

To: Communities, Housing & Planning Policy Board

On: 15 March 2022

Report by: Director of Communities & Housing Services

Heading: COVID Tenant Grant Fund & Homelessness in Renfrewshire

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the proposed distribution of the Covid 19 Tenant Grant Fund, and how the needs of homeless people have continued to be met throughout the pandemic, as well as an update on the significant progress that has been made in the implementation of Renfrewshire's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP).
 - 1.2 The report also provides information about the consultation on the prevention of homelessness duty that is currently being carried out by the Scottish Government.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Policy Board:
 - (i) note the proposed distribution of funding across Renfrewshire in relation to the £214,000 allocated in terms of the Scottish Government's Coronavirus Tenant Grant Fund;
 - (ii) note the progress made in meeting the needs of those who are statutorily homeless during the recovery from the impacts of COVID19, and the implementation of Renfrewshire's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan; and
 - (iii) authorise Director of Communities and Housing Services to submit a response to the Scottish Government consultation on proposals for broadening the duty for prevention of homelessness across public bodies.
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3. COVID 19 - Tenant Grant Fund

- 3.1 A report to the Policy Board in October 2021 advised on a new Scottish Government fund being distributed to local authorities aimed at providing some degree of support to tenants with rent arrears - this included the private rented sector, council tenants, and those renting housing association properties.
- 3.2 The funding – known as the COVID 19 Tenant Grant Fund – is targeted towards tenants who are faced with rent arrears directly caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and which were accrued between 23 March 2020 and 9 August 2021. The Fund is to be primarily distributed to those who may be at risk of having their tenancies repossessed.
- 3.3 Renfrewshire's share of the fund was set at £214,000, and national and local publicity in late 2021 invited applications from either tenants or landlords across the private and social rented sectors to allow the fund to be distributed.
- 3.4 Over 300 applications were received from tenants / landlords in Renfrewshire, and these have been assessed in line with the Scottish Government guidance and criteria.
- 3.5 In line with the recommendations to the Policy Board in October 2021, the Council is on track to have distributed the full Tenants Grant Fund allocation of £214,000 across the 3 housing sectors mentioned, to address rent arrears accrued by around 172 tenants, which all met the guidance and criteria that was to be applied.
- 3.6 The value of applications for the fund exceeded the available fund for distribution. However, having regard to the guidance relating to the fund to prioritise prevention of homelessness, and a letter from Cabinet Secretary to the Convenors of Housing across all Scottish Councils which advised that the expectation was that applications from private tenants should be prioritised, the distribution of the fund will allow 100% of eligible claims from private tenants/ landlords to be met, with 90% of the value of claims from RSL and Council tenants to be met.
- 3.7 The breakdown of the payments which are on schedule to be distributed before the end of this current financial year which meet the guidance criteria is :
 - Private Rented Sector - 17 tenancies (£37,000),
 - Registered Social Landlord's - 115 tenancies (£115,000)
 - Renfrewshire Council - 40 tenancies (£55,000)
- 3.8 The average payment to landlords from the fund for applications which met the guidance criteria is : private rented sector - £2189 per tenancy , RSL - £1000 per tenancy, and Council - £1345 per tenancy.
- 3.9 Landlords will receive any awarded funds directly prior to the end of this financial year but this is on the strict condition that they credit the tenant's rent account with that exact amount, and that they commit not to pursue eviction action in respect of rent arrears accrued during the period which is covered by the Tenant Grant support. Paying the funds directly to landlords also ensures that tenants who receive other forms of financial assistance will avoid any negative impact on their benefits entitlement.

4 Homelessness Update

- 4.1 Access to homelessness and housing advice, assistance and temporary accommodation for those in greatest housing need has continued throughout the period of the pandemic.
- 4.2 In this context, while many services changed to being delivered online or by telephone, Homeless Services and Housing Support staff ensured that there continued to be regular contact with homeless applicants, including face-to-face contact when required, whilst they were waiting for settled accommodation.
- 4.3 This 'move-on' process allowed the safe resettlement of homeless households to secure Council and RSL tenancies and in this context saw the number of homeless households staying in temporary accommodation reduced from its peak of 420 in October 2020 to 192 in February 2022, which is in line with pre-COVID19 levels.
- 4.4 Despite the challenges of the past 2 years, the total annual number of statutorily homeless households in Renfrewshire has shown no significant change – see table, below, and the majority of homeless applicants continues to be single person households (over 75%).

Year	Total annual number of homeless applications in Renfrewshire
2021/22	886 (estimated)
2020/21	834
2019/20	874
2018/19	849
2017/18	860

5. Lets to homeless

- 5.1 Whilst there was an unavoidable reduction in the number of social rented houses let in 2020/21, there has been a continued strong focus on matching Council / RSL properties to those who were homeless or in greater housing need, and the number and proportion of lets to homeless applicants is now on target to show an increase in 2021/22 from pre-COVID 19 levels.
- 5.2 This increase in social rented lets to those who are statutorily homeless is in line with a key aim of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) for Renfrewshire, which is outlined further in section 6.

6 Review of Renfrewshire's RRTP

- 6.1 Previous Policy Board reports have detailed the Scottish Government requirement for all local authorities to consult on and produce a 5-year Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan covering the period 2019 – 2024.
- 6.2 These plans detail how local authorities would move to a situation where those who are homeless:
- are provided with accommodation more quickly
 - spend less time in temporary accommodation background
 - have greater access to an up-scaled use of the Housing First model, and / or other support.
- 6.3 Key partners such as local and national Housing Associations, Renfrewshire Health & Social Care Partnership and a range of 3rd sector organisations were fully consulted on the content of a RRTP for Renfrewshire, and the Scottish Government has allocated funding from the 'Ending Homelessness Together' fund to support and assist local authorities in the implementation of their RRTP's.
- 6.4 A full review of progress to date and the challenges for Renfrewshire's RRTP was provided to the Policy Board in August 2021, and there continues to be progress in implementing the plan. Funding from the Council and annual allocations of funding from the Scottish Government have been deployed for measures which are in line with the priorities within Renfrewshire's 5-year RRTP.
- 6.5 There is now substantial evidence of innovative partnership working, and of the implementation of several new measures to prevent homelessness and positively meet the needs of those who have nowhere to stay, all having an impact. This includes:
- the use of a Housing First approach in partnership with Turning Point Scotland and Blue Triangle H.A. which has now been further upscaled from 18 service users at the beginning of the RRTP, to 57 individuals now being in receipt of this wraparound support at any one time, using both RRTP and Council funding.
 - launch of a 'shared living' initiative with Simon Community Scotland to support homeless applicants who want to share accommodation.
 - Deployment of an officer from 'Say Women' to support young women (16-25 years old) who have been subjected to sexual violence and are at risk of homelessness.
 - A stepped increase in the number and proportion of social rented lets to homeless applicants.

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – funding from the Scottish Government will continue to be fully used to support the transition to rapid rehousing
 2. **HR & Organisational Development** – None
 3. **Community/Council Planning** –
 - *Our Renfrewshire is fair - those who are homeless will be provided with settled housing options more quickly.*
 - *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 more quickly.*
 - *Working together to improve outcomes – RRTP's require local authorities and partners to work together 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 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** – none.
 11. **Privacy Impact** – none
 12. **COSLA Policy Position** – not applicable
 13. **Climate Risk** – none
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List of Background Papers

- (a) Background paper 1 'Tenant Hardship Grant Fund', Communities, Housing & Planning Policy Board on 26 October 2021
- (b) Background paper 2 'Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan and Homelessness Update' Communities, Housing & Planning Policy Board on 17 August, 2021
- (c) Background Paper 3 'Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan – funding update' Communities, Housing & Planning Policy Board on 19 January 2021.
- (d) Background Paper 4 'RRTP for Renfrewshire update' Communities, Housing & Planning Policy Board on 20 August 2019.

The foregoing background papers will be retained within Communities & Housing Services for inspection by the public for the prescribed period of four years from the date of the meeting. The contact officer within the service is Tom Irvine, Tom.irvine@renfrewshire.gov.uk.

Author Tom Irvine Tom.irvine@renfrewshire.gov.uk