

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL23 APRIL 2025REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTOUTLINE OF PRESSURES FACING HOMELESSNESS**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. The purpose of the report is to provide an update on homelessness following the declaration by Council of a local housing emergency on 11 September 2024.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. It is recommended that Council note the update provided.

BACKGROUND & REPORT

3. Members will recall the paper submitted to Council on 11 September 2024 which detailed the statutory requirements of the Council in relation to households who find themselves homeless or at risk of homelessness. The paper also noted that since 2019 East Renfrewshire Council has seen a significant increase in homeless applications. This has had an impact on both the demand for services and how services are being delivered. A copy of the paper can be accessed at: [September 2024 Council Housing Emergency Paper](#)

4. The paper also advised that Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) stated that several Councils are facing “systemic failure” of their homelessness services. East Renfrewshire Council is in this group of Local Authorities. The SHR also publish an annual engagement plan for each Local Authority. For 2025/26 they have continued to raise homelessness as an area of risk. A copy of the plan can be accessed at: [Housing Regulator - East Renfrewshire Council Performance](#)

5. The biggest challenge facing the Council as a result of this emergency is the provision of suitable temporary and permanent accommodation. In particular the use of hotel / bed & breakfast accommodation, which is deemed unsuitable accommodation. The Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation Order) (Scotland) 2014 states that homeless households should not be placed in temporary accommodation that is 'unsuitable' for more than 7 days. “Suitable” temporary accommodation pursuant to section 5 of The Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation Order) (Scotland) Order 2014 (as amended) is required to be not “outwith the area of the local authority which is subject to the duty to accommodate”.

6. In addition to the unsuitable nature of hotel / bed & breakfast accommodation, the use of this type of temporary accommodation places a significant strain on Council financial resources.

Increase in homelessness

7. From September 2019 to September 2023, East Renfrewshire Council saw a 53% increase in homeless presentations compared to a national average of 10%. In the same period the Council also saw a 125% increase in the use of temporary accommodation compared to a national 37% increase.

8. New national data published for the period September 2023 to September 2024 has shown a 4% decrease in applications in East Renfrewshire compared to a national increase of 2%. However as detailed in the graph below, the numbers in temporary accommodation in East Renfrewshire at the end of September 2024 increased by 44% (red column) from the same period the year before, the highest increase in Scotland. This is compared to a national average of 6% (yellow column). It is also worth noting that East Renfrewshire live homeless cases at the end of September 2024 increased by 38% compared to a national average of 6%.

Full details can be found at: [Scottish Government Homelessness Statistics](#)

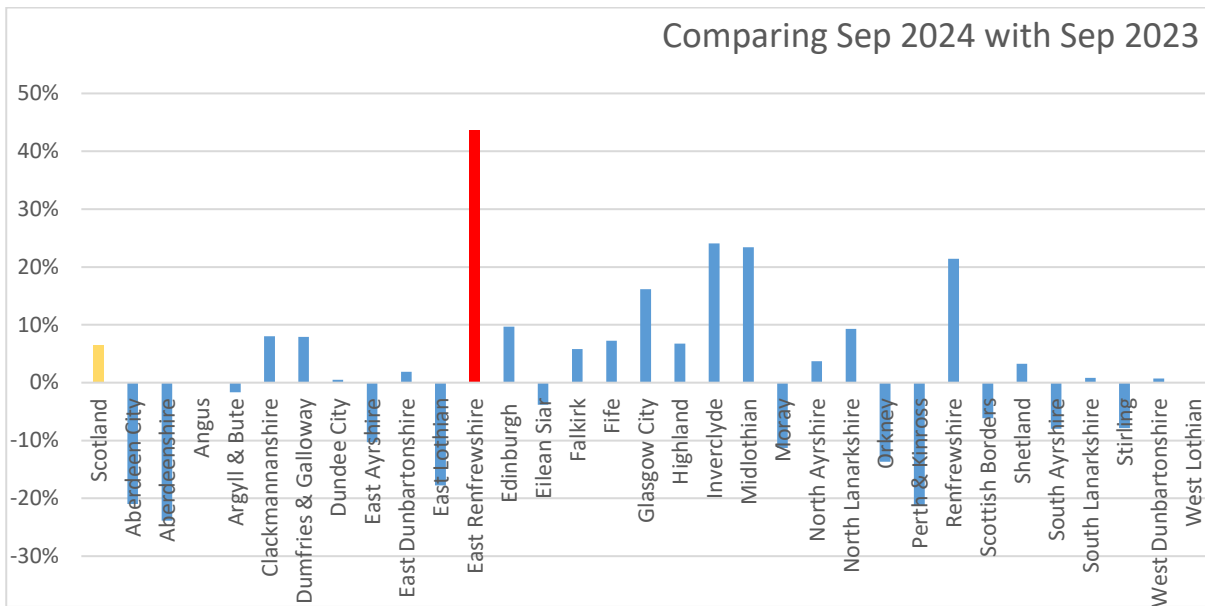


Table 1 - % increase of numbers in temporary accommodation

9. Initial data for the year 2025/26 are expected to confirm that the small decline in homeless applications has continued and in recent months a decline in the numbers in temporary accommodation. However, pressure on temporary accommodation and permanent accommodation still remains a significant challenge. The data demonstrates that whilst there is a small decrease in applications, it is too early to assess that this is the start of a downward trend in new homelessness applications. Furthermore, there is not enough social housing to meet the sustained increase causing a backlog of households in temporary accommodation and of households awaiting an offer of permanent housing.

10. At present the Council has up to 350 households accepted as homeless and awaiting an offer of accommodation. There are approximately 170 households in temporary accommodation, including 39 in bed and breakfast. This is a reduction from September 2024 where the Council had over 200 households in temporary accommodation and around 50-60 households in bed & breakfast at any one time. These figures can and do fluctuate on a day to day basis depending on the volume of persons presenting and whether they are assessed, at first presentation or on subsequent appeal, as having a statutory entitlement to temporary and/or permanent housing.

11. In recent years the Council has seen a significant rise in applications from households from outwith East Renfrewshire. Prior to November 2022, a household from outwith could only present as homeless in East Renfrewshire if they could either demonstrate a local connection, had been granted leave to remain, or were a victim of domestic abuse. However, in November 2022, the Scottish Government removed all other restrictions around the requirement to have a local connection.

12. The national data has also shown a 20% increase in homeless applications for Glasgow City Council. This is important to note as with the removal of local connection, East

Renfrewshire's proximity to Scotland's largest city will have an impact on the number of homeless applications received.

Actions and update over last 6 months

13. Members will note from the previous paper that the Council has put in place several actions in recent years to respond and mitigate the impact of increasing levels of homelessness. Actions and on-going work led by the housing team over the last 6 months include:

- More than doubling the provision of temporary accommodation over last 5 years and increasing lets to homeless households for council housing and through partnership with Barrhead Housing Association. In the last 6 months this has increased further from 130 units to 145 currently in use.
- Approval by Council of a £1m housing acquisition fund in September 2024 has to date resulted in 6 properties having been purchased with a further property shortly due to complete. The fund has been topped up following Cabinet approval in Feb 2025 of a further £1m investment with expectation of approximately another 6 units being acquired.
- Capital investment is also being made available to provide 5 further flats at Overlee House, 2 of which will be accessible, and which are anticipated to be also completed during 2025/26. This project is currently at tender stage.
- A land audit of all Council owned land, alongside a review of buildings owned by the Council, to consider development and redevelopment opportunities for both additional temporary accommodation and also affordable and social housing development.
- A change to lettings targets was implemented. The change allocated more new homes to existing council tenants and increased the percentage allocation of homeless households for existing stock.
- A fully revised Letting Policy is being prepared and will be presented for approval later in 2025.
- A Tenant Support Fund has been created to support and focus on tenants rent arrears and prevent homelessness.
- Training and development for Housing Services teams to ensure high quality services despite sustained demand. This is including protected learning time for staff to ensure that knowledge is shared and learning is core to the development of the service.
- An empty homes officer was employed in July 2024 to target 124 long-term empty homes in East Renfrewshire and return them to the housing market. Engagement with empty and second home owners in conjunction with the council tax levy being applied has resulted in a 12% reduction in the number of empty homes and a 7% reduction in the number of second homes.
- A full review of void processes, as a part of a wider review of Housing Services, to minimise any avoidable delays in preparing Council homes for new tenants efficiently. At present the Council has no unlettable stock.
- A procurement notice has been issued to enable us to appoint providers of temporary accommodation, including hotels and bed & breakfast accommodation. This is with the desire to formalise current arrangements for hotel booking and to help provide some element of cost control.
- The development of self-serve online advice services is underway. This will provide households with access to a digital housing advice service to include available local housing options for council housing, housing associations and advice on private sector housing for rent. The new service is anticipated to be launched later in 2025.
- A review has been carried out resulting in the development of a new protocol being put in place to with a view to aiming to prevent Care Experienced Young People from having to be assessed as homeless.
- A multi-partnership strategic group is in place to review services for homeless households. This includes ensuring that partners work together to prevent homelessness from occurring, wherever possible, including ensuring households receive the correct advice

and service from all agencies involved. More information is set out below on the partnership work on going to address homelessness.

Provision of New Permanent Housing

14. Through the development of the Strategic Housing Investment Programme (SHIP), East Renfrewshire Council and our partner social landlords continue to increase the supply of affordable housing. However, it is important that the Council are aware of the following influences:

- Financial capacity of social landlords – in developing capital programmes, the Council (and all other social landlords) have a legal duty to ensure existing homes meet all current and future statutory standards. The introduction of the Social Housing Net Zero Standard (SHNZS) is expected to place significant investment pressures in the coming years, as is ensuring that all stock meets – and continues to meet – Scottish Housing Quality Standards (SHQS) and that we meet or exceed all statutory regulatory requirements. The opportunity cost of all of these investment requirements is, therefore, less resource availability to support new build housing activity, as ultimately all of these activities require to be funded through rents, Council borrowing and such capital grant and any other funding streams as may be available.
- The Housing Revenue Account 30 year business plan is updated on an annual basis. A review of the business plan was submitted to the 7 November 2024 Cabinet. The financial appraisal confirmed that Housing Services are in a position to support the current level of annual expenditure required to continue to deliver the current new build programme.
- We regularly review whether there is any capacity to extend this programme. The Local Housing Strategy 2024-29 agreed an action with partners to deliver a minimum of 45 additional affordable homes per year on average over 5 years. Activity in the first year of the strategy was able to be accelerated to facilitate 109 homes being completed for rent with a notable success in bringing forward 105 units at Maidenhill during 2024/25 alone.
- In the five years to 31st March 2025, a total of 425 affordable units, representing £31,911,182 in capital grant funding, have been delivered by the Council and partner Registered Social Landlords.
- In terms of our Housing Supply Programme (AHSP), the existing Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) 2025-30, which was agreed on 24 October 2024, was based on the previously announced 24% AHSP reduction. It has subsequently been announced that this funding reduction is to be reversed, therefore meaning that funding will return to previous levels for 2025/26. This means that the Council has been advised that the East Renfrewshire grant allocation for 2025/26 will increase from what had been an expected £5.4m, to £7.225m. Housing Services is in discussions with all partners to determine which projects can be delivered earlier as a result of this increase, and these proposals will be the subject of a future Cabinet report in 2025.
- In addition to the above, we were notified on 27 March 2025 that we have been successful in obtaining a further £4.716m of additional capital grant money for the provision of additional affordable housing units. This is a windfall amount as it reflects a subsidy redistribution from other local authorities who could not spend their full grant allocation, and is an indication of the success of the service and partners in achieving spend against target, leading to this welcome extra allocation of funding. As immediately above, we will be discussing how this will be invested with partners, and we will also update Cabinet on our proposals in this regard during 2025.
- Land Supply and Infrastructure – whilst new homes are needed, a challenge remains to identify available land and the infrastructure to meet this need. In East Renfrewshire school capacity represents a significant challenge.

15. In April 2024, the Scottish Government pledged an additional £80m of grant funding over two years to permit Council and Housing Associations to purchase social housing from the open market. For 2024/25, East Renfrewshire was awarded £196k of grant funding which is being

utilised by Barrhead Housing Association for this purpose. No confirmation has been provided at the point of writing on the 2025/26 award as this is subject to a COSLA agreement, but we will provide further updates to Cabinet during 2025/26 as funding is confirmed and as properties are delivered through this pathway.

16. East Renfrewshire Council has also recently submitted evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Local Government Housing & Planning Committee detailing the reasons for the local housing emergency.

FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY

17. The use of hotel / bed & breakfast accommodation is a particular financial challenge. In 2024/25, East Renfrewshire Council budgeted approximately £545k to fund specifically hotel / bed & breakfast accommodation. However, the estimated total cost for 2024/25 is £2.3m, with only around 12% being recouped in housing benefit support. All other forms of temporary accommodation are fully funded from rental income or housing benefit support.

18. The existing programmes to increase stock by purchasing from the open market and the extension of Overlee House will permit the Council to recoup up to 80% of revenue costs. Reductions in overall spend on hotel / bed & breakfast accommodation as a result of these investments are predicated on there being no further increase in homelessness presentations. Whilst the most recent figures represent a small decline in new cases, it is too early to say if that downward trajectory will continue.

CONSULTATION & PARTNERSHIP WORKING

19. Homelessness requires a multi-agency approach to prevent, manage and address. Housing Services established a multi-agency partnership to work through the actions detailed in the LHS and improve services. These partners include:

- East Renfrewshire Health & Social Care Partnership;
- ERC Money Advice & Rights Team (MART);
- East Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau (ERCAB);
- Education Department;
- Customer 1st; and
- Barrhead Housing Association (BHA)

20. The partnership are helping to mitigate the emergency in a number of ways through:

- A joint protocol with HSCP to deliver "The Promise to ensure our looked after young people access and sustain tenancies outside of the homelessness system;
- A protocol is in development for discharge from rehabilitation services to ensure we have smooth routes into suitable accommodation reducing the need to use hotel accommodation; and
- Housing Services continues to work with all partner services to raise awareness of Housing and Homelessness issues that promote and encourage the development of homelessness prevention activities.

21. The Council works closely with all social housing providers to ensure all social housing stock is used for those in most need. However, many providers in the area are specialist housing providers and are often unable to assist. Barrhead Housing Association (BHA) are the only community based housing association in East Renfrewshire. It is vital as the two main social housing providers that a partnership approach is taken. A strategic agreement is in development

between the Council and BHA which will be launched in May 2025. This a 5 year agreement detailing how as our core partner, BHA will support the aims of the Local Housing Strategy including the prevention of homelessness and increase in affordable housing.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSALS

22. Any implications of the actions proposed in this paper will be reviewed and reported to Cabinet in due course and where appropriate implication assessments will be undertaken.

CONCLUSIONS

23. East Renfrewshire Council continues to face a local housing emergency. Whilst there has been a small reduction in homelessness and use of temporary accommodation, the emergency has not yet been addressed. The sustained increase in homelessness since 2019 continues and the local housing market is not equipped to deal with this increase in demand.

24. East Renfrewshire Council are continuing to undertake actions to mitigate the issue such as:

- Maximising new supply through a review of the local housing finance model; and
- Working with partners to improve prevention models; and
- Significant capital investment to increase the supply of temporary accommodation.

25. Further updates can be provided to Council on our response to the emergency at regular intervals and proposals for investment to support mitigation measures and supply will be brought forward over the forthcoming year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

26. It is recommended that Council note the update and future actions.

Caitriona McAuley, Director of Environment

Further details can be obtained from Mark Rodgers, Head of Housing & Property on mark.rodgers@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk

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