
To: Communities & Housing Policy Board

On: 21 May 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 overviews on the progress with the implementation of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan 2019 - 2024 (RRTP).
 - 1.2 At the Policy Board meeting in January, it was agreed that an additional progress report would be submitted to the Policy Board in May 2024 due to the scale of the emerging local and national housing pressures and demand for support.
 - 1.3 This report provides updated details on the nature and scale of homelessness in Renfrewshire and the current and emerging pressures, as well as the measures being taken to address these.
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2. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Communities and Housing Policy Board:

- 2.1 Note the continuing local and national pressures that are resulting in an increase in homeless applications and demand for housing support, and the impacts these increases are currently having and may have in the future.
 - 2.2 Note that reports will be submitted to the next meeting of the Policy Board on the provisions within the new Housing (Scotland) Bill 2024 and associated public consultation, and on the implementation of Renfrewshire's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan.
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3. Background

Homelessness update

- 3.1 As reported to previous Policy Board meetings, 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, stepped increase in homeless applications since 2020/21, as detailed in the table below, and this has resulted in the number of applications in 2023/24 exceeding 1,000 for the first time, as was forecast in recent updates to the Policy Board.

Year	Total annual number of homeless applications in Renfrewshire
2023/24	1028
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 As reported to the Board in January, the reasons behind the increase in homelessness over the last 3 years and the more recent emerging housing pressures largely stem from the impacts during the COVID recovery years, pressures arising from the cost-of-living crisis, the impact of the migration and asylum humanitarian programmes, a slowing down in the turnover rate of social rented housing, and the impact in Renfrewshire since the suspension of the 'local connection' criteria for homeless applicants in December 2022.
- 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 housing need.

- 3.5 This was confirmed by the Scottish Housing Regulator who published a thematic review of homelessness services across Scotland in February 2023 and a statement in December 2023 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. This has now been augmented by the Regulator's 'Risk Assessment Outcomes Report' published in April 2024 which advises that in the Regulator's most recent programme of annual conversations with all local authorities, they found that:
- most saw an increase in demand for homeless services,
 - around half advised that they were not able to always fully comply with statutory duties to provide suitable temporary accommodation when someone needed it, and
 - most had fewer permanent homes becoming available to let to people in housing need, including people who are homeless.
- 3.6 The more recent national increase in migration and asylum activity is also impacting on local housing pressures – see section 4 of this report - and Councils such as Glasgow, Edinburgh, Argyle & Bute and latterly Fife have all made well publicised statements on the severe pressures they were experiencing with demand for social rented lets and homelessness support.
- 3.7 Whilst Renfrewshire continues to experience increasing homelessness and local housing pressures, it is not currently at risk of 'systemic failure' as some other local authorities are. However, there is less resilience across the system, and it is anticipated Renfrewshire will continue to struggle to provide both temporary and permanent accommodation for those in housing need, in line with our statutory duty.
- 3.8 Whilst the challenges are and will remain significant, there are still some positive performance indicators for Renfrewshire in terms of how the changes in the nature and scale of homelessness are being tackled. On 27 February 2024, the Scottish Government published a 'Statistics Bulletin' providing information on homelessness in Scotland up to 30 September 2023 with an indication of trends for key aspects of homelessness as well as comparisons between local authorities.
- 3.9 Some of the key factors emerging from this Scottish Government report which help to illustrate the changes that are taking place and the performance of local homeless services and partners, are:
- whilst the national average proportion of homeless households which are single person is 68%, Renfrewshire continually has >80% of homeless applicants being single persons. This is largely due to having good housing options for families, which helps prevent homelessness.
 - there was a 3% increase in homeless applications across Scotland when comparing the period January – September 2022 to January – September 2023, however the figure for Renfrewshire was an increase of 11%.

- only 3 local authorities recorded more homeless applicants than Renfrewshire who had 'no previous local connection with their area'. These are applicants who previously we would not have had a duty to take a homeless application from.
- 8 local authorities reported not being able to offer temporary accommodation to homeless households on at least one occasion. Renfrewshire was always in a position to provide temporary accommodation - one of the key legal duties on local authorities in relation to homelessness.
- Nationally there was a 3% increase in the number of households in temporary accommodation between April – September 2023, however the figure for Renfrewshire was an increase of 7%.
- Between April to September 2023, the national average number of days spent in temporary accommodation by homeless households was 216. The figure for Renfrewshire was 116, significantly better than the national average.

3.10 Sections 4 and 5 of this report provide details on issues which are impacting - or may impact - on the local housing pressures, and in Section 6 an updated summary is provided on the current and planned measures in place to mitigate the impacts.

4. Resettlement Programmes and asylum dispersal

- 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 The Council, HSCP and partners have played a key role in supporting people who arrived in Renfrewshire over the last 2 years. A core element of our role has been to support the establishment and ongoing operation of a Welcome Hub linked to Glasgow Airport.
- 4.3 There have now been 180 social rented tenancies provided to Ukrainian Displaced Persons by the Council (115) and Registered Social Landlords (65) and 13 households have been supported to access private rented sector tenancies. The total number of households living in the community, with a host or in their own tenancy in Renfrewshire is now 229 households (486 individuals).
- 4.4 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.

- 4.5 More people are now being served with positive asylum decisions whilst being accommodated in hotels, and 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.
- 4.6 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. There have been 48 homeless applications from former asylum seekers in the last 6 months - the annual number of applications for previous years has been in single figures. 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.

5. Housing (Scotland) Bill, 2024

- 5.1 A new Housing Bill was published at the end of March 2024 which aims to, amongst other things, help prevent homelessness. It is proposed that the Housing (Scotland) Bill will introduce an 'ask and act' duty on public bodies, such as health boards, Police Scotland and RSL's to ask about a person's housing situation and act to avoid them becoming homeless wherever possible. The Bill also seeks to reform provision for people threatened with homelessness up to six months ahead (currently Councils can consider homeless applications up to 2 months ahead of settled accommodation being likely to be lost).
- 5.2 There is a degree of concern that the provisions above may lead to an increase in referrals or approaches for help, advice, information and temporary accommodation to local authorities homeless teams, and the provisions are currently now subject to public consultation and scrutiny by the Scottish Parliament, along with other areas covered by the Bill including proposal for provisions for tenants experiencing domestic abuse and a New Deal for Tenants which includes long term rent controls for private tenancies.
- 5.3 A further report on all the Housing Bill proposals and consultation will be submitted to a future Board meeting.

6. Responding to Emerging Homeless / Housing Support Pressures

- 6.1 The Council exceeded the target of allocating 49% of general lets to homeless applicants in 2023/24 in response to the increase in the level of homelessness over the last two to three years, and a target of 55% of general lets in 2024/25 was approved by the Policy Board in March. This figure was 41% in 2022/23.

- 6.2 Similarly, local RSLs have responded positively to the request to increase the number and proportion of lets to those who are homeless and whilst this has been welcomed, 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.
- 6.3 The Council's stock of furnished properties being used to provide temporary accommodation for those who have nowhere to stay has been increased on a stepped basis to 276. This is helping Renfrewshire to meet the legal duty to provide temporary accommodation, however like most other local authorities, the Council is regrettably now having to use regularly use B&B in order to ensure that some form of temporary accommodation can be provided for those in housing need.
- 6.4 Additional staffing resources have been appointed within Homeless Services, with 3 x Accommodation Officer and 2 x Housing Options Adviser posts now filled on a temporary basis to support the Councils response to the increase in homelessness.
- 6.5 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, housing support services are increasingly coming under pressure.
- 6.6 Two additional Housing Support Officer posts have now been created and filled on a temporary basis to help ensure the legal duty to assess the support needs of those who are homeless and ensure these needs are met can be complied with.
- 6.7 Our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan has been effective in supporting the provision of adequate temporary accommodation, increasing the number of lets to homeless in order to meet needs, provide assistance to help new tenants resettlement, and upscaling the provision of wraparound support initiatives such as Housing First.
- 6.8 A funding announcement for RRTP's in 2024/25 has now been made by the Scottish Government. The amount awarded to Renfrewshire is £190,000 which is in line with what has been received in the previous 5 years. This will allow the continuation of the key initiatives detailed in Renfrewshire's RRTP, including our wraparound support programme, as well as focussed resettlement assistance for those moving out of temporary accommodation and deployment of Say Women who are our delivery partner in an innovative project to support young women (16-25 years old) who have been subjected to sexual violence and are at risk of homelessness.
- 6.9 A report on progress with the implementation of Renfrewshire's RRTP will be submitted to a future Policy Board.

- 6.10 Renfrewshire's Alcohol & Drug Commission Programme Board have provided funding since 2023 for a My Life Ahead (MyLA) project which provides holistic support for families / individuals affected by alcohol and drugs and who may be in danger of losing their home. Building on the concept that in order to have good health, you need a good home, MyLA now supports 25 – 30 service users at any one time and is delivering exceptional outcomes in terms of sustaining settled housing, and supporting service users to access the help they need.
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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** – none.
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.
 11. **Privacy Impact** – none.
 12. **COSLA Policy Position** – not applicable.
 13. **Climate Risk** – not applicable.
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List of Background Papers

- (a) Background paper 1 'Homelessness in Renfrewshire – Update', Communities & Housing Policy Board on 16 January 2024.
- (b) Background paper 2 'RRTP and Homelessness Update', Communities & Housing Board on 25 October 2022.
- (c) Background paper 3 'Homelessness Update' Communities, Housing & Planning Policy Board on 15 March 2022.
- (d) Background paper 4 'Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan and Homelessness Update' Communities, Housing & Planning Policy Board on 17 August, 2021.
- (e) Background Paper 5 '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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