- Implemented our “No Home for Domestic Abuse” approach, to ensure that victims are supported to pursue their most appropriate housing option;
- Launched our Armed Forces Pathway;
- Implemented a Conversion Programme to provide settled accommodation for more homeless households.

- 4.6** Objective 4: Implement a Housing First model which enables the most excluded service users to achieve housing sustainment:
- We have recruited and trained a dedicated Housing First Support Team;
 - Fully assessed 51 Housing First referrals jointly with clients, with 23 being suitable and agreeing to participating in the Housing First approach;
 - Created 15 new Housing First tenancies, in addition to the 5 created in Year 1;
 - The average time for an offer of housing was 118 days from the referral being accepted;
 - The average length of time before moving into tenancy was 81 days;
 - Whilst timescales have been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, they compare favourably with Scotland's Housing First Pathfinder, comprising Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Stirling;
 - Our Housing First approach has a tenancy sustainment rate of 100%, with the only tenancies ending sadly being due to the deaths of the tenants.
- 4.7** The coronavirus pandemic has had and continues to have a profound impact on all our lives and those facing homelessness have been hit uniquely hard. As an initial response to the pandemic, nationally the Scottish Government, local authorities and charities moved quickly to get people off the streets and into safe accommodation to protect people's health.
- 4.8** The response by the sector was impressive and within West Dunbartonshire we have ensured that all households have been provided with suitable, safe and settled accommodation and the Council has continued to deliver its housing options and homelessness service throughout this period.
- 4.9** Concerns that the impacts of the pandemic would lead to more people being at risk of losing their homes, led the Scottish Government to create stronger protections for most renters during lockdown to help prevent evictions from taking place (in place until the end of September 2021 in any areas in Tier 3 or above). In addition, the Scottish Government also decided to extend the Unsuitable Accommodation Order to all homeless households much earlier, from April 2021 to May 2020 (with some exemptions due to Covid-19 created which now extend to the end of September 2021). This sent out a strong signal that temporary accommodation, such as B&Bs and hotels, are not to be seen as a replacement for a safe and settled homes.
- 4.10** A combination of these measures and challenges such as reduced letting activity across the sector, has had an impact in terms of being able to deliver our Year 2 plan in full and impacted on the planned expansion of services and implementing some new initiatives
- 4.11** A key consequence is an increase in the overall number of homeless households in temporary accommodation and an overall increase in the average time spent in temporary accommodation.

- 4.12** At the time of writing in early August 2021, we had 53 households who had spent over a year in temporary accommodation. Most of these have complex need and we are actively working with these households providing high levels of support and are focused on securing long term housing solutions so that every household has safe and secure accommodation.
- 4.13** These factors have contributed to a Year 2 underspend in our RRTP as outlined in the table below, however as highlighted later in this report the underspend for Year 2 will be utilised to deliver Year 3 RRTP ambitions:

RRTP Year 2 spend	Year 2 plan	Year 2 spend	Year 2 underspend
Housing First West Dunbartonshire	£237,167	£209,500	£27,667
Interim Supported Tenancies	£36,000	£0	£36,000
Additional Resettlement Support Service	£36,000	£24,000	£12,000
Enhanced Prevention Service	£36,000	£36,000	£0
Pilot Prevention Fund	£21,833	£5,200	£16,633
Conversion Programme	£125,000	£80,000	£45,000
Year 2 totals	£492,000	£354,700	£137,300

Review and update of “Home at the Heart”

- 4.14** 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.
- 4.15** West Dunbartonshire Council submitted this report in June 2021 and we have taken this opportunity to fully review and update our existing RRTP to take account of the progress made in the first two years, the homelessness context within West Dunbartonshire, the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the following funding that is available for Year 3:

RRTP Year 3 funding	
Year 2 underspend	£137,300
SG addition funding for Year 2 (Winter Fund)	£156,000
SG funding for Year 3	£234,000
Housing and Homelessness contribution	£200,000
Year 3 total funding	£727,300

- 4.16** Our fully updated plan is attached as Appendix 1. This has resulted in some reduced costs and whilst the projected shortfall in funding for Year 3 highlighted to the Housing and Communities Committee in February 2021 has been minimised, there remains a small projected deficit in our Year 3 plan. We would expect to avoid any overspend through operational activity throughout Year 3.

RRTP Year 3 costings	
Housing First West Dunbartonshire	£484,500
Interim Supported Tenancies	£31,200
Additional Resettlement Support Service	£38,500
Enhanced Prevention Service	£38,500
Pilot Prevention Fund	£16,633
Shared Living Project	£28,810

Conversion Programme	£75,000
Review of Hostel Provision	£18,000
Year 3 total cost	£731,143
Funding deficit	£3,843

RRTP Year 3 main objectives

- 4.17** Objective 1: Deliver a whole systems approach to the prevention of homelessness:
- The Prevention Officer will continue to engage with households at risk of homelessness;
 - We will explore options to mainstream this role within our wider service provision;
 - We will continue to monitor the impact of the pilot prevention fund and consider options to identify and provide longer term funding;
 - Monitor and assess impact of the funded Youth Shared Living Project in partnership with Acton for Children/Simon Community.
- 4.18** Objective 2: Enable service users with low or no support needs to access settled housing quickly:
- Reduce time in temporary accommodation for those with no or low support needs down to 17 weeks by end of Year 3;
 - Agree lettings targets with all social landlords within West Dunbartonshire in order to deliver this outcome;
 - We have identified the need for resettlement support to be flexible and can be more intensive even for those households with no/low support needs;
 - We will contact households whose cases were closed without a housing outcome, discuss their current circumstance, assess whether further assistance is required and provide the appropriate service.
- 4.19** Objective 3: Develop interim housing options which enable independent living and tenancy sustainment:
- Commission a full review of our provision of temporary and supported accommodation within the context of the updated Unsuitable Accommodation Order and make appropriate recommendations to the Housing and Communities Committee in February 2022;
 - Establish a Senior Supported Accommodation worker post which will replace the proposed additional Supported Accommodation Workers initially proposed to have been established in Year 2 (resources deployed in dealing with the housing and homelessness consequences of the pandemic resulted in this not been progressed);
 - Implement our Year 3 Conversion Programme to provide settled accommodation for more homeless households.

- 4.20** Objective 4: Implement a Housing First model which enables the most excluded service users to achieve housing sustainment:
- Increase staff resource to scale up our Housing First initiative by three fixed term Housing First Support Worker (18 months) from 1st April 2021;
 - Create a further 35 Housing First tenancies in Year 3;
 - Explore long term funding options to continue our Housing First support service.
- 4.21** Short-term financial uncertainty remains in terms of our RRTP as at present Scottish Government funding only covers a 3 year period up to and including 2021/22, whilst our RRTP covers a period of 5 years. Our Year 3 funding allocation of £234,000 represented a reduction of 6.8% in relation to Year 2 funding.
- 4.22** We have taken the expected actions to mainstream some elements of our transition plan within our wider service provision and aim to do more in this respect, however future sustainable funding for Housing First remains a key challenge, with current overall cost to deliver our RRTP in Year 4 being £921,200 and in Year 5 being £1,175,700.
- 4.23** Whilst we continue to explore long term funding options to continue our Housing First support service, we are aware of some national discussions through colleagues within COSLA looking at reviewing funding to deliver homelessness and housing option services which would include future funding to deliver the RRTP outcomes.
- 4.24** Regular progress reports will be provided to the Council's Housing and Communities Committee, the Health and Social Partnership Integrated Joint Board and the Housing Solutions Partnership, chaired by the Convenor of the Housing and Communities Committee.

New approaches to homelessness and impacts of Covid-19

HARSAG2

- 4.25** Due to the risks posed by the Covid-19 the Scottish Government assessed that the national plan to end homelessness needed to be looked at again and in June 2020 the Housing Minister asked the Housing and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG) to reconvene and look at what more can be done to tackle homelessness.
- 4.26** The Scottish Government agreed in principle to all the 105 recommendations HARSAG made and subsequently published an updated Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan on 8 October 2020.
- 4.27** The Scottish Government's Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group will oversee 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 requests of the UK Government.

- 4.28** 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.
- 4.29** Progress in terms of the on-going development and implementation of this comprehensive response will continue to be reported regularly to the Housing and Communities Committee and to the Housing Solutions Partnership to ensure the full delivery of these recommendations.

Local Connection

- 4.30** 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.
- 4.31** 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.

Temporary ban on evictions

- 4.32** The temporary ban on eviction orders is due to end in September 2021 and only applies in areas in Covid-19 Tiers 3 or above. At the time of writing West Dunbartonshire is currently at beyond Level Zero. Whilst Scottish councils, housing associations and private landlords have all said that they will only take eviction action in the last resort, we will monitor the impact on eviction levels as a result of the easing of restrictions.

Public Sector duty to prevent homelessness

- 4.33** 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.
- 4.34** The Scotland Prevention Review Group was convened and has 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.
- 4.35** This work was initially due to be completed in the Summer of 2020 though was delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic. A 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.

4.36 The Scottish Government has committed to consider these proposals and to work with local authorities over the coming months to seek further input to carry out further consultation with partners. We await discussion on and the introduction of guidance.

5. People Implications

5.1 There are no additional people implications in this report.

6. Financial and Procurement Implications

6.1 The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning wrote to West Dunbartonshire on 10th December 2020 advising of the Council's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan funding allocation for 2021/22 of £234k. Subsequently The Minister also wrote on the 18th December 2020 to inform the Council of their allocation of £156k of the additional £5m funding to support the delivery of Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans. This additional funding has been paid to the Council as a redetermination of the General Revenue Grant.

6.2 The delivery of the wider Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan will be from within existing budgets noting the additional Scottish Government funding for 2020/21, the funding allocation for 2021/22 and utilising the underspend from Year 2.

6.3 There is further financial uncertainty as at present Scottish Government funding only covers a 3 year period whilst the RRTP covers a period of 5 years. There is also an expectation that Housing First becomes a permanent part of all Homeless services however, there is no further funding past this year and therefore to continue to provide the service and expand to meet demand requires long term funding.

6.4 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 3 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 3 therefore long term funding is required to be sourced to continue with the transformation and continuing 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 EIA. Our overall strategy for homelessness aims to tackle current health and other inequalities. Our RRTP highlighted some key groups where we have higher homelessness presentations from and therefore have created policies to allow for further positive impacts such as targeted Youth projects and a Domestic Abuse Policy.

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.

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Date: 19 August 2021

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Appendices: App1: WDC RRTP Year 2 update; June 2021
App 2: RRTP monitoring report, activity and funding; June 2021

Background Papers: Ending Homelessness Together updated action plan; Scottish Government October 2020
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/ending-homelessness-together-updated-action-plan-october-2020/>

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 7th
November 2018 “Rapid Rehousing Transition Paper
position paper”

Housing and Communities Committee Report 6th February
2019 “Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan 2019/20 to
2023/24”

Housing and Communities Committee Report 14th August
2019 “Rapid Rehousing Transition Paper 219-24 update
report”

Housing and Communities Committee Report 5th February
2020 “Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan and new
approaches to homeless update”

Housing and Communities Committee Report 2nd
September 2020 “New approaches to homelessness
update report – “More than a Roof 2017-20” final report and
“Home at the Heart 2019-24” Year 1 update on our Rapid
Re-housing Transition Plan”

Housing and Communities Committee Report 3rd February
2021 “Rapid Re-housing Transition Plan and new
approaches to homelessness update report”

HARSAG2 recommendations tracker, West Dunbartonshire
Council Housing Development and Homelessness Team,
June 2021

Letter from Kevin Stewart, MSP, Minister for Local
Government, Housing and Planning on Distribution of
Funding for Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans for 2021/2;
10 December 2020

Letter from Kevin Stewart, MSP, Minister for Local
Government, Housing and Planning on Additional Funding
for Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans for 2020/1; 18
December 2020

Wards Affected:

All

