

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

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

**Housing, Environment and Economic Development Committee:
7 March 2012**

Subject: West Dunbartonshire Council's Temporary Accommodation Strategy

1. Purpose

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to provide members with information on the draft of West Dunbartonshire's Temporary Accommodation Strategy prior to wider consultation with partners, customers and other interested parties.
- 1.2** The report also seeks approval for the establishment of a supported accommodation project in Ashton View, Westcliff. This project will be monitored by a steering group whose members will be drawn from the local community. There will be established pre-determined review periods to assess performance and sustainability within the community.

2. Background

- 2.1** A paper was presented to the Member Officer Working Group in September 2011 which detailed:
 - current provision for homeless households and individuals in West Dunbartonshire.
 - an in-depth analysis of the accommodation support requirements of those presenting and
 - potential new models of provision which will address the needs of both homeless households and the communities in which they are temporarily housed.

The MOWG agreed that a temporary accommodation strategy be developed to seek better outcomes for:

- WDC in terms of performance and value for money;
- homeless households and individuals in terms of accommodation and support tailored to individual circumstances; and
- communities in which temporary accommodation is located.

- 2.2** A further report was brought to the Housing, Environment and Economic Development Committee which proposed the establishment of a Council managed supported accommodation project at 28 Ashton View, Dumbarton as the first step in the reconfiguration process and provide the opportunity to establish clearly the benefits and challenges in developing this model as a mechanism for delivery across the Council. Council officers have consulted on this proposal over the last few months with local residents and elected members.
- 2.3** An outcome of the Local Housing Strategy 2011-2016 is that *Homelessness is minimised through prevention and early intervention*. In order to help achieve this outcome West Dunbartonshire Council has developed a draft temporary accommodation strategy.
- 2.4** The Temporary Accommodation Strategy covers the period 2012 - 2015. The strategy sets out how the Council aims to simplify the homeless process for homeless households through establishing a supply of temporary accommodation that is:
- efficient and appropriate to meet individual needs,
 - is easily accessible and,
 - well managed.

The temporary accommodation strategy aims to deliver a reduced length of time spent in temporary accommodation, whilst still ensuring that this is appropriate to the individuals needs. If required, housing support is provided to households to support them to maintain their accommodation.

- 2.5** West Dunbartonshire Council has a duty to provide temporary accommodation in terms of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 as amended by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003. This involves a duty to temporarily accommodate anyone who presents as homeless until an assessment decision has been made. Anyone found to be unintentionally homeless has the right to remain in temporary accommodation until permanent accommodation has been sourced by the Council. For households found to be intentionally homeless, temporary accommodation must be provided for a reasonable period of time to allow the household to source its own accommodation. The Housing Service works with its customers in this situation and is currently developing a Housing Options Service which aims to maximise the opportunities available to applicants.

2.6 In order to ensure households, especially those with children, are placed in appropriate temporary accommodation the Government introduced the Unsuitable Accommodation Order in 2004. Under the regulations set out by the Unsuitable Accommodation Order 2004, temporary accommodation is assessed as unsuitable by looking at 3 main criteria:

- Physical standard - such as toilet and cooking facilities; and that the accommodation is within the local authority area.
- Proximity standard - such as the accommodation being near health and education facilities that households use.
- Safety standard - such as the accommodation being suitable for children and pregnant women. Only under exceptional circumstances, should such households be temporarily accommodated in a B&B.

2.7 The unsuitable accommodation order is breached when a family with children or a pregnant female are in B&B accommodation for more than 14 days. West Dunbartonshire Council has not breached the order.

2.8 Section 11 of the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003 places a duty on landlords and creditors to notify the local authority when they raise proceedings for possession due to rent or mortgage arrears. This commenced in April 2009 and from a strategic perspective this duty can be used to improve the local authority's approach to preventing homelessness. It is important that processes for dealing with this provision are effective in preventing homelessness where this could occur as this has an impact on the use of the temporary accommodation stock. More information relating to this provision is included within the Temporary Accommodation Strategy at Appendix 1.

2.9 The 2001 Act gave local authorities the power to require RSLs to provide permanent housing to homeless households who are unintentionally homeless through section 5 referrals. This is an important process in ensuring households are not in temporary accommodation for any longer than necessary.

WDC works in partnership with local RSLs to ensure that re-housing opportunities are maximised and activity in this area is reported through monthly performance reports.

3. Main Issues

3.1 The strategy interrogates the current supply of temporary accommodation, what the future supply needs to consist of, and how that supply is managed effectively. The strategy sets out a number of outcomes that the Council wishes to achieve over the next few years.

3.2 West Dunbartonshire council currently has 249 temporary furnished flats available for homeless households and individuals. Of these 249, 125 (50%) are in the Clydebank area. In 2010/11 961 homeless households were temporarily accommodated in these flats with an average stay of 79 days. There are also 20 furnished flats from the local housing associations that are used as temporary accommodation. In 2010/11 86 homeless households were accommodated within them with an average stay of 78 days.

3.3 There are a number of supported accommodation projects within West Dunbartonshire Council area. Blue Triangle has 3 supported accommodation projects across the council area that accommodated anyone who is 16 years of age and over. Action for Children has a project for young people aged 16 to 25. These projects are designed to offer support to homeless households who require it, and teach them the skills required to maintain a tenancy.

The supported accommodation provision is as follows:

- **Blue Triangle Housing Association (BTHA)** - has 3 supported accommodation projects across the council area (Alexandria, Bonhill and Clydebank) totalling 31 bedspaces that accommodate single homeless people with defined support issues.
- **Action for Children** - has the '*Preparation for Life*' project in Alexandria for young people aged 16 to 21. The project can accommodate up to ten young single people and is designed to offer support to homeless young people and teach them the skills required to maintain a tenancy successfully
- In addition West Dunbartonshire has two separate **Womens Aid** projects that can accommodate up to a maximum of 16 households, who are homeless as a result of domestic violence.

3.4 In 2011 West Dunbartonshire commissioned Arneil Johnston Consultancy to assess the current provision of temporary accommodation against the demonstrated need for it. This work was undertaken in recognition of the changing needs of homeless households, the welfare reform agenda, partial stock transfer strategy and the housing options agenda. The consultants reviewed the type, location and amenity of temporary accommodation available. A core element of the work was a full assessment of the accommodation and support needs of all those who presented as homeless in 2010/11. This was matched against the available resources (current voluntary sector provision and dispersed temporary accommodation).

3.5 The result of this work clearly identified a mismatch between demonstrable need and current provision.

There is a clear shortage of intensive supported accommodation for different client groups and indicated significant differences in vulnerable client groups and varying levels of need across the district.

There is a clear indication that grouped supported accommodation is required in all areas of West Dunbartonshire. The main client group for this is single people (although the focus of projects needs to be clearly on specific client groups e.g. young women, older men etc.) but there is a need for specific accommodation for vulnerable families.

3.6 The strategy takes into account what is happening at a local level in West Dunbartonshire including:

- West Dunbartonshire successfully abolished priority need in January 2011 so that all unintentionally homeless households have the right to permanent accommodation
- The growing and changing needs of homeless households
- Potential loss of temporary stock through the partial stock transfer

3.7 The strategy contains a number of high level outcomes which are designed to meet the needs of the homeless population in West Dunbartonshire.:

1. There is a sufficient supply of good quality and appropriate temporary accommodation that meets the needs of homeless households.
2. Temporary accommodation is accessible, affordable and well managed.
3. Support is provided where necessary, that meets the needs of homeless households in temporary accommodation.
4. The length of time spent in temporary accommodation is appropriate to the individuals needs, but that overall the length of time spent in temporary accommodation is reduced.
5. The views of homeless households placed in temporary accommodation are considered, especially for service development.

3.8 An action plan has been developed that states how we aim to achieve these outcomes. The council will monitor its progress towards this achievement.

3.9 Ashton View: Supported Accommodation Pilot

3.9.1 One of the clear outcomes of the research undertaken in 2011 is that there is a lack of supported accommodation for single people in Dumbarton.

In consultation with the local community, 28 Ashton View - a tenemental property - has been identified as the initial pilot project to develop and promote supported accommodation within the community.

3.9.2 The project will support up to 12 single persons in accommodation which is staffed 24/7.

The aims of the project are to:

- offer accommodation and support to those at risk
- offer stability and security to vulnerable adults
- ensure that “house rules” are designed to instil citizenship and neighbourliness
- to minimise the levels of anti-social behaviour in the area
- to resettle individuals into their own homes following a period of residency.
- To bring appropriate services into the project to help residents get back on their feet.

The project will be staffed 24/7. It will be secured with comprehensive CCTV coverage and will be working with local police officers and public resource teams to ensure that the accommodation has a positive impact in the community.

3.9.3 A steering group, members of which are being drawn from the local community, from the Housing and Community Safety Service, will oversee the establishment of the project and will monitor its outcomes.

3.9.4 A full business case is being developed to ensure the project will be self sustaining and operates within welfare reform guidelines.

As agreed with the local community, a review period of one year will be established which is robust in that it:

- allows time for the project to become established; and
- enables the steering committee to request any adjustments the community or the project require.

4. People Implications

- 4.1** In order to achieve some of these outcomes there may be a need to reconfigure staff duties within the homeless service. Additional staffing resources will be required to deliver the core projects suggested in the consultancy work.
- 4.2** Appropriate staffing levels are essential to the success of any supported accommodation project. Officers have sought advice and information from staff managing a similar project managed by West Lothian Council and existing local Blue Triangle Projects.
- 4.3** To ensure that there is 24 hour cover available at all times, the project will require a dedicated manager (Grade 8), 4 Housing Support Workers (Grade 5) and a Housing Support Assistant (Grade 3). (Please note that grades at this time are indicative as all posts will be subject to job evaluation). Estimated staff costs are £180,000 per annum including on costs. However, there is an opportunity for this figure to be reduced by the use of existing staff resources. Any changes to roles and remits will be fully discussed with Trade Unions.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1** The delivery of the draft temporary accommodation strategy will bring together a number of resource streams from the council and other partner organisations. Resource implications will be further identified during the consultative period and reported back to members. The financial implications with regards the pilot development in Ashton View are outlined from 5.2 onwards.
- 5.2** The creation of a supported accommodation project at 28 Ashton View is a pilot within a planned reconfiguration of temporary homeless accommodation ahead of the financial challenges associated with the changes to the DWP regulations and the impact of the proposed partial stock transfer on the Council's income stream.
- 5.3** Outline costs have been obtained from Consultancy Services in relation to the proposed refurbishment of 28 Ashton View. They have estimated that the associated works will cost £136,000 which will be funded from

- a) the HRA Capital Programme: or
- b) use of the projected HMT0 surplus

This estimate does not include the installation of CCTV in the common close area and monitoring equipment in the newly created office accommodation in the 2 ground floor flats. It had been agreed in principle that this will be funded from the Capital Programme, however because the supported accommodation project will be to accommodate homeless households the alternative funding stream would be to allocate an element of the projected HMT0 surplus within the General Fund for 2012/13. In addition, the refurbishment of the individual flats and the provision of furniture will be funded from the existing Homeless budget.

- 5.4 The property at 28 Ashton View will provide 12 supported accommodation places. Based on the Blue Triangle projects, Housing Benefit of approx. £300.00 per week is payable for each place. Therefore, after the initial refurbishment outlay, the project will be self financing.
- 5.5 Homelessness is a statutory service and as such the service has to be available out with normal working hours. At present the standby service is delivered by staff from within the Homeless Service at a cost of £11,000 per annum. It is proposed that the out of hours service will be delivered by the night shift staff based at 28 Ashton View generating some efficiency in out of hours provision.
- 5.6 If Committee approves the establishment of this pilot project, it is envisaged that the project will be fully operational before the end of the current financial year.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1 There is the risk that the council does not meet its statutory obligations of providing temporary accommodation. It is essential that the strategy is managed effectively to ensure this does not happen.

7. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 7.1 An impact assessment is not required at this stage but will be required as the project develops.

8. Strategic Assessment

- 8.1 The Temporary Accommodation Strategy sets out the strategic direction for the management of temporary accommodation in West Dunbartonshire. The strategy is part of an action for achieving the outcome *Homelessness is minimised through prevention and early intervention* in the Local Housing Strategy's action plan.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

9.1 Development of a temporary accommodation strategy will help the council in meeting its duty to homeless households.

9.2 It is recommended that the committee:

(i) notes and approves the draft temporary accommodation strategy;

(ii) delegates authority to the Executive Director of Housing, Environmental and Economic Development to consult wider on the draft strategy with a view to reporting back to a future Housing, Environment and Economic Development committee in 2012;

(iii) approves the establishment of the pilot supported accommodation project in Ashton View including that establishment costs are allocated from an element of the projected HMTO surplus in the General Fund for 2012/13; and

(iv) agrees that a further report on progress and success of the project is brought to a future meeting of the committee.

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Appendix: 1. Temporary Accommodation Strategy

Background Papers: West Dunbartonshire Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013
Local Housing Strategy 2011-2016
Temporary Accommodation, Housing, Environment and Economic Development Committee Report, November 2011

Wards Affected: All