



REPORT TO: COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE ON 18 AUGUST 2015

SUBJECT: HOMELESSNESS IN MORAY – ANNUAL REPORT 2014/15

**BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR (ECOMONIC DEVELOPMENT,
PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE)**

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 This report presents an analysis of homelessness in Moray throughout 2014/15 and makes a comparison with previous years. It also sets out future actions to address homelessness in Moray.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section III G (4) and (9) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to homelessness and the preparation of the housing quality plans and other such housing related plans as may be required to ensure effective implementation of strategic housing matters.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that the Communities Committee:-

- (i) considers and notes the analysis of homelessness detailed in this report; and**
- (ii) agrees the future actions detailed in Section 6 of this report.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 This is the seventh annual report to be presented to this Committee relating to the operation of homelessness legislation in Moray. The previous report was presented on 23 September 2014 and provided an analysis of homelessness within Moray for 2013/14 (paragraph 6 of the Minute refers).
- 3.2 This report relates to the financial year 2014/15 and draws information from the annual dataset provided to the Council by the Scottish Government Statistical Office, published on 30 June 2015. The analysis is presented in a similar format to last year's report.
- 3.3 Homelessness is assessed in accordance with the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, as amended, and the Code of Guidance on Homelessness (2005). There are three tests of assessing homelessness:

Test 1 – Is the applicant homeless or threatened with homelessness?

Test 2 – Is the applicant intentionally homeless?

Test 3 – Does the applicant have a local connection?

The outcome of each test determines the level of assistance that local authorities must provide to a person who is homeless or threatened with homelessness.

4. PROFILE OF HOMELESSNESS APPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The detailed analysis of homeless applications and assessments made in Moray during 2014/15 is detailed in the tables within **APPENDIX I**.
- 4.2 **Table 1** shows that there has been a slight increase in the number of homeless applications received from 524 in 2013/14 to 562 in 2014/15 - an increase of 38 applications or 7.25%. The increase in homelessness may in part be due to the current economic climate as more households are seeking assistance due to financial difficulties, debt and unemployment.
- 4.3 **Table 2** represents the age groups of those presenting as homeless. Similar to previous years, the two main age groups who continue to present as homeless are those aged 18 to 25 (35.2%) and 26 to 59 (54.6%). Combined, these represent 89.8% of all homeless applications which is also reflective of previous years. There has been a slight decrease in the number of homeless applications from those aged 16 – 17 from 8.2% in 2013/14 to 6.8% in 2014/15.
- 4.4 **Table 3** shows homeless applications by household type. Single people (59.3%) continue to be the highest household type presenting as homeless which also reflects previous years. Single parents (22.4%) remain the second largest household type.
- 4.5 **Table 4** provides details of the main reasons for homelessness. Again, these reasons are reflective of previous years with those asked to leave the home (33.6%), non violent disputes within the household (14.6%) and violent or abusive disputes within the household (11.9%) being the main reasons.
- 4.6 **Table 5** identifies the factors that applicants' state has contributed to their homelessness. This information is obtained directly from homeless applicants, who are able to provide multiple answers. A total of 486 reasons were provided. The main reason for failing to maintain accommodation was financial difficulties/debt/unemployment (127). This is an increase on the previous year (103) and has almost doubled since 2012/13 (65). Another area where there has been an increase is those citing mental health as a factor, lack of support from friends/families and difficulties managing on their own. It is proposed within the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2015/16 to carry out more investigation of the reasons for homelessness to examine options that may help to prevent homelessness and to provide better outcomes for those at risk of homelessness.

- 4.6.1 A total of 13 applicants indicated that welfare reform was directly responsible for the loss of their accommodation. Of these, 5 applicants (1 was a Council tenant) stated that the removal of the spare room subsidy was a key factor in their homelessness. Officers have investigated the background of these cases where possible and it would appear that there is a need to continue to provide information on what assistance can be provided to those who endure the spare room subsidy. In the case of the Council tenant, they gave up their property without first seeking any advice and thereafter presented to the Council as homeless. It is clear from the case notes that if the tenant had sought advice or had been aware of what wider assistance could have been provided, homelessness in that case could have been avoided.
- 4.7 **Table 6** indicates that a total of 547 homeless assessments were completed in 2014/15. Of these, 98.2% had a local connection with Moray as defined in the Code of Guidance on Homelessness (2005). **Table 7** reveals that, in line with previous year's figures, residency and family association remain the main reasons for a local connection.
- 4.8 **Table 8** identifies the outcome of homeless assessment decisions made during 2014/15. These decisions determine the level of assistance that the Council is required to provide in terms of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, as amended.

Decision	Assistance
Neither Homelessness nor potentially homeless	Appropriate advice/assistance relating to the housing circumstances of the household to be provided
Unintentionally homeless	Temporary accommodation until permanent accommodation is provided.
Intentionally homeless	Temporary accommodation until decision and then advice provided.

- 4.8.1 A total of 288 households were assessed as unintentionally homeless compared with 281 in 2013/14 – an increase of 2.49%. In terms of the homeless legislation, the Council has a duty to provide these households with temporary accommodation until permanent settled accommodation can be provided.
- 4.9 **Table 9** identifies that 63.1% of all homeless households were unemployed at the time of their homeless application. This compares with 63.5% in 2013/14 and 67.1% in 2012/13.

5. NATIONAL COMPARISON

- 5.1 The Scottish Government published its statistical review of homelessness activity in Scotland on 30 June 2015. This allows a comparison to be made, where relevant, with the local picture in Moray, and with other local authorities.

Homeless applications

- 5.2 There has been a 4% reduction in homeless applications across Scotland in 2014/15. This is not however reflected uniformly across local authorities with Moray being one of 13 local authorities where there has been a slight increase. Across Scotland, 66% of homeless households had made a housing options approach prior to making a homelessness application. This compares with 80% in Moray. Nationally, the rate of reduction in homelessness has slowed and this may suggest that the impact of housing options work is unlikely to lead to any further significant reductions beyond those already seen.

Profile of homelessness

- 5.3 The profile of homelessness in Moray continues to be broadly similar to that across Scotland. Since 2007/08, there has been a small year on year increase nationally in applications from single people with only a 1% reduction being recorded in 2014/15. By contrast, Moray has experienced a gradual year on year reduction in applications from single people but in 2014/15 experienced a 3 % increase.
- 5.4 Nationally the main reason for homeless applications remains as relationship breakdown. However there is variation in those who are asked to leave which has significantly reduced nationally but increased locally from 28% to 33.6% in 2014/15. Mental health reasons, lack of support from family/friends and physical health reasons have all increased both locally and nationally.

Assessments

- 5.5 The percentage of homeless assessments identified as repeat cases (i.e. where a previous application from the household had been closed less than 12 months before the current assessment) has increased nationally (7.2%). In Moray, repeat cases have reduced to 3.5% in 2014/15. This reduction may be attributed to the impact of the housing support service which assists homeless applicants to achieve a sustainable tenancy and avoid further housing crisis.
- 5.6 Across Scotland, the proportion of cases assessed as intentionally homeless increased to just over 6%. The overall increase may be a consequence of the abolition of the priority need test as all those assessed as homeless are now tested for intentionality. Prior to this, non-priority homeless households would not have been subject to the intentionality test. Although Moray continues to find more households intentionally homeless (9.3%), a review of existing processes has concluded that Officers are applying the test for intentionality in a fair and consistent manner.

Support needs of homeless households

- 5.7 Across Scotland, homeless assessments where the applicant had one or more support needs have increased to 38% in 2014/15. This includes

increases in those requiring support for basic housing management/ independent living skills, mental health issues and alcohol or dependency problems. In Moray, the situation would appear to be even more acute with 70% of households identifying that they had one or more support needs. This variation sets out the ongoing challenge to support households and meet demand. The diversity of support needs also identifies a requirement for a range of different services/agencies to work closely together if the Council is to successfully support vulnerable people into independent living. In 2015/16, the Homelessness Strategy Group will consider how it can further improve areas of multi-agency work to support vulnerable households at risk of homelessness.

Temporary accommodation

- 5.8 Across Scotland, the total number of households in temporary accommodation increased by 2% in 2014/15 compared with a 9% increase in Moray. The need for temporary accommodation in Moray continues to be influenced by the availability of new build council housing, re-lets and the vulnerabilities experienced by homeless applicants such as lack of life skills which means that some households must remain longer in temporary accommodation until they are ready to move on to independent living.

Permanent accommodation

- 5.9 The Allocation Policy Annual Performance Report presented to this Committee identifies that a total of 586 properties became available for let in Moray in 2014/15. This included 465 council properties (of which 68 were new build houses) and 121 housed by nomination to Registered Social Landlords (RSL).
- 5.10 Of the total number of council lets, 42.3% (197) went to homeless households compared to 38% nationally. A further 77 homeless households were housed by nomination to RSLs.

FUTURE ACTIONS

Homeless applications

- 6.1 Given the increase in homeless applications locally and the slowing of the rate of reduction in homeless applications nationally, Officers will continue to examine the impact this will have on the service and the effect a potential increase in more complex cases will have on the Council.

Temporary accommodation

- 6.2 A revised temporary accommodation charging policy was implemented on 6 April 2015. The overall aim of the policy is to ensure that the rent charged for temporary accommodation is affordable to all, does not act as a disincentive to work and that rent is recovered to its maximum potential. An appraisal on the performance of the policy will be completed during 2015/16 and a report on this will be presented to this Committee in June 2016.
- 6.3 From 1 April 2016, Local Authorities will begin submitting data on temporary accommodation to the Scottish Government. This will provide placement level

information on temporary accommodation and will also enable analysis of the time spent in each placement. To facilitate this, Officers are currently working on the transfer of temporary accommodation data to *MWorld*. This will be progressed during 2015/16.

Homelessness Strategy Action Plan

- 6.4 A separate report is being presented to this Committee on the Homelessness Strategy and its accompanying action plan which will be progressed during 2015/16. The following actions highlighted within this report will be included:
- Ensuring compliance with the Scottish Government's Housing Options Guidance;
 - Provision of housing advice and information on the range of housing options available to make informed choices and decisions at an early stage; and
 - Provision of housing support services to all who need it, to prevent homelessness and to break the cycle of repeat homelessness.

7. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Moray 2023 A Plan for the Future/ Service Plan

Moray 2023 and the Service Plan (Priority 2) identify the need to tackle homelessness. Housing options seeks to reduce homelessness and prevent homelessness where possible to help those at risk of losing their home. This promotes healthier citizens and adults living healthier, sustainable independent lives safeguarded from harm.

(b) Policy and Legal

The legislative framework for homelessness is contained within the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, as amended.

(c) Financial implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

(d) Risk Implications

There are no risks immediately arising from this report. There will be potential risks to the Council should the level of homelessness presentations increase in the future, which will result in pressure on temporary and permanent housing stock.

(e) Staffing Implications

None arising from this report.

(f) Property

None arising from this report.

(g) Equalities

There are no equalities issues in this case.

(h) Consultations

Consultation on this report has taken place with the Head of Housing and Property, Principal Accountant (Deborah O'Shea), Legal Manager – Property and Contracts (Aileen Scott) and the Committee Services Officer (Lissa Rowan) and Managers within the Housing Service who agree with this report.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 This report presents an analysis of homelessness in Moray during 2014/15. It also provides a national comparison and identifies future improvement actions to be taken forward by the Service in 2015/16.

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Background Papers: With authors

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