

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

29 January 2015

Report by Director of Environment

ELIMINATION OF BED AND BREAKFAST USAGE FOR HOMELESS APPLICANTS

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To advise the Cabinet on East Renfrewshire Council's progress towards the elimination of the usage of bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless households and to approve an action plan designed to achieve this.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. It is recommended that the Cabinet notes East Renfrewshire Council's progress towards the elimination of the usage of bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless households and approves an action plan designed to achieve this.

BACKGROUND

3. In accordance with the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 Section 29 as amended by the Housing (Scotland) 2001 Act when a homeless applicant presents to an authority they must be provided with temporary accommodation while their homeless status is investigated. If a duty is found to provide the applicant with permanent accommodation they must remain in temporary accommodation until permanent accommodation is secured. If no duty applies they must remain in temporary accommodation for a reasonable period of time while receiving advice and assistance to secure their own permanent accommodation.

4. Historically local authorities have used Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation as a means of discharging this duty. However, the use of Bed and Breakfast is now deemed as being poor practice.

5. Furthermore legislation limits the use of such accommodation for some categories of homeless applicant. The Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 contains a provision which allowed Scottish Ministers to create legislation which would limit the use of B & B accommodation across Scotland. In 2004 the Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order was created. This sets out standards which temporary accommodation for households with children and pregnant woman must meet. The purpose was to put an end to the use of B & B accommodation or other unsuitable accommodation for such households unless exceptional circumstances existed.

6. The Scottish Housing Regulator, who is tasked with regulating housing and homeless services in local authorities, inspected East Renfrewshire Council in 2010 and published its findings in April 2011. The Council was criticised for having a shortage of suitable temporary accommodation for service users with high support needs as well as relying heavily on B & B accommodation.

7. The Council took on board the recommendations by the Scottish Housing Regulator and devised an action plan to review temporary accommodation within the area and reduce the usage of B & B accommodation by 50% by March 2012.

8. Although B&B usage reduced following the SHR visit (from 50% in 2010/11 to 40% in 2011/12 and then 41% in 2012/13), further reductions proved difficult to achieve.

9. These difficulties initially related to inadequate facilities to deal with out of office hours presentations and a lack of supported accommodation in East Renfrewshire for service users with high support needs. The Cabinet approved a proposal on 21st June 2012 to build a supported accommodation unit within East Renfrewshire to permit the elimination of Bed and Breakfast usage and to provide the Council with appropriate options for households that are unable to sustain a mainstream tenancy, even with the provision of floating support. (As has been reported to the Cabinet subsequently on 21st August 2014 the identification of a suitable site for such a unit has not proved possible).

10. In the last 18 months the introduction of the under occupancy charge for Housing Benefit claimants (colloquially known as the “bedroom tax”) has increased the challenge of eliminating the usage of bed and breakfast. This is partially due to an increased demand for temporary accommodation with more homeless households presenting as homeless. However, the main factor is a lack of suitable permanent accommodation with a significant number of applicants waiting for one bedroom properties. This means that homeless households stay in temporary accommodation for a longer period than previously.

11. In response to this the Cabinet approved on 21st August 2014 measures to increase the number of properties leased through the private sector leasing scheme from ten to twenty, thereby increasing the supply of temporary accommodation.

Current performance and issues

12. Regulatory concern regarding the use of Bed and Breakfast remains. Reference was made to the continued use of Bed and Breakfast in the Assurance and Improvement Plan 2014-2017. This plan was published in May 2014.

13. Current performance is detailed below. The table shows the performance of the Council this year compared to last year. Whilst improvements have been made in both measures and whilst performance in one of the indicators remains better than the national average, there is still a need for further progress.

Measure	2013/14 ARC/SHBVN average	ERC 2013/14	ERC 2014/15 Mid Year
% of homeless applicants accommodated in Bed & Breakfast (where accommodation was provided)	26% (SHBVN)	44%	40%
Average stay in Bed & Breakfast	41 days (ARC)	14 days	9 days

REPORT

14. As part of the Council’s journey in the complete elimination of Bed and Breakfast usage, an interim target has been set to ensure that the Council’s performance is in the top quartile of all local authorities by September 2015.

15. In practice this means reducing the percentage of applicants placed in Bed & Breakfast to 3.7% and the number of days they spend in Bed & Breakfast to 5 days.

16. To achieve the target of 3.7% fewer than 8 applicants can be placed in Bed & Breakfast in the period April-September 2015.

Increasing Supply of Furnished Accommodation

17. Since 2012 the number of homeless applicants requiring temporary accommodation has increased by 23% and the supply of temporary furnished accommodation has increased in the same period from 34 to 45 (32%) including 9 properties leased privately from landlords.

18. An analysis of demand for temporary accommodation indicates that that supply of furnished temporary properties requires to be increased from its current level of 45 units to 53. This would, based on current projections, eliminate the need for Bed & Breakfast accommodation for applicants who present **within office hours**.

19. The Council has identified an additional five properties which will be used for temporary accommodation. Two of these will be available for use by the end of December 2014 and a further three by the end of January 2015.

20. Initial negotiations with Registered Social Landlord partners have been positive and they will provide two properties which will be available for use as temporary accommodation by the end of February 2015. We have written to Registered Social Landlord partners to seek agreement for a further two properties to be made available for this purpose by the end of May 2015.

21. Although take up of the expansion of the Private Sector Leasing Scheme has been slow it is anticipated that a least two properties would be provided through his scheme again by the end of March 2015.

22. In an attempt to stimulate interest from private landlords in the Eastwood side of the authority, during the month of January 2015 we will be offering them full Local Housing Allowance for the period of their agreement instead of usual 90%.

23. If no properties are provided through this initiative by end March 2015 then additional properties will be sourced from Registered Social Landlord partners or local authority stock to achieve the number required.

Provision of Out of Hours Accommodation

24. As mentioned above, there is an absence of any out of hours accommodation other than Bed & Breakfast. On average the Council receives out of hours applications from 33 people per year which equates to 15% of all applicants who require temporary accommodation.

25. It is clear therefore that if the target of 3.7% is to be achieved an alternative option is required to the use of Bed & Breakfast for this client group and a proposal has been developed to pilot the use of a property at Overlee House for this purpose.

26. Work is ongoing to facilitate this option including agreement on a "booking in" process for applicants. It is planned a pilot with one property will begin by the end of January 2015 with a view to two properties being utilised by the end of the current financial year.

Other proposals

27. Other proposals have been identified in relation to the use of sheltered accommodation and the sharing of temporary accommodation which have been outlined in the action plan.

FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY

28. Although there will be savings associated with a decrease in the use of bed and breakfast accommodation it cannot be stated with certainty that the proposals will be met within existing resources given the staffing and furnishing implications associated with managing a larger pool of accommodation. The additional cost of this proposal is difficult to calculate for a demand led service but could be in the region of up to £15,000.

CONSULTATION

29. Consultation has not been required in the preparation of this report.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

30. In 2012 the Scottish Government and COSLA jointly convened a Homelessness Steering Group to strategically drive progress towards meeting the 2012 homelessness target. One of the key issues that emerged from the steering group is that whilst traditionally the provision of homeless services is a task undertaken by the Housing Services section of a local authority, it is a duty that should be undertaken corporately.

31. In order to help understand this process COSLA commissioned the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) to produce a report to highlight the key learning points for local authorities.

32. The report, entitled "Homelessness - the Need for a Corporate Approach to Homelessness, Whose "problem" is it anyway?" noted that "Local Authorities cannot afford to pay lip service to corporate responsibility. They must be prepared to fully embrace the corporate approach in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for the most vulnerable within our society, ensuring services and support reaches those who need it, whilst developing and integrating systems and processes that will ensure that services are delivered more effectively, and that essential information is shared. Homelessness is everyone's problem. No single agency or service can resolve homelessness alone. Where Local Authorities and partners take a meaningful, holistic approach to meeting the needs of individuals, they are more likely to reap the benefits of preventing homelessness and achieving good, sustainable outcomes."

33. On this basis it is important that East Renfrewshire Council continues to fully recognise the corporate nature of resolving homelessness.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSALS

34. There are no implications associated with this report in terms of staffing, property, legal, IT, equalities and sustainability. Any financial implications will be met from within existing budgets.

35. Members may wish to note concerns previously expressed by some local residents in relation to the utilisation of Overlee House for out of hours emergency accommodation.

CONCLUSIONS

36. The need to further reduce the usage of bed and breakfast accommodation is both challenging and essential. The measures outlined in the action plan attached will hopefully ensure that this requirement can be achieved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

37. It is recommended that the Cabinet notes East Renfrewshire Council's progress towards the elimination of the usage of bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless households and approves an action plan designed to achieve this.

Director of Environment

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KEY WORDS

Scottish Housing Regulator, homelessness, temporary accommodation, bed and breakfast

Action Plan

Objective	Tasks	Timescale
<p>Increasing Supply of Furnished Accommodation</p>	<p>Prepare and furnish two Temp LA Properties for use by homeless applicants</p> <p>Negotiate leases for two RSL properties with BHA.</p> <p>Prepare and furnish two Temp RSL Properties for use by homeless applicants</p> <p>Prepare and furnish three additional Temp LA Properties for use by homeless applicants</p> <p>Negotiate PSL agreements for two properties with landlords</p> <p>Prepare and furnish two additional Temp PSL Properties for use by homeless applicants</p> <p>Negotiate with RSL partners for an additional two properties for use</p>	<p>End December 2014</p> <p>End January 2015</p> <p>End February 2015</p> <p>End January 2015</p> <p>End January 2015</p> <p>End February 2015</p> <p>End May 2015</p>
<p>Provision of Out of Hours Accommodation</p>	<p>Identify property at Overlee for use as out of hours accommodation.</p> <p>Consider and agree arrangements required for book ins with CCTV/Security Company and draft procedures</p> <p>Prepare and provide property for use</p>	<p>Mid January 2015</p> <p>Mid January 2015</p> <p>End January 2015</p>
<p>Use of Overnight Accommodation in Sheltered Complexes</p>	<p>Confirm remedial work required to make accommodation suitable for temporary accommodation.</p> <p>Carry out remedial work required</p> <p>Confirm properties available for use</p>	<p>Mid January 2015</p> <p>End January 2015</p> <p>Start February 2015</p>
<p>Sharing of Temporary Accommodation</p>	<p>Consider issues which have to be addressed to facilitate sharing and develop solutions.</p> <p>Identify potential properties/applicants for sharing</p> <p>Confirm properties/applicants for sharing and agree start date</p>	<p>End February 2015</p> <p>End February 2015</p> <p>End March 2015</p>