



REPORT TO: COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE ON 17 OCTOBER 2017

SUBJECT: HOMELESSNESS IN MORAY – ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17

**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 2016/17 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 ninth annual report to be presented to this Committee relating to the operation of homelessness legislation in Moray. The previous report was presented on 8 November 2016 and provided an analysis of homelessness within Moray for 2015/16 (paragraph 13 of the Minute refers).
- 3.2 This report relates to the financial year 2016/17 and draws on information from the annual dataset published by the Scottish Government Statistical Office on 27 June 2017.

- 3.3 Nationally, it is recognised that preventing and tackling homelessness is a key part of fighting poverty and inequality in Scotland. The Government has implemented a range of policies and legislation to prevent and alleviate homelessness and to ensure that homeless households get support and assistance according to their individual needs. According to Shelter Scotland, Scotland's homelessness legislation is recognised as some of the most progressive in the world.
- 3.4 Homelessness is seldom just a housing problem. It is frequently a result of a range of complex and often interlinked issues, rarely solved by housing alone. Guidance published by the Scottish Government emphasises that a local authority's duties towards a homeless person are corporate in nature and not solely the responsibility of the housing service. By ensuring a corporate approach, based on the principles of early intervention, local authorities are more likely to implement homelessness prevention activities that gain optimum effectiveness and address the complex issues which cause housing crisis and result in homelessness.
- 3.5 Local authorities have statutory responsibility for homelessness as detailed within the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, as amended. A summary of the Scottish homelessness legislative and policy framework is provided in **APPENDIX I**. These duties primarily include the prevention and alleviation of homelessness and provision of temporary and permanent accommodation for unintentionally homeless households.
- 3.6 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 2016/17 is detailed in the tables within **APPENDIX II**.
- 4.2 **Table 1** provides detail on the number of homelessness applications and assessments in Moray. This shows that the number of applications received since 2010/11 decreased and thereafter has remained fairly stable, with 554 applications received in 2016/17. This decrease can largely be attributed to the impact of housing options and prevention work. A separate report providing a detailed analysis of housing options and prevention work in Moray is included on the Agenda for consideration by this Committee.

- 4.3 **Tables 2 and 3** provide a profile of the households who presented as homeless and the reasons for this. In summary:
- i. the group most likely to become homeless are aged between 26 – 59 (60.3%), followed by 18 – 25 (29.6%) (**Table 2**); and
 - ii. the majority of applicants are single person households (62.8%), followed by single parents (24.4%) (**Table 3**).

The characteristics of applicants have not changed significantly since reporting to Committee started, only fluctuating by a few percentage points at most. This is on par with the national context.

- 4.4 **Table 4** identifies the reasons for homelessness. Being asked to leave continues to be the main cause of homelessness applications (40.6%). Dispute within the household (and relationship breakdown) is another key driver of homelessness. In 2016/17, 11.2% and 12.2% of homelessness applications come from those who have been through a violent or nonviolent domestic household dispute respectively.
- 4.5 The causes of homelessness can be complex and not the result of a single incident or event. The main reason cited by applicants for failing to maintain their accommodation continues to be financial difficulties/debt/unemployment, followed by mental health reasons, lack of support from family/friends and difficulty managing on their own (**Table 5**).
- 4.6 **Table 6 and 7** evidence that the vast majority of households presenting as homeless (97.7%) have a local connection to Moray. The local connection is mainly associated with residency and family association.

5. **HOMELESSNESS DECISIONS**

- 5.1 The outcome of homelessness assessment decisions will determine the level of the assistance that the Council is statutorily 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.

- 5.2 During 2016/17, 63% of applicants (355 assessments out of a total of 560) were assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness. The number of applicants who resolved their homelessness prior to the

assessment decision has continued to increase to 13.4% (from 10.3% in 2015/16). This may be attributed to the ongoing focus on prevention work and tenancy sustainment, whereby Officers continue to work with applicants to resolve their housing situation whilst continuing to progress their homeless application. This work is also reflected in the reduction in the number of applicants found to be intentionally homeless/potentially homeless from 9.7% in 2015/16 to 6.2% in 2016/17 (**Table 8**).

Repeat homelessness

- 5.3 The Council has strived to reduce repeat homelessness in Moray and since 2013/14 it has constantly remained lower than the national average. Repeat homelessness is defined as “where a previous application was closed less than 12 months before the previous presentation and where the adult members of the household are the same”. In 2016/17, Moray had 6.2% cases of repeat homelessness in contrast with the national figure of 6.7%.

Support needs

- 5.4 Of the 355 households assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness in 2016/17, 249 (70%) cited having one or more support needs. Although this figure has decreased from the previous year, it is still above the national average and evidences that a large proportion of applicant households have more complex needs. This reinforces the need for a continued corporate approach as set out in section 3.4 of this report.

Temporary accommodation

- 5.5 A snapshot of homelessness collected by the Scottish Government as at 31 March 2017 revealed that, nationally, the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation had increased by 3% from the previous year. Moray experienced an increase of 4%, (higher than the national average) which is a year on year increase since 2013. This reinforces the ongoing pressures faced by the Council on addressing the demand for temporary accommodation. A separate report providing a detailed analysis of temporary accommodation in Moray will be presented to this Committee in December 2017.

Permanent housing

- 5.6 The annual report for 2016/17 relating to the operation of the Council housing allocations policy was presented to this Committee on 21 June 2016 (Para 8 of the Minute refers). This report highlighted significant pressures on the available stock of council housing and the continued increase in the number of applicants on the homeless list. The report indicated the pressures were being driven by the high number of single people presenting as homeless and the lack of suitable one bedroom properties becoming available for relet. These trends will be considered as part of the forthcoming Housing Needs and Demands Assessment 2017 and development of the Local Housing Strategy 2018 – 2023.

6. **FUTURE ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

- 6.1 There are a range of actions contained within this report which will be taken forward by the Housing Service in 2017/18.
- 6.2 Between 2003 and 2018, the Council developed homelessness strategies setting out how it worked with partner agencies to prevent and alleviate homelessness and to ensure that appropriate assistance and support is provided to households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. On 13 September 2016, this Committee agreed that the Council should not produce a separate Homelessness Strategy but that strategic actions to address homelessness should be incorporated in the next Local Housing Strategy 2018-23 (Para 7 of the Minute refers).
- 6.3 A report on progress with the final Homelessness Strategy 2015-18 will be presented to this Committee in March 2018. Thereafter, the homeless strategic planning activity will be incorporated in the next Local Housing Strategy, a consultative draft of which will be presented to this Committee also in March 2018.

Welfare Reform

- 6.4 The ongoing roll out of Universal Credit, the benefit cap reduction and the capping of housing benefit for social sector rents to Local Housing Allowance (LHA) levels have the potential to directly threaten people's ability to keep their tenancies and risk pushing people into a housing crisis and homelessness. Officers will continue to monitor the impact of welfare reform on homelessness in Moray.

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 financial implications arising from this report.

(d) Risk Implications

There are no risks directly arising from this report. However, 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

There are no implications arising from this report.

(f) Property

There are no property implications arising from this report.

(g) Equalities

There are no equality implications arising from this report.

(h) Consultations

Consultation on this report has taken place with the Head of Housing and Property, Deborah O'Shea (Principal Accountant) Paul Nevin , Senior Solicitor (Property and Contracts)), Caroline Howie (Committee Services Officer) and senior managers within Housing and Property and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 This report presents an analysis of homelessness in Moray during 2016/17. It also provides a national comparison where appropriate and identifies future actions that will be taken forward by the Housing Service in 2017/18.

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Background Papers: With author
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