

To: Communities & Housing Policy Board

On: 16 January 2024

Report by: Director of Environment, Housing and Infrastructure

Heading: Homelessness in Renfrewshire - Update

1. Summary

- 1.1 The Policy Board has been provided with regular reports on homelessness in Renfrewshire and an overview on the progress with the implementation of our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP).
 - 1.2 This report provides a further update on the nature and scale of homelessness both nationally and in Renfrewshire and details the current and emerging pressures, as well as the actions being taken by officers to address these pressures.
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2. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Communities and Housing Policy Board:

- 2.1 Note the current and emerging local and national pressures that are resulting in an increase in homeless applications and demand for housing support, and the impacts these increases may have.
 - 2.2 Note the progress being made to date to meet the needs of those who are homeless, and that a further progress report will be submitted to the Policy Board in May 2024.
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3. Background

Homelessness update

- 3.1 The annual number of statutorily homeless households in Renfrewshire generally remained consistent for many years and tended to be within the 750 – 850 range.
- 3.2 There has however been a steady increase in homeless applications since 2020/21, as detailed in the table below. This recent increase in applications has been in line with the national trend.

Year	Total annual number of homeless applications in Renfrewshire
2023/24	752 at 31 December
2022/23	935
2021/22	909
2020/21	834
2019/20	874
2018/19	849
2017/18	860
2016/17	777
2015/16	843
2014/15	838

- 3.3 The reasons behind the gradual increase in homelessness over the last 3 years and the more recent emerging housing pressures are believed to largely stem from the impacts during the COVID recovery years, pressures arising from the cost-of-living crisis, and since December 2022 from the suspension of the ‘local connection’ criteria for homeless applicants.
- 3.4 Local authorities across Scotland are experiencing significant pressures in meeting demand for social housing and there is now clear evidence nationally of rising homeless presentations, record numbers in temporary accommodation and increasing waiting times for those in need of a home.
- 3.5 The Scottish Housing Regulator published a thematic review of homelessness services across Scotland in February 2023 and found that a number of councils were struggling to meet all their statutory duties to homeless applicants and concluded that there is considerable pressure on councils in the provision of homelessness services.

- 3.6 In December 2023 the Regulator published a statement which updated its February report, in which they concluded that there is now systemic failure in the delivery of homelessness services in some local authorities and an immediate risk in others. Their judgement is that the demands on some councils now exceed their capacity to respond and in others it soon will.
- 3.7 Whilst Renfrewshire is experiencing increasing homelessness and local housing pressures, it is not currently at risk of 'systemic failure' as some other local authorities are. However, if homeless presentations continue to rise in the coming months, there is little resilience left across the system and it is anticipated Renfrewshire will struggle to continue to provide both temporary and settled accommodation in line with our statutory duty.
- 3.8 The very recent national increase in migration and asylum activity is also impacting on local housing pressures, and Councils such as Glasgow, Edinburgh and Argyle & Bute have all made well publicised statements on the severe pressures they were experiencing with demand for social rented lets and homelessness support.
- 3.9 It is anticipated that local social rented housing pressures will continue to build here in Renfrewshire, with it being likely that there may be a significant increase in the number of homeless applications in the current financial year.
- 3.10 The reasons behind this are outlined in more detail in sections 4 – 6 of this report and were also considered by the Council's Leadership Board at its meeting on 6 December 2023.

4 Resettlement Programmes

- 4.1 As previously reported Renfrewshire has a strong track record in terms of supporting people who have come to live and settle in the area through different humanitarian programmes or routes, such as the resettlement schemes for Syrian and Afghan nationals and those displaced from Ukraine.
- 4.2 Partners and officers have developed skills and experience in terms of supporting people to settle successfully and the last 12-18 months have seen unprecedented change in relation to migration and asylum activity, through factors such as the Ukraine humanitarian resettlement programmes and the widening of asylum dispersal across the UK.

5 Support for Ukrainian Displaced Persons (UDPs)

- 5.1 The Council, HSCP and partners have played a key role in supporting people who arrived in Renfrewshire over the last 18 months. A core element of our role has been to support the establishment and ongoing operation of a Welcome Hub linked to Glasgow Airport.

- 5.2 At its peak, our Welcome Hub supported over 400 Ukrainian Displaced Persons in the Autumn / Winter of 2022, and the reducing number of arrivals has allowed our Resettlement Team to scale back operations at the Hub in order to reduce costs and direct support towards those Ukrainian households who have moved on to live in communities across Renfrewshire, including those staying with 'hosts'.
- 5.3 As at 14 December 2023, 151 social rented tenancies have been provided to Ukrainian Displaced Persons by the Council and Registered Social Landlords. The total number of households we have living in the community, with a host or in their own social rented tenancy in Renfrewshire is 190 households (432 individuals).

6 Asylum Dispersal

- 6.1 In April 2022, the UK Government notified all UK local authorities of their intention to expand asylum dispersal arrangements across the UK, rather than through a smaller number of agreed asylum dispersal areas such as Glasgow.
- 6.2 More people are now being served with positive asylum decisions whilst being accommodated in hotels in the local area. Whilst this is positive for the individuals concerned, this has led to an increase in the numbers of people presenting to Homeless Services for support who are entitled to be provided with temporary accommodation and the right to apply for a social rented tenancy.
- 6.3 In line with current protocols put into place by the Home Office, asylum seekers receiving a positive asylum decision have 28 days to leave existing hotel accommodation and are directed to work with charities and the local authority to make this transition and find suitable accommodation. Those receiving negative decisions on asylum applications are given 21 days notice to leave their existing accommodation.
- 6.4 Local services are already beginning to see this develop and since October 2023 the number of asylum seekers who had been staying in hotel accommodation and have then presented as homeless following a positive decision being granted has grown month on month. There is also emerging evidence of people presenting as homeless in Renfrewshire who were previously staying in hotels in other local authority areas, which they are allowed to do.
- 6.5 The Home Office have also begun to share data through COSLA which provides an indication of the number of potential positive decisions that can be expected over the short term (3 months), given the work that is being undertaken by the Home Office to tackle the volume of asylum applications nationally. This is linked to the UK government's announcement in 2023 to streamline the application process for claimants from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Libya, Syria and Yemen. Some claimants from Sudan are also being considered under the new process.

- 6.6 Officers have also identified concerns that the well-publicised housing challenges in Glasgow may impact Renfrewshire's housing and homeless service, as people who are unable to access accommodation in Glasgow look to surrounding local authority areas for support. There is anecdotal evidence this is already happening in terms of homeless presentations, and it is the view of officers that preparations should actively be made to prepare for the likely additional demand that this could place on already over-stretched services.
- 6.7 For example, officers are considering a scenario where 10% of the 1400 asylum seekers with positive decisions and seeking housing support in Glasgow in the short term, may be likely to present in Renfrewshire as homeless due to the lack of accommodation options in Glasgow. It is therefore anticipated this could generate an additional 140 applications over the next few months.
- 6.8 The next section provides an overview of the work that is being undertaken to address the local homeless and housing support pressures.

7. Responding to Emerging Homeless / Housing Support Pressures

- 7.1 As reported at the previous meeting of the Communities and Housing Policy Board, the Council is on target to allocate 49% of general lets to homeless applicants this year in response to the increase in the level of 'domestic' homelessness over the last two to three years. This figure was 41% in 2022/23.
- 7.2 Similarly, local RSLs have been asked to increase the number and proportion of lets to those who are homeless and whilst there has been a positive response from our RSL partners, lower turnover rates and the overwhelming demand for one bedroom properties for single homeless applicants is making it particularly challenging for all social housing providers.
- 7.3 The Council's stock of furnished properties being used to provide temporary accommodation for those who have nowhere to stay has been increased to 263. However, like many other local authorities, the Council is regrettably now having to use B&B on a daily basis in order to ensure that some form of temporary accommodation can be provided for those in housing need. It is important to note that our Homeless Services team have managed to avoid placing households with children in B&B.
- 7.4 An application for Scottish Government funding to return 'last-in-the-block properties' for use as accommodation for Ukrainian Displaced Persons as part of a ring-fenced funding programme was reported to the Policy Board in August 2023. The application has now been approved 'in principle' and formal confirmation of this funding award will assist in reducing pressure in the housing system.

- 7.5 A review of current empty properties in areas within the Council's regeneration programme has been undertaken which has identified a number of flats which could potentially be used as temporary accommodation for homeless applicants. Work is underway to assess and prepare these properties for use in the short to medium term, during the period leading up to when regeneration works will be underway and a further update will be provided at a future meeting of this Board.
- 7.6 As would be expected, the associated demand for housing support has similarly increased and whilst the range of support services and initiatives being delivered across Renfrewshire have been successful in improving tenancy sustainment for those who have been homeless and reducing the level of repeat homelessness, homeless and housing support services are increasingly coming under pressure.
- 7.7 In line with other local authorities, we do require to increase capacity to ensure the Council is able to continue to respond appropriately to the current and anticipated increase in homelessness pressures. An initial review has been carried out and additional frontline posts identified that require to be deployed on a temporary basis to provide greater resilience at this time, and effectively manage the increased stock of temporary accommodation, reduce the reliance on B&B, and ensure value for money whilst providing essential support to those residing in temporary accommodation.
- 7.8 An officer working group has been established to ensure the Council and partners respond to these additional pressures and that measures were in place to respond proportionally throughout December and over the holiday period to meet the demand for accommodation. The group will continue to meet and develop the Council's response as the nature of local housing pressures develops and the scale of the challenge becomes clearer moving forward. This will include linking in with surrounding local authority areas to share information and work collaboratively where appropriate.
- 7.9 A further update will be provided to the Communities and Housing Policy Board in May 2024.

8. Financial Pressures

- 8.1 The Leadership Board recently authorised the Chief Executive to put in place additional resources to respond to potential service pressures identified within the report over the next 3 months if these are required, in consultation with the Council Leader.
- 8.2 Officers are continuing to explore options to use existing funding streams to create additional officer capacity in the housing support and homeless service, children's social work and in terms of overall co-ordination of the programme of work required.

- 8.3 At present the increasing demand on services has been largely managed within existing resources with some additional staffing being put into place through migration and asylum funding streams allocated to the Council by the UK and Scottish Government.
- 8.4 The significant potential increase in homeless presentations linked to asylum population in Renfrewshire and more widely across the West of Scotland, is anticipated to create additional financial pressures for Council services. Projections of these pressures will continue to be reviewed and reported to future Communities and Housing Policy Boards.
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Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – the increasing demand on services has been largely managed within existing resources with some additional staffing being put into place through migration and asylum funding streams allocated to the Council by the UK and Scottish Government. As noted in the paper, the significant potential increase in homeless presentations linked to asylum population in Renfrewshire and more widely across the West of Scotland, is anticipated to create additional financial pressures for Council services. Projections of these pressures will continue to be reviewed and reported to future Communities and Housing Policy Boards.
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – additional temporary posts will be deployed in response to the housing pressures referred to in this Report.
3. **Community/Council Planning –**
 - Our Renfrewshire is fair - those who are homeless will be provided with housing options.
 - Building strong, safe and resilient communities – meeting the needs of those who are homeless and providing access to settled housing helps to support communities.
 - Tackling inequality, ensuring opportunities for all – those who are in housing need will be provided with settled housing options.
 - Working together to improve outcomes – we will be working with partners to improve outcomes for those in housing need.
4. **Legal** – none.
5. **Property/Assets** – none
6. **Information Technology** – none

7. **Equality & Human Rights**

- (a) The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because it is largely for noting only. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.

8. **Health & Safety** – none

9. **Procurement** – none

10. **Risk** – There are potential risks in terms of increased pressure on housing / homelessness resources as a result of national policy changes around asylum dispersal and these will be recorded in the Council's strategic risk register.

11. **Privacy Impact** - none

12. **COSLA Policy Position** – not applicable.

13. **Climate Risk** – not applicable.

List of Background Papers

- (a) Background paper 1 ' RRTP and Homelessness Update', Communities & Housing Board on 25 October 2022.
- (b) Background paper 2 ' Homelessness Update' Communities, Housing & Planning Policy Board on 15 March 2022.
- (c) Background paper 3 'Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan and Homelessness Update' Communities, Housing & Planning Policy Board on 17 August, 2021.
- (d) Background Paper 4 'Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan – funding update' Communities, Housing & Planning Policy Board on 19 January 2021.

The foregoing background papers will be retained within Environment, Housing & Infrastructure Services for inspection by the public for the prescribed period of four years from the date of the meeting.

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