



REPORT TO: COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE ON 8 NOVEMBER 2016

SUBJECT: HOMELESSNESS IN MORAY – ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16

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

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides Committee with an analysis of homelessness in Moray throughout 2015/16 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 F (4) and (10) 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 within Section 6 of this report.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 This is the eighth annual report to be presented to this Committee relating to the operation of homelessness legislation in Moray. The previous report was presented on 18 August 2015 and provided an analysis of homelessness within Moray for 2014/15 (paragraph 12 of the Minute refers).
- 3.2 This report relates to the financial year 2015/16 and draws on information from the annual dataset published by the Scottish Government Statistical Office published on 28 June 2016.
- 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 IN MORAY

- 4.1 The detailed analysis of homeless applications and assessments made in Moray during 2015/16 is detailed in the tables within **APPENDIX I**.
- 4.2 **Table 1** shows that the number of homeless applications reduced to 536 compared with 562 the previous year – a reduction of 4.62%. This is similar to the reduction nationally of 4%. Moray was one of 22 local authorities who have reported a reduction in homelessness in 2015/16 and this is due in part to the housing options work that is carried out by the Council.
- 4.3 **Table 2, 3 and 4** provide details of the age and type of households that are presenting to the Council as homeless and their reasons for homelessness. In summary:
- the majority of applicants are single persons (57.1%);
 - this is followed by single parents (23.74%);
 - the most likely group to become homeless are aged 26 to 59 (59.14%);
 - this is followed by those aged 18 to 25 years (29.7%);
 - there was almost an equal split of applications received from males (49.62%) and females (50.38%); and
 - the main reason for homelessness is being asked to leave (37.1%), followed by a non-violent dispute within the household (14.2%).
- 4.4 The above figures show the pressures that the Council continues to face both in responding to and preventing homelessness. There is an ongoing need to look at the reasons for homelessness and the homelessness trends. In recent years, this has identified a strategic need to increase the supply of affordable housing – particularly 1 and 2 bedroom single person units. The increase in female homelessness also requires further scrutiny which will be taken forward by the Service in 2016/17.
- 4.5 The number of applicants citing violence or abuse within the household (63) has reduced for the fourth consecutive year. While the percentage of applications (11.8%) is now similar to the Scottish average, the overall number of households at risk from this type of behaviour continues to be an area of concern.
- 4.6 **Table 5** identifies the factors that applicants' state have contributed towards their homelessness. Multiple reasons can be given to reflect the reality that in many cases, there is a combination of reasons and not a single cause of homelessness. In 2015/16, there has been a further increase in the number of applicants (151) citing financial difficulties/ debts/ and unemployment as the main cause of their homelessness. This factor has been increasing in recent

years and is the most likely cause for the increase in homeless people requiring emergency temporary accommodation at the point of presentation. When this is compared with the other main factors – mental health, lack of support from friends and family, physical health, drug and alcohol dependency, criminal/antisocial behaviour and welfare reform – these are all showing reductions in this financial year which is an obvious shift in terms of the historic client base who in previous years have presented as homeless. It is important that the Housing Service now understands the reasons for this change as failure to do so could have financial implications particularly in relation to the provision of temporary accommodation. This work will be progressed in 2016/17.

4.7 **Table 6** and **Table 7** provide details of the number of homeless assessments completed in the year and also those who presented to the Council with a local connection. In summary:

- 546 homeless assessments were completed in the year;
- 98.4% had a local connection with Moray as defined in the Code of Guidance on Homelessness (2005); and
- residency and family association continue to be the main reasons for local connection.

4.8 **Table 8** identifies the outcome of homeless assessment decisions made during 2015/16. 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 |
|---|---|
| Unintentionally homeless | Temporary accommodation until permanent accommodation is provided. |
| Intentionally homeless | Temporary accommodation provided while applicant is given reasonable opportunity to find their own accommodation. |
| Neither Homelessness nor potentially homeless | Appropriate advice/assistance relating to the housing circumstances of the household to be provided |

4.9 **Table 9** shows that 55% of all homeless households were employed at the time of their homeless application. This compares with 63.1 in 2014/15, 63.5% in 2013/14 and 67.1% in 2012/13.

5. **HOMELESSNESS DECISIONS**

5.1 The outcome of homeless decisions based on the above assessment criteria is provided below:

- 325 households were assessed as unintentionally homeless;
- 53 households found to be intentionally homeless; and
- 37 households found not to be homeless or potentially homeless.

5.2 The Council had a legal duty to provide permanent accommodation to the 325 unintentional households. Across Scotland, Moray had the highest proportion of outcomes securing settled accommodation (82%). Households found intentionally homeless (9.34%) were higher than the national average (6%) but Officers were found to be applying the intentionality test in a fair and consistent manner and in accordance with the homelessness legislation. The Council offered advice and general assistance to 37 households who made a homeless application but were found not to be homeless or potentially homeless.

5.3 The number of applicants who resolved their homelessness prior to the assessment decision was 10.26% - an increase of 2.3%. This may be attributed to the ongoing focus on homeless prevention and tenancy sustainment. Officers continue to work with the applicants to resolve their situation whilst progressing with a homelessness application.

Support needs

5.4 In 2015/16, 264 households (69.84%) cited having one or more support needs. This is considerably higher than the national figure of 42%. The main support needs included basic housing management/independent living reasons (38.39%), mental health concerns (21.89%), medical reasons (14%) and drug/alcohol dependency (13.86%). The Council's housing support services continue to develop its approach towards applicants with support needs. This will continue in 2016/17 using the data that has been gathered from the annual report.

Repeat homelessness

5.5 In 2015/16, 20 households made a repeat homeless presentation. This compares with 15 the previous year. The classification of a repeat application is where a previous application was closed less than 12 months before the repeat presentation. Although there has been a small increase in repeats (5.3%) it still remains lower than the national figure (6.6%). The main causes of repeat applications during the year were the applicant being asked to leave their accommodation, a dispute within the household (non-violent and violent) and the applicant having their tenancy terminated by their landlord.

Temporary accommodation

5.6 A snapshot of homelessness collected by the Scottish Government as at 31 March 2016 showed that nationally, the number of homeless households had decreased by approximately 1%. In contrast, Moray experienced a 10% increase which confirms the ongoing pressures now facing this part of the homelessness service. The Head of Housing and Property is currently looking at resources within this part of the service as the Supported Accommodation Manager (who has done excellent work over the years to develop the range of temporary accommodation and support) is due to retire in December 2016. The main factors that affect the throughput in temporary accommodation include:

- the speed of homelessness decisions;
- the availability of permanent housing;
- the number of first offer refusals for permanent accommodation;

- intentionally homeless households; and
- vulnerable households who need help towards independent living.

Permanent housing

- 5.7 The annual report for 2015/16 relating to the operation of the Council housing allocations policy was presented to this Committee in June 2016 (Para 8 of the draft Minute refers). The report highlighted that a total of 619 properties were re-let in Moray (480 council properties and 139 from other Registered Social Landlords (RSL). Of these, 189 council lets (39.4%) and 77 RSL lets (70%) were allocated to homeless households.

6. FUTURE ACTIONS

- 6.1 There are a range of actions contained within the body of this report that will be taken forward by the Housing Service in 2016/17. Most are intended to help Officers understand the shift in the homelessness population so that any appropriate changes to the current service delivery model can be considered. The actions will assist Officers to deliver the Homelessness Strategy and its accompanying action plan during 2016/17 which was presented to this Committee in September 2016 (paragraph 7 of the draft Minute refers).

Health and homelessness data linkage

- 6.2 Earlier this year the Council participated in the Scottish Government's health and homelessness data linkage project. The project will link homelessness and health data to quantify the health needs of homeless people so that appropriate health services can be developed around the data. Analysis of the data is due to start in autumn and preliminary results may be available by the end of the year.

7. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Moray 2026: A Plan for the Future and Moray Corporate Plan 2015 – 2017

Moray 2026 and the Service Plan (Priority 2) identify the need to tackle homelessness. The Homelessness Service seeks to provide advice and assistance, and where appropriate, affordable accommodation and support to those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. 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

The Head of Housing and Property is currently looking at resources within the supported accommodation team following the decision by the Supported Accommodation Manager to retire in December 2016.

(f) Property

There are no property issues arising from this report.

(g) Equalities

There are no equalities issues in this report.

(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 2015/16. It also provides a national comparison where appropriate and identifies future actions that will be taken forward by the Housing Service in 2016/17.**

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Background Papers: With author

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