

Housing and Economy Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 7 June 2018

Homelessness Task Force – Actions, Recommendations and Outcomes

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Executive Summary

A homelessness task force has been created to support the coalition commitment:

Create a homelessness task force to investigate the growing homelessness problem in the city. The team will review the use of bed and breakfast premises and explore alternatives that better meet the needs of individuals and families, with an aim to end the use of bed and breakfast facilities.

This report provides an update on the work of the task force and outlines recommendations and outcomes from their work.

Homelessness Task Force – Actions, Recommendations and Outcomes

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 To note the information contained within the report;
- 1.2 To agree the recommendations detailed within the report at points 3.12, 3.25, 3.39, 3.40, 3.41, 3.42, 3.43 and 3.44;
- 1.3 To agree the recommendation set out in 3.19 and to note that (subject to approval) a report on shared housing will be referred to Finance and Resources Committee on 12 June 2018 for approval of the additional funding;
- 1.4 To refer a report on Housing First to the Integrated Joint Board, as outlined in 3.38; and
- 1.5 To agree to continue the homelessness task force for two cycles to align with recommendations from the Scottish Government's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group.

2. Background

- 2.1 Edinburgh continues to be a pressured housing market, with high housing costs and high need and demand for affordable housing. The city is also growing with the population projected to increase by around 20%, between 2014 and 2039. This is over three times the Scottish average.
- 2.2 Social rented homes account for 14% of the housing stock in Edinburgh, compared to the Scottish average of 23%. There are currently over 21,000 households registered on the common housing register for social housing in Edinburgh.
- 2.3 In 2016/17 an average of 167 bids were received for every social rented home advertised. Recent figures show continuing high demand with average bids for each home increasing to 191 during 2017/18.
- 2.4 Social rented homes are let to those in the highest levels of housing need. This includes homeless people, people unable to manage in their existing homes or unable to return to their existing homes from hospital and people who are living in homes that do not meet their needs, such as overcrowded households.

- 2.5 The strong partnership approach through EdIndex, the common housing register between the Council and 19 partner landlords, continues to support positive outcomes for homeless households.
- 2.6 During 2017/18, the Council and RSL partners let 1,323 homes to homeless households, from a total of 2,348 lets and there is a commitment through the EdIndex board for an additional 275 lets between April 2018 and September 2019.
- 2.7 The Council's homelessness services are facing unprecedented pressures, with demand for both permanent and temporary accommodation exceeding supply and addressing these pressures will require a city-wide partnership approach to ensure that sustainable solutions are found.
- 2.8 The Council has a statutory duty to provide temporary accommodation for anyone who presents and is assessed as homeless and requires it until an offer of settled housing is made.
- 2.9 Homelessness presentations continue to fall year on year in the city, due to an increased focus on prevention and early intervention from the Council and its partners. In 2017/18, 3,102 households presented as homeless, down from the peak of 5,517 in 2006/7.
- 2.10 In addition to this in 2017/18 the number of repeat homelessness presentation also reduced from 9.9% in 16/17 to 7.8%. Both the prevention of homelessness and the continued reduction in repeat homelessness are crucial in terms of ensuring that people do not need to access homelessness services, where this is avoidable.
- 2.11 During the same period, the average homelessness case length has increased from 109 days to 303 days, as a result of lack of affordable housing options, the removal of non-priority status and a growing population, despite the delivery of 8,565 affordable homes in the city during that same period.
- 2.12 The Scottish Housing Regulator has confirmed, that as part of its 2018/19 Scrutiny plan it will focus on the Councils actions relating to provision of temporary accommodation, use of bed and breakfast accommodation, length of stay in temporary accommodation, lost contacts before duty discharge, repeat presentations, case durations and percentage of RSL lets to homeless households.
- 2.13 The Scottish Government has created a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG) to take a national view on homelessness. Details of the work of this group can be found here: <https://beta.gov.scot/groups/homelessness-and-rough-sleeping-action-group/>.
- 2.14 HARSAG is in the process of working through the areas highlighted in the above link. It is currently focussing on reviewing and making recommendations around the national delivery of temporary accommodation services.
- 2.15 These recommendations will be made public in June 2018. The Council will need to consider them in the local context. It would be therefore be beneficial to

continue the Homelessness Task Force, to allow that review to take place and for members of the task force to input into how the recommendations could be adopted in Edinburgh.

3. Main report

- 3.1 The task force agreed to develop a strategy, to achieve the following outcomes, prior to reporting back to Committee:
- No families to be accommodated in bed and breakfast;
 - No 16/17 year olds to be accommodated in bed and breakfast;
 - Reduce the number of people in bed and breakfast accommodation;
 - Reduce the lengths of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation;
 - Reduce the number of people sleeping rough;
 - Increase the stock of temporary accommodation, specifically flats, supported accommodation and new forms of temporary accommodation;
 - Continued reduction in homelessness presentations; and
 - Implement the “Housing First” approach.

Families in Bed and Breakfast and increase in Temporary Accommodation Stock

- 3.2 Currently around 75 families are accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation. To eradicate the use of this form of accommodation for families, based on current demand, the Council needs to identify around 130 additional properties, to ensure that the current families are moved to more suitable accommodation and that no further families are required to use this form of accommodation.
- 3.3 The Council has agreed to allocate an additional 26 properties from its own stock, in addition to the 389 already provided as temporary accommodation to ensure families can be moved into suitable accommodation. The properties will be made available throughout May and June 2018.
- 3.4 The Council has agreed to deliver a further £872,000 in funding for the Private Sector Leasing scheme, operated by Link Housing, to allow them to provide a more attractive option for existing and new landlords to increase the stock of suitable interim accommodation for homeless households. The contract allows Link to operate and manage 1,750 properties. Due to current market conditions, such as high rent levels, increased house prices and the option for landlords to use their properties as short term lets, the number of properties in the scheme has reduced to less than 1,400.
- 3.5 Following agreement of this additional funding, Link have now begun a landlord engagement process to secure existing leases and significantly increase the

number of properties available. Priority for vacant PSL properties will be provided for families, currently in bed and breakfast accommodation, that meet the referral criteria.

- 3.6 The Council has approached all Registered Social Housing landlords (RSLs) from the EdIndex partnership to request a number of family properties from their stock to be used as temporary accommodation.
- 3.7 The EdIndex partnership have committed to providing an additional 275 homes through the choice based lettings system, over the period 1 April 2018 to 30 September 2019. These properties will be allocated to homeless households who successfully bid for properties, many of which will be families currently occupying temporary accommodation.

Young People in Bed and Breakfast

- 3.8 Currently around 50% of all 16/17 year olds who present as homeless and who require temporary accommodation are placed, at least initially, in temporary accommodation.
- 3.9 When a 16/17 year old presents for accommodation and they are not allocated to a social worker, they are provided with support through the Youth Emergency Support Service, from the point of presentation. This includes support through the presentation, mediation back home where it is safe to do so, assistance with benefits, emotional support and being accompanied to their allocated accommodation.
- 3.10 Young people are prioritised for supported accommodation and should an initial placement in bed and breakfast be required, priority will be given for any supported accommodation space which becomes vacant. This is monitored on a daily basis.
- 3.11 To ensure that as few placements in bed and breakfast as possible are required the Council is working with Link Living, to gain priority access to their supported flats.
- 3.12 Officers should produce a further report, within one cycle for Housing and Economy Committee, which considers a range of potential options to secure alternative accommodation options for 16/17 year olds. This should include consideration for a young person's shared house, access to self contained flats and a young person's supported unit. This report should also include any relevant procurement options and a full financial assessment (see recommendation 1.2).

Bed and Breakfast Accommodation

- 3.13 Currently around 650 households are accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation each evening. Whilst demand for temporary accommodation services remains at its current level, the Council will be required to continue the use of this type of accommodation.

- 3.14 When surveyed, most of bed and breakfast services users stated that to improve their stay, it would be beneficial in terms of health and wellbeing and finances to have access to cooking, food storage and laundry facilities.
- 3.15 During a 2014 service user survey and then a series of focus groups in 2017 and 2018, a number of the service users gave positive views in relation to the standards of the bed and breakfast accommodation, but stated their dissatisfaction at the lack of facilities.
- 3.16 To support this, the Council has developed a specification for shared housing to directly replace the traditional bed and breakfast model, which ensures that contracted accommodation provision provides these facilities.
- 3.17 All shared houses will have a visiting support service aligned to the property. The visiting support service will be available to all residents and will actively promote their service within the properties to ensure that residents are aware of how to access these services.
- 3.18 In addition to this the Homelessness Task Force recommend (see recommendation 1.3) that officers should develop an easy to access rating system for customers using these properties. These ratings will be collated and form part of the regular contract management arrangements with providers.
- 3.19 The cost of providing this form of accommodation is an additional £446,000 per annum and a full report is included on the B agenda for Housing and Economy Committee on 7 June 2018. Subject to approval, the report on this additional funding will be referred to the Finance and Resources Committee on 12 June 2018.

Rough Sleeping

- 3.20 To deliver a reduction in rough sleeping the Council, in partnership with the Scottish Government and Streetwork, has developed a rapid access accommodation model. This model has been in place from 9 December 2017 and is currently funded until mid June, as a result of additional Scottish Government funding.
- 3.21 The accommodation accepts referrals 24 hours a day and is accessed through engagement with street based outreach workers who identify rough sleepers who need emergency accommodation.
- 3.22 The Council is using this period to develop further proposals to increase the number of beds available, to help more rough sleepers and to assess whether a more cost-effective accommodation model can be found.
- 3.23 A review of the first three months of this pilot has been completed and details are contained in the Rapid Access Accommodation report to be presented to Housing and Economy Committee on 7 June 2018.
- 3.24 The Council and its partners already deliver a range of services to ensure that rough sleeping is minimised over the winter months. A series of meetings involving the Council, Scottish Government and third sector providers began in May 2018 to

review existing provision and also develop services based on the learning the from the recent winter initiatives, in order to minimise rough sleeping wherever possible.

- 3.25 To support the delivery of street based outreach for rough sleepers, it is recommended (recommendation 1.2) that a series of awareness raising and training sessions should be delivered for Council officers who are likely to witness rough sleeping in their day to day activities e.g. street cleansing operatives and park rangers. This training would ensure staff in these areas are confident in the actions required to ensure that rough sleepers can access appropriate services as quickly as possible.

Continued Reduction in Homelessness Presentations

- 3.26 As previously noted, homelessness presentations continue to fall. A further reduction was achieved in 2017/18 with 3,102 presentations, down from 3,386 in 2016/17. Each year since homelessness presentations peaked in 2006/07, there has been a reduction in the numbers of households presenting.
- 3.27 This is an essential part of the delivery of homelessness services. As there is an acute shortage of social housing and a lack of affordable housing in the city, the Council should continue to develop services so that early intervention and prevention opportunities are maximised to ensure that wherever possible the need to present as homeless and access temporary accommodation are avoided.
- 3.28 To align with the Council's locality model of working, the Council's Homelessness and Temporary Accommodation Services moved from 1a Parliament Square on 26 March 2018, to provide locality based services.
- 3.29 The new service model will increase prevention activity as homelessness services will now be further integrated with locality based linked services, such as Family and Household Support, Housing Management team and Social Work services.
- 3.30 This is a change in the way services are delivered as the majority of housing advice and homelessness assessment services were previously delivered from a central point at 1a Parliament Square. The service area will review the progress of locality working, specifically access, successes and areas for development and report back to the Housing and Economy Committee bi-annually on the progress of services.
- 3.31 Whilst the Council has moved the bulk of homelessness services to a locality setting, single people and couples with multiple and complex needs can still obtain services through The Access Point, 17-23 Leith Street.
- 3.32 The Access Point provides co-located services for vulnerable service users including access to homeless officers, social workers, community care assistants and a range of health services.
- 3.33 The Council is currently also reviewing its Advice Services and it is proposed that following the conclusion of the review, these services would also be delivered on a locality basis, providing further opportunity for integration and early intervention

and the support to deliver more comprehensive housing options interviews at the point of contact with vulnerable service users.

Implement Housing First Approach

- 3.34 Housing First is a model of accommodation and support that provides vulnerable service users with quick access to a permanent home and a range of supports to enable tenancy sustainment. Further details on the principles of Housing First can be found in the report circulated for Housing and Economy committee on 7 June 2018.
- 3.35 Following the recent “Sleep in the Park” event organised and delivered by Social Bite around £3million of funding has been made available to local authorities to develop and deliver a Housing First service. This money is available for the initial two year period and would allow Edinburgh to provide up to 275 packages, on an average cost of £7,500 per household.
- 3.36 At the moment officers have identified around 50 service users who have been homeless for more than three years, who are unable to secure a tenancy due to a high level of support needs. RSL partners, through the EdIndex Board, have agreed that should Housing First packages be available, then if these people bid successfully for housing they will provide an offer of housing.
- 3.37 This limited number of cases would allow us to begin the process of a Housing First service and gain learning from the project, whilst initially capping the numbers until commitment can be sought from partners.
- 3.38 Following the initial two year period there will be a requirement for the Council and its partners to mainstream this funding to ensure continuation of support for people accessing the scheme. All studies linked to the delivery of this service in other parts of the UK and across the world highlight savings which can be made across many areas of public spending. To deliver this model, the Council requires the support of the Integrated Joint Board and the Edinburgh Partnership and it is recommended that a report on Housing First will be presented to the Integrated Joint Board in due course (recommendation 1.4).

Further Recommendations

- 3.39 The following recommendations are included in paragraph 1.2 in this report’s recommendations section. The Homelessness Task Force also recommends a review of the housing allocations policy. The current allocations policy was created within a legal and regulatory framework that both the Council and RSLs need to take into account. An allocations policy must include reasonable preference for homeless, but also other categories of housing need. It should cover the following areas:
- Transparency and flexibility, ability to obtain information around position following bidding for properties;
 - Review of priority groups and points awarded;

- Prioritisation based on vulnerabilities; and
 - Online access to housing application forms.
- 3.40 A review of the supports that can be put in place to assist service users to remain in and access the private rented sector in Edinburgh, this review should cover:
- Financial support and assistance to maintain a tenancy, avoiding a homelessness presentation;
 - Engagement with large city landlords to increase access;
 - The delivery of a rent and deposit guarantee scheme;
 - Allocation of homelessness priority to families who are private sector tenants who have received a notice to quit and are deemed to be at serious risk of homelessness, to allow a planned move to alternative settled accommodation. This should be monitored and a further report brought to committee on how effective it has been with a cost/benefit analysis; and
 - Meetings to take place with landlords individually and by creating an open forum where views can be exchanged on the supports that can be provided in increasing access.
- 3.41 That Homelessness Services review the use of ICT systems to provide greater access and information for service users, this review should include:
- Information around statutory duties;
 - Service access information and online housing options tool;
 - Details of service users' rights and responsibilities;
 - Confidential mailboxes to report concerns;
 - Information around changes to service delivery models based on customer feedback; and
 - Exploration of alternative methods of contacting customers, based on new ICT provision and customer preference.
- 3.42 Homelessness Services to review the information packs provided to services users at the point of presentation and throughout the case, including:
- Information around statutory homelessness functions and service user rights;
 - Details of services available to homeless people including advice and support agencies;
 - Details of the care and professional standards that officers must adhere to in the delivery of homelessness services;
 - Provision of a person-centred action plan for each homeless person, which includes details of housing options, a record of the interview and supports and advice provided; and

- A briefing note for elected members which contains above information to assist in the response to constituency enquiries.
- 3.43 Through partnership working with EdIndex partners, the Council should improve access to Mid-Market Rent properties for homeless people or people who are at risk of homelessness, to include:
- Ensure appropriate training for all housing advice staff to ensure that MMR is fully considered as part of housing options assessment and advice, to ensure that homelessness is prevented wherever possible where someone meets the criteria for MMR;
 - Assessment of access routes into MMR for homeless people who meet the criteria, this should include analysis of how many homeless people would currently meet this criteria; and
 - Collaborate with RSL's around criteria for accessing to MMR, including a review of the allocation policy.
- 3.44 Following the implementation of task force recommendations there should be a series of additional service user engagement events, including a wide ranging customer survey to discuss existing and future service delivery models and this should form part of regular engagement to further determine future service delivery within the sector.

4. Measures of success

- 4.1 A continued reduction in homelessness presentations.
- 4.2 A reduction in repeat homelessness presentations.
- 4.3 A reduction in rough sleeping.
- 4.4 A reduction in the use of bed and breakfast accommodation.
- 4.5 A reduction in homelessness case lengths.
- 4.6 A reduction in the time spent in temporary accommodation.

5. Financial impact

- 5.1 The approved budget for Safer and Stronger Communities includes £1.972 million of additional service investment, to be applied as follows.
- 5.2 To maintain and increase the number of Private Sector Leasing properties available there is additional cost of circa £872,000 in 2018/19.
- 5.3 To deliver the shared house model of accommodation there is an additional cost of approximately £446,000 per annum, if committee agrees this recommendation a referral is required to Finance and Resources to agree the spend.
- 5.4 Implementation of other task force recommendations.

6. Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

6.1 None.

7. Equalities impact

7.1 An equalities and rights impact assessment will be developed once the future shape of service delivery is finalised.

8. Sustainability impact

8.1 None.

9. Consultation and engagement

9.1 None.

10. Background reading/external references

10.1 Details of the Scottish Governments HARSAG work can be found here:
<https://beta.gov.scot/groups/homelessness-and-rough-sleeping-action-group/>.

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11. Appendices

11.1 None

