



REPORT TO: COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE ON 17 OCTOBER 2017

SUBJECT: HOUSING OPTIONS AND SUPPORT SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT 2016-17

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

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides Committee with the sixth annual report of the Council's housing options and housing support services.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section III G (4) and (7) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to homelessness and exercising the Council's powers within the terms of the relevant legislation in relation to housing support.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that the Communities Committee:-

- (i) considers and notes the sixth annual report of the housing options and support services; and**
- (ii) agrees that the next annual report for 2017/18 will be presented to this Committee in due course.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council has statutory duties and responsibilities to prevent and alleviate homelessness. The Council's priorities for addressing homelessness in Moray are set out in various strategies and plans, including Moray 2026, the Corporate Plan, the Housing and Property Service Plan and the Local Housing Strategy as well as the Homelessness Strategy 2015-18. Housing options and support, providing advice and assistance to households facing homelessness as well as robust transitional and tenancy sustainment services, are key elements of the Council's approach to preventing homelessness and responding to the needs of homeless households.
- 3.2 This is the sixth annual report of the Council's housing options and housing support services. The previous report for 2015/16 was presented to this Committee on 24 January 2017 (paragraph 9 of the Minute refers). The report presents the housing and homelessness data in a new condensed

format focussing on the key points and trends. The data is provided in the tables in **APPENDIX I**.

- 3.3 The legislative framework for homelessness prevention is defined under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and the Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003. This places a duty on the Council to provide advice and information to prevent homelessness from occurring. Although there are no specific legal duties around housing options, the Scottish Government has encouraged local authorities to develop services to address the local context and challenges. Local authorities do, however, have a duty to complete an annual statistical return (Prevent 1) which records all their housing options activities. This data is used to monitor and evaluate how housing option services across Scotland are progressing and to provide comparisons with the national context.
- 3.4 In March 2016, the Scottish Government published non-statutory guidance on housing options. This followed a thematic inspection on housing options by the Scottish Housing Regulator. Although it has recognised that there are different ways of delivering housing options, the Government has reported that a further review of the guidance will be carried out during 2017. However, at the time of writing, details of the review had not been made available.

4. HOUSING OPTIONS

- 4.1 The Scottish Government's guidance indicates that local authorities should take a holistic approach when providing a housing options service. This ensures that the advice and assistance that is being offered is specifically tailored to the individual whilst taking account of their own specific circumstances. This service is available to anyone who has a housing need and aims to prevent homelessness before it occurs.
- 4.2 **APPENDIX I** provides an analysis of the housing options and housing support activity between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017.
- 4.3 **Table 1** shows that 1,078 households approached the Housing Options service for housing, 14 fewer than the previous year (a 1.28 % reduction). This marginal reduction indicates that there is a continuing pressure on the service.
- 4.4 **Tables 1-4** provide a profile of those who requested housing advice. In summary:
- 18-24 year olds are more likely to seek advice (27.37%) closely followed by those between 30-39 (22.82%);
 - The majority of approaches come from single people (85.7%) of which 23.01% are single parents;
 - Slightly more females approach for assistance than males, 52.97% and 47.03% respectively; and
 - 44.89% were living with parents, partner, family and/or friends at the time of approach with 21.62% in private rented accommodation.

- 4.5 **Table 5** provides a breakdown of the main reasons households approach the Council for advice and assistance:
- 28.20% cited dispute within the household/relationship breakdown (non-violent), a 3.47% increase on the previous year;
 - 12.52% were at risk of losing accommodation as a result of repossession;
 - 12.06% were asked to leave their accommodation (which was also the main cause of homelessness during the year); and
 - 12.15% cited dispute within a household: violent or abusive (a 0.58% decrease from 2015/16). This is reflective of the number of homelessness cases for the same reason (11.2%).

Partnership working with the Moray Domestic Abuse Partnership and Police Scotland's Public Protection Unit allows cases to be highlighted to the necessary agencies and monitored or actioned where necessary.

- 4.6 **Tables 6a and 6b** highlights that a significant proportion (33.03%) of those approaching the Council for housing assistance considered themselves to be vulnerable:
- 22.79% cited financial difficulties/debt/unemployment;
 - 21.03% cited mental health issues and 14.85% physical health issues, both of which is a slight increase on 2015/16; and
 - 12.80% cited difficulty managing on their own.

Overall 14.94% disclosed multiple vulnerabilities. This indicates the Housing service cannot deal exclusively with the range of issues that cause homelessness. The need for a robust multi-agency approach to homelessness is highlighted in the Homelessness Annual Report 2016/17, which is a separate item on the Committee agenda.

- 4.7 **Tables 7a and 7b** provide a breakdown of all the housing options actions that were carried out during 2016/17. 30.83% were given general housing advice/info/assistance while 28.42% were advised on their rights under the homelessness legislation.

The vast majority of actions were carried out by the housing options team (97.19%). This reflects the past two years' data. Officers in the Housing Service continue to refer and signpost clients for support from other Council services and partner agencies.

- 4.8 **Table 8** identifies the outcomes of households who attended a housing options interview in 2016/17:
- 42.62% made a homeless application (just below the national average of 44%);
 - 21.72% remained in their current accommodation (again just below the national average of 22%);
 - 11.09% moved in with friends or relatives;
 - 8.8% secured accommodation in the private rented sector;
 - 6 households (0.55%) embarked on some type of home ownership; and
 - the remainder (15.77%) secured either a local authority/Registered Social Landlord (RSL) or voluntary organisation tenancy. This reflects the national data.

- 4.9 **Tables 9a and 9b** highlight the length of time that housing options cases remain open. Only 34.65% of cases were closed within 28 days and only 17.51% within 2 weeks. The majority of cases (65.35%) were open for more than 29 days after the initial approach. This shows that the Housing Options Teams are dealing with cases over a prolonged period of time and that there is no easy solution to the housing issues faced by many clients.
- 4.10 **Table 10** highlights that 11.2% of all housing options cases were repeat approaches, which is higher than the national average of 9%.

5. Section 11 Referrals

- 5.1 Under Section 11 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2003, there is a legal requirement on other landlords and mortgage lenders to notify the local authority of any households who may be at risk of homelessness due to threat of eviction or repossession. This ensures an early notification of households who may be at risk of homelessness and who require advice.
- 5.2 In 2016/17, the Council received 78 Section 11 notifications - a decrease of 1 from the previous year. Of these, 38 were from Registered Social Landlords, 5 from private landlords and 35 from mortgage lenders. Housing options staff attempted to contact all referred households. However 37 (47.44%) did not respond to the contact. 15 cases (19.23%) engaged with the housing options service with no further action required. 14 (17.95%) were able to remain in their property, 8 (10.26%) went on to make a homeless application, 3 (3.85%) moved in with family/friends and 1 (1.27%) lost contact.

6. HOUSING SUPPORT AND TENANCY SUSTAINMENT

- 6.1 All housing support services are required by law to be registered with the Care Inspectorate and are subject to inspection as and when required. The Council's housing support team plays a vital role in supporting vulnerable tenants within their own home. The service is available to anyone aged 16 and over. Support aims to assist people to live as independently as possible in their own home. The service can be provided in many different tenure types, including temporary accommodation and other forms of supported accommodation. Staff will assist people to manage and sustain their own tenancy or to help them transition to a more suitable tenancy. The support offered includes completion of benefits or other forms, budgeting advice as well as the home safety and security advice.
- 6.2 Housing support data is held internally for business reporting and provides an analysis of all housing support activity from 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017.
- 6.3 A total of 502 households were referred for housing support. This is a slight decrease of 7.37% from the 539 referrals in the previous year. An average of 198 households receive housing support each month.

- 6.4 **Table 11** shows the original source of the referral:
- 69.33% were internal from the Council's housing options, allocations, homeless and/or temporary accommodation teams and the area housing teams;
 - 11.16% from social work;
 - 9.96% were self-referrals; and
 - the remaining 9.55% was made up of small numbers of referrals from RSL's, Benefits, Moray Women's Aid, Drug and Alcohol or family and friends.
- 6.5 **Table 12** highlights that the majority of people who received housing support were single (89.32%) with 12.5% being lone parents. The age group most likely to require support is 35-59 (32.81%), followed by 18-24 (26.04%) and 25-34 (25.26%). The service supported 58 households with children compared to 91 the previous year, a decrease of 36.26%.
- 6.6 **Table 13** provides details of the type of tenure occupied at the time of support. 43.43% were living in a Moray Council tenancy. 19.72% were living in temporary homeless accommodation and 16.33% were living with family/friends/parents. A smaller but significant number (4.98%) were living in the private rented sector. The number referred for support while in hospital increased to 6 from 1 in the previous year. Albeit small numbers, this can be attributed to stronger working links with Health and Social care on the hospital discharge protocol.
- 6.7 **Table 14** provides a breakdown of cases where the Area Housing Teams have referred tenants to the housing support service for assistance in managing their rent arrears. During the year, a total of 175 referrals were made compared with 226 in the previous year. Of the 175 referrals, 52 cases (29.71%) were stabilised and 38 (21.71%) were given support.
- 6.8 **Table 15** details the main reasons for providing housing support during 2016/17. The main reasons were financial/ literacy/correspondence issues (41.34%). This is a decrease of 4.4% from 2015/16. Lack of life skills accounted for 32.67%. Mental health reasons and addictions to substances or alcohol accounted for 15.14% (an increase of 7.9%) and 10.56% (a reduction of 2.24%) respectively.
- 6.9 **Table 16** shows outcomes and reasons for the support ending. Exactly 50% of all cases ended support naturally as it was no longer required. Of the remaining 50%, 25.36% either did not engage, need or declined the service, while 13.63% transferred to another service or family and friends for ongoing support. The remaining 11.01% were cases where support ended due to eviction, the end of temporary accommodation or the client being in prison or deceased.

6.10 **Table 17** illustrates the variances in the length of time that support is required:

- 11.24% receiving support of up to one month
- 18.90% of cases received support of up to 3 months
- nearly one quarter received support for up to 6 months (24.40%)
- nearly one third received a service of up to 1 year (35.89%)
- only 9.57% required support lasting over one year

6.11 161 cases were still open and receiving support at 31 March 2017.

6.12 Syrian Refugees

During 2016/17, continued support was provided to the five Syrian families who moved to Moray in February 2016. Initially support was being provided for a period of six months. However, it has been recognised that the families will require support for an extended period of time. The families have all engaged and are accessing external services to meet their needs with their English language skills developing well (both adults and several of the children). In March 2017, a nine month exit strategy was implemented with support to be gradually withdrawn by December 2017. This will enable the families to become more independent. Should the families continue to require support beyond this date, this will be provided by the generic housing support team. The Refugee Resettlement Officer's role will cease at the end of December 2017.

7. EXTERNAL SUPPORT PROVIDERS

7.1 The Council has three housing support contracts with external providers. Two of the contracts deliver support in a residential setting. The Council monitors quality of these services on an ongoing basis, meeting regularly with service providers to discuss operational issues, agree service outputs and highlight any areas of concern or good practice. The three contracts are:-

7.2 Marleon House, Elgin

This accommodation has 10 units of temporary accommodation for single women or women with children who have been subjected to, or are at risk of, domestic abuse. The contract with Moray Women's Aid has been extended to 31 March 2018 and officers are currently looking at options for contracting the service beyond this date. During 2016/17, Marleon House accommodated 27 women and 23 children.

7.3 Covesea Road, Elgin

This accommodation has 10 units of shared accommodation for young people of both genders aged 16 to 24. The provider is SACRO which is a national community justice voluntary organisation. A three year contract commenced 1 July 2016 and will run until 30 June 2019. Covesea Road accommodated 21 single young people during 2016/17.

7.4 Guildry House, Elgin

This accommodation has 10 units of shared accommodation. There is no age or gender restriction. The service provides support for those with addictions. A new three year contract commenced 1 July 2016 and will run until 30 June 2019. Guildry House accommodated 27 people during 2016/17.

8. FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

8.1 The following longer term actions will be developed throughout the remainder of 2017/18 and into 2018/19:

Housing Options Training Toolkit

8.2 A Housing Options Training Toolkit is being developed nationally by the Scottish Government's Housing Options Hub partners. Despite a series of delays, it is anticipated that the toolkit will be completed by the end of 2018 with implementation in 2019. The toolkit will be used to deliver dynamic training, knowledge boards and discussion forums to frontline housing options staff as well as other departments, agencies and partners who require a basic induction in housing options to assist the multi-agency process.

Housing Support Services Policy

8.3 A review of the Housing Support Services Policy will be carried out in May 2018 to reflect the Scottish Government's new Health and Social Care Standards, due to be implemented on 1 April 2018 to replace the National Care Standards.

9. 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. 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. The work of the Housing Options and Support teams reduce the risks and costs to the Council arising from homelessness presentations, which increase pressure on temporary accommodation and the permanent housing stock.

(e) Staffing Implications

There are no staffing issues arising from this report.

(f) Property

There are no property issues 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 Services Manager – Property and Contracts and the Committee Services Officer (Caroline Howie) and Managers within the Housing Service who agree with this report where it relates to the area of responsibility.

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1 This report provides the Communities Committee with an annual report outlining the work of the housing options and housing support services during 2016/17. It identifies the positive impact of this work on tackling homelessness in Moray.**

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Background Papers: With authors

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