

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Chief Officer, Housing and Employability

Housing and Communities Committee: 3 February 2021

Subject: Rapid Re-housing Transition Plan and new approaches to homelessness update report

1. Purpose

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to provide members with an update in terms of Scottish Government funding received to deliver our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP), “Home at the Heart” and provides an update relating to our local response to the new recommendations made by the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG).

2. Recommendations

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

- (i) Approve additional funding allocation that has been awarded for 2020/21 (£156k), and the funding awarded for 2021/22 (£234k), to meet the objectives of the West Dunbartonshire Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan;
- (ii) Note the ongoing review of RRTP year 2 activities and some of the priority workstreams highlighted within section 4.7 of this report;
- (iii) Note the progress being made in developing a local response to the new HARSAG recommendations;
- (iv) Note the developments in relation to the proposed changes to the “local connection” provisions within the homelessness legislation;
- (v) Note the current position in terms of the new Unsuitable Accommodation Order; and
- (vi) Note that an annual update and progress report will be provided to the next Housing and Communities Committee in May 2021, including an updated Year 3 plan.

3. Background

- 3.1** An update report to the Housing and Communities Committee in September 2020 outlined the progress made during Year 1 of our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan “Home at the Heart”.
- 3.2** The report detailed that we had refreshed the costings and assumptions within our RRTP based on Year 1 activity and sought approval for the main objectives and activities based on available Year 2 funding.

- 3.3** The report noted that a substantial shortfall in funding was still expected in terms of being able to deliver Years 3 to 5 of our plan in full.
- 3.4** The report also noted that in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, HARSAG had reconvened and made a set of 105 recommendations outlining what should be done to tackle homelessness right now and into the future.

4. Main Issues

Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan and funding update

- 4.1** The feedback received from the Scottish Government in relation to the first iteration of our RRTP was 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 as a housing solution;
 - Our award winning Leaving Care Housing Protocol; and
 - The fact that WDC has never breached the Unsuitable Accommodation Order.
- 4.2** All local authorities were asked to provide the Scottish Government with a written report outlining how they had spent their allocation of Year 1 funding and progress to date.
- 4.3** West Dunbartonshire Council submitted this report in June 2020, which included our refreshed RRTP for 2020/21 based on the funding available. These plans were approved by the Housing and Communities Committee in September 2020.
- 4.4** In December 2020, it was confirmed that nationally an additional £5 million of RRTP funding for 2020/21 would be made available by the Scottish Government to support the increased pace of work around local rapid rehousing transition plans and the Council was being awarded a further £156,000, as per the existing distribution formula.
- 4.5** This current formula used to allocate 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 and there are still perceived inconsistencies in how each local authority records and reports such homelessness prevention activity.
- 4.6** The Scottish Government and COSLA have again looked at alternative formulas to distribute the £8 million funding available for Year 3 (2021/22), however, no agreement was reached and therefore the same formula has

been used for the funding allocation for 2021/22 (with the addition of a £50,000 “floor” of funding for local authorities with low levels of homelessness). This formula has resulted in an allocation for West Dunbartonshire Council of £234,000 to deliver Year 3 of our RRTP.

4.7 Whilst the additional funding is welcome, a shortfall for Year 3 is still being projected. Work is currently being undertaken to fully review Year 2 activities and refresh our plan for Year 3, which will include the following:-

- acceleration of commissioning a full review of our provision of temporary and supported accommodation, within the context of the updated Unsuitable Accommodation Order;
- the increase in staff resource to scale up our Housing First initiative by three fixed term Housing First Support Worker (18 months) from 1st April 2021;
- the establishment of a Senior Supported Accommodation worker post which will replace the proposed additional Supported Accommodation Worker proposed to have been established in Year 2, because of resources deployed in dealing with the housing and homelessness consequences of the pandemic this had not been progressed.

Developing a local response to the new HARSAG recommendations

4.8 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?

4.9 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.

4.10 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 urgent requests of the UK Government.

4.11 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.

- 4.12** Progress in terms of the on-going development and implementation of this comprehensive response will 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

- 4.13** Local Authorities currently have the power to refer homeless households who do not have a local connection with them to another local authority where they do have such a connection
- 4.14** In 2019, the Scottish Government issued a consultation paper inviting views on a recommendation from the original sitting of HARSAG to give Scottish Ministers the power to modify, by statutory order, referrals for local connection. HARSAG also recommended that Ministers use the new power to suspend referrals between local authorities in Scotland.
- 4.15** Following the consultation, the Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 (Commencement No. 4) Order 2019 commenced the local connection provisions, giving Scottish Ministers the power to modify the operation of referrals between local authorities within Scotland. The provisions also required that Scottish Ministers must publish a statement setting out the circumstances and general criteria by reference to which modifications will take place.
- 4.16** A further consultation on preparing the ministerial statement was planned to launch in May 2020, however this was postponed to allow local authorities and others time and space to respond to the immediate impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic.
- 4.17** The Scottish Government subsequently launched this consultation on 3 August 2020. The consultation paper invited views on the commitment to address barriers for people facing homelessness by taking forward the power to modify local connection referrals, in particular the proposal to suspend local connection referrals.
- 4.18** Normally, such a consultation response would be approved by the Housing and Communities Committee however this was not possible because of timeframes.
- 4.19** As proposed in the report to Committee in September 2020 the Council's response has however factored in the views of all members of the Housing and Communities Committee.
- 4.20** An initial draft response was shared for comment on 7 September 2020, an Elected Member briefing note was provided with the final response and a further briefing was provided for the Convenor and Vice Convenor by the then Strategic Lead, Housing and Employability before our response was submitted within the consultation timeframe.

- 4.21** In addition, the initial draft was circulated to members of the Housing Solutions Partnership and to specific contacts within the HSCP and Education and feedback received has been supportive.
- 4.22** It was expected that changes will be introduced around May 2021; however we were notified by Scottish Government officials on 14th January as a consequence of the coronavirus pandemic, the legislation to modify local connection would be laid in the next session of parliament rather than prior to the Scottish Parliamentary elections scheduled for May this year.
- 4.23** 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 resettlement 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.
- 4.24** The Scottish Government will monitor the impact of these changes and respond to any local authorities that report undue pressure on service provision.

Unsuitable Accommodation Order 2020

- 4.25** The Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2014 (UAO) ensured that families with children and pregnant women did not have to stay in unsuitable accommodation such as B&Bs for more than a 7 day period.
- 4.26** In September 2019 the Scottish Government announced in the Programme for Government that they would extend this order to all homeless households. In late April 2020, a Scottish Statutory Instrument was laid in parliament which brought forward the previously agreed date of May 2021 to 5 May 2020, upon which the Unsuitable Accommodation Order would be applied to all homeless households.
- 4.27** The date was brought forward in response to the Coronavirus pandemic and included two exemptions to ensure physical distancing. These exemptions were scheduled to expire 31 September 2020. In September 2020 an additional Scottish Statutory Instrument was laid in parliament which extended the current exemption period until 31 January 2021. It also introduced an additional exemption which acknowledged the impacts of coronavirus on temporary accommodation supply in the area. These exemptions have now been extended till the end of May 2021.
- 4.28** Comprehensive guidance relating to the provisions within the updated Unsuitable Accommodation Order has been developed by a joint Scottish Government and COSLA working group and this will be useful for Local Authorities in providing clarity around the requirements of the new Order.
- 4.29** The guidance outlines the detail around the extension of the Order, defines what accommodation is deemed Unsuitable and outlines where

exemptions can apply. The guidance also includes definitions and case studies around three models of shared accommodation which is deemed suitable; rapid access accommodation, shared tenancies and community hosting.

- 4.30** West Dunbartonshire Council has not reported any Breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order in recent years and the extension to all homeless households has not resulted in any Breaches being reported to date in 2020/21.

5. People Implications

- 5.1** The additional posts referred to within 4.7 of this report will be recruited in line with the Council's existing recruitment policy.

6. Financial and Procurement Implications

- 6.1** The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning wrote to West Dunbartonshire on 10th December 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 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 will be paid to the Council as a redetermination of the General Revenue Grant in the last 2 weeks of this financial year.
- 6.2** There remain some financial uncertainty remains in terms of our wider RRTP as at present Scottish Government funding only covers a 3 year period up to and including 2021/22 whilst the RRTP covers a period of 5 years. However, we aware of some national discussions looking at reviewing funding to deliver homelessness and housing option services which would include future funding to deliver the RRTP outcomes.
- 6.3** The delivery of the wider Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan will be within existing budgets noting the increases in such as a result of the additional Scottish Government funding for years 2020/21 and 2021/22.
- 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.

8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 8.1** There are no equalities impacts due to this update report however preventing and responding to homelessness has a significant positive impact on individuals and communities. Our overall strategy for homelessness aims to tackle current health and other inequalities. Through an initial screening within the RRTP we highlighted some key groups where homelessness and housing challenges exist.

A full Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and submitted to the Scottish Government as part of this plan.

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
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Date: 10 January 2021

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Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	<p>HARSAG2 recommendations tracker, West Dunbartonshire Council Housing Development and Homelessness Team, January 2021</p> <p>West Dunbartonshire Council's Revised Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan including Action Plan and Equalities Impact Assessment, Home at the Heart</p> <p>Housing and Communities Committee Report 2nd September "Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan and new approaches to homeless update" Report</p> <p>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</p>

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

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