

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

25 October 2018

Report by Director of Environment

SCOTTISH HOUSING REGULATOR

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To advise Cabinet on the issues highlighted as concerns for Housing Services in the Local Scrutiny Plan (LSP) for 2018/19.

RECOMMENDATION

2. The Cabinet is asked to note the issues raised in the Local Scrutiny Plan and the current performance levels.

BACKGROUND

3. The Scottish Housing Regulator undertakes an annual risk assessment of the performance of all Social Landlords and engages with landlords to address the areas of concern.

4. The Council submits data on a quarterly basis to the Scottish Government on the delivery of homelessness duties through a national database known as HL1. The role of the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) is to assess performance against previous years and against other landlords. Any risks or concerns identified are highlighted to the relevant authority and included in the Local Scrutiny Plan.

5. In May 2018 the Cabinet considered the Local Scrutiny Plan for 2018/19. Two issues identified in the report were the percentage of applicants sleeping rough and the percentage of "returned to" households that had been assessed as intentionally homeless. The report advised that these two issues would be monitored by the Scottish Housing Regulator in 2018/19 and also that engagement with Registered Tenant Organisations would remain a focus for the SHR.

REPORT

Percentage of applicants sleeping Rough

6. During homeless interviews an applicant is asked the questions "Have you slept rough in the past 3 months?" and "Did you sleep rough last night?" If the applicant answers "yes" to either, the length of time and location of rough sleeping is recorded. As stated above this information is reported to the Scottish Government with other homelessness information and the local authority is benchmarked against other local authorities.

7. Rough Sleeping is defined as:

- People sleeping/about to bed down in the open air (on streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments).
- People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks or cars).

8. During 2017/18 there were 37 homeless applicants claiming to have slept rough in East Renfrewshire. This represented 11.7% of all homeless applicants. This appears high compared to the figures being presented by other local authorities.

9. However, in-depth analysis of the homeless applications and the out of hour's service for 2017/18 provided more detailed information about the situation surrounding rough sleeping. In most cases the period of rough sleeping appears to have only been 1-3 nights with no indication of rough sleeping occurring **after** the customer had approached Housing Services for assistance.

10. The majority of cases were males aged 26-50, often sleeping rough as a result of a relationship breakdown or who already had a history of "sofa surfing". The location of rough sleeping was disclosed by the majority of customers and included carparks, places of work, outdoors in the local parks or communal areas in tenemental flats.

11. Analysis has shown that rough sleeping was often a result of an argument or a dispute that is ongoing and the applicant does not always present as homeless at the beginning of their situation.

12. It has also been noted there were some cases of incorrect recording by the applicant of rough sleeping status resulting in an over recording of the issue. For example some applicants recorded that they slept rough but the detail they provided of their circumstances suggests that this wasn't the case. This may suggest the applicant misunderstood the question. Some applicants may therefore have interpreted temporarily sleeping at a friend's house as being rough sleeping

13. A number of actions have been identified to ensure a reduction in the number of cases and an improvement in the housing options for potential rough sleepers. Some are already being put into practice whilst others require more planning and changes to service delivery. Actions in place include;

- Promotion of the Housing Advice and Support services available especially targeting male customers.
- Housing Advisors investigating in greater detail any claims of rough sleeping including venues, length of time and the circumstances leading to rough sleeping.

14. Current Performance Levels

Slept Rough	17/18 Annual	18/19 Quarter 1
In previous 3 months	11.6%	11.4%
The night before	3%	4.8%

15. In June 2018, the Scottish Government wrote to all Scottish local authorities and requested that each one produce a rapid re-housing plan by December 2018. This plan will be focused on addressing homelessness quicker, reducing time in temporary accommodation and eradicating rough sleeping. A further Cabinet paper will follow on this work.

Returned Home

16. There are times when individuals who present as homeless, then return to the accommodation they were made homeless from. The Scottish Housing Regulator has queried the higher than usual number of cases in this category both in comparison to other local authorities and to previous years.

17. Analysis of the 2017/18 information submitted to the Scottish Government show that of the 315 homeless applicants in the year, 36 returned to the address at which they were living before making their homeless application. This is approximately 11% of the applications, an increase from 6.5% in the previous year.

18. Firstly it is important to note that not all of these 36 cases making an application were assessed as being homeless. 9 cases were given advice and assistance and returned to their previous address. Of the remaining 27 all of whom were assessed as Homeless or Potentially Homeless, 21 were made an offer of either Council or Registered Social Landlord housing, refused the offer and returned home. A large number of these were households originally from the "Eastwood" side of the authority who were offered accommodation in the Levern Valley. The low availability of social housing in East Renfrewshire prevents Housing Services from meeting the aspirations of many homeless applicants. A large number of applicants presented from the Eastwood area where availability of social housing is particularly limited.

19. The remaining 6 cases moved into temporary accommodation before returning home. The reasons given for the return home included negotiating an extended lease with a private landlord or as a result of reconciliation with family or partners. In these circumstances their homelessness was resolved.

20. Current Performance Levels

	17/18 Annual	18/19 Quarter 1
% "returned to" with statutory duty	9.8%	6.6%
% "returned to" all cases	10.9%	7.6%

Current Actions

21. Prior to September 2017, homeless applicants were only able to restrict their application for 1 month for their area of choice. After this they would be considered for properties anywhere in East Renfrewshire. Since September 2017 this restriction period has been increased to 3 months allowing more opportunities for a property in the area of choice to become available. This appears to be making a difference to the number of offers accepted. The number of refusals and clients "returning to" will be monitored each quarter.

Future Actions

22. A number of future actions have also been identified to address this issue:

- Development of improved housing options and housing advice interviews ensuring that where possible customers are given advice and support to resolve their situation preventing the need to present as homeless.
- Further training for staff to support customers presenting with issues regarding private lets.

- The planned introduction of a Choice Based Lettings scheme will improve customer choice and should help to reduce refusals. However, it will be important to ensure that homeless applicants are encouraged to bid and where necessary direct matches will be made.
- When applicants stay at home after making an application (Homeless at Home e.g. this could be with parents or relatives unable to accommodate them in the long term) a more robust case management system is needed to keep up to date with changes in circumstances.

Resident and Tenant Organisations

23. Engagement with Resident and Tenant Organisations (RTO's) was regular throughout 2017/18 with regular forum meetings and individual meetings.

24. Topics discussed at the monthly meetings included; New Council House Building, Service Improvement Plans, Rent Setting, and Tenant Scrutiny. RTO's have been involved or facilitated wider consultations around Rent Setting and Choice Based Lettings.

25. During the year, 27 Neighbourhood Inspections were carried out involving representatives from Housing Services and various other services and RTO's and individual tenants. These inspections enable people to get involved and discuss issues in their area.

26. Work with the RTO'S is ongoing with staff engaging at local meetings and forum meetings and working with individuals and groups keen to establish a RTO. Quarterly updates will be passed to the Scottish Housing Regulator and they will continue to monitor the situation.

FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY

27. Housing Services aim to deliver an effective Homelessness Service offering the best opportunities for homeless applicants looking for housing in East Renfrewshire. Regular monitoring of our outcomes and processes will ensure that we develop or change the service delivered to meet the changing demands and expectations of customers.

CONSULTATION

28. No consultation has been required in the preparation of this report.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

29. It is vital that all social landlords in East Renfrewshire contribute towards addressing homelessness. Housing Services are engaging with local Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) to share the results of this analysis and discuss how these can be addressed through working together.

30. The development of a rapid re-housing plan as requested by the Scottish Government will require greater partnership working between Housing Services, HSCP and local RSL's. This work will be designed to ensure homelessness is prevented where possible but also addressed quickly when it occurs.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSAL

31. There are no implications with the actions being taken in terms of staffing, legal, property or sustainability.

32. The existing housing management IT system is able to accommodate the data necessary to ensure that activity can be evidenced and monitored.

CONCLUSIONS

33. The low level of applications and the small number of properties becoming available result in figures that do not compare easily with other Local Authorities. However the current and future actions outlined in the paper will all improve the delivery of Homelessness services in East Renfrewshire.

RECOMMENDATION

34. The Cabinet is asked to note the issues raised in the Local Scrutiny Plan and the current performance levels.

Director of Environment

Further information can be obtained from Phil Daws, Head of Environment (Strategic Services) on 0141 577 3186

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