

## SUBMISSION FROM THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

### **1 Homeless Presentations**

- 1.1 The Council has seen a reduction in homelessness applications following policy changes and the introduction of a homelessness prevention team last year.
- 1.2 In 2011/12 we received 1,285 homelessness applications; a reduction from 2,149 in the previous year. Of these **97** (7.5%) were from 16-17 year olds and **408** (32%) were from 18-25 year olds. This compares to **168** (7.8%) and **673** (31%) respectively in 2010/11. This indicates that the Council's prevention activity is having a proportional impact on homelessness amongst young people.

### **2 Repeat presentations from young people**

- 2.1 We have seen a reduction in repeat homeless presentations within the last year from **74** (4.3%) in 2010/11 to **38** (3.5%) in 2011/12. Repeat presentations from single person households have reduced from **65** in 2010/11 to **31** households in 2011/12.
- 2.2 The Council has carried out some longer term analysis and established that **146** (29%) of young people (16 to 25 years) who applied as homeless during 2011/12 had submitted a previous homeless application.

### **3 Homeless Prevention**

- 3.1 The Council established a Homelessness Prevention team in mid-2011. We are working with young people to try to prevent them having to leave home. We use family mediation where appropriate and follow this up with support to the young person to help them plan and structure their departure from the family home.
- 3.2 We have worked with colleagues in our Education service to develop a homelessness awareness programme with S4 pupils, which is due to be trialled in three Highland schools next term. The programme covers conflict resolution at home and how if left unattended conflict can ultimately lead to homelessness. The programme also presents life in temporary accommodation through anonymous case studies.

### **4 Housing Support**

- 4.1 Many young people presenting with housing needs will be unprepared to maintain a tenancy without support. For many, issues of capability, confidence, maturity and other life skills present a risk of tenancy failure.

- 4.2 The Council provides housing support for young people through contracts with independent support providers. There are specialist providers with particular expertise in supporting young tenants.
- 4.3 The Council is currently reviewing its arrangements for commissioning services – in order to provide a clearer focus on client outcomes.

## **5 Clients with Multiple / Complex Needs**

- 5.1 A relatively small proportion of homeless clients (estimated at around 15%) exhibit multiple / complex needs. We have introduced an assessment matrix linked to a multi-agency protocol, based on the principles of “Getting it right for every child” to ensure that agencies meet to agree a personal plan to help address the underlying issues contributing to a client’s homelessness or risk of homelessness.

## **6 Care Leavers**

- 6.1 The Council has adopted a proactive approach to reducing the risk of homelessness amongst care leavers. In 2009 we introduced a policy that any young people under the age of 25 who had been in care at any time in their lives would be automatically assessed as being in “Priority Need” in relation to homelessness.
- 6.2 We have also introduced a Protocol for Accommodation and Support for Young People leaving care. This aims to ensure a coordinated response to the accommodation needs of care leavers to ensure where possible that no young person leaving care would become homeless. The principle was that care leavers should be provided with the securest form of tenancy appropriate to their needs and abilities.
- 6.3 We have a specialist supported accommodation service available for care leavers, which aims to offer housing support, and for clients to develop the skills required to maintain their own tenancy.

## **7 Employment**

- 7.1 In Highland 6.5% of young people aged under 25 are receiving Job Seekers Allowance compared with 8.2% for Scotland, with 1.8% of young people long term unemployed compared to 3.2% for in Scotland.
- 7.2 These Highland-wide figures mask some significant variation in the proportions of unemployed young people across Highland, such as particularly high proportions in Wick (13.9%), Inverness Central (11.9%) and Tain & Easter Ross (10.2%).
- 7.3 The Council’s current homelessness strategy focusses on the links between homelessness and skills / employment. Housing solutions should be looked at together with a wider package of measures that assist young people gain

the life-skills that will enable them not only to sustain a tenancy, but to access training and employment opportunities

- 7.4 There is a need to align homelessness strategy and multiagency working on training and employment. We are working to develop a Personal Housing and Employability Plan for agencies to use when working with young people thinking about leaving home.
- 7.5 In Highland the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector is developing some innovative approaches to training and employment aimed specifically at clients at risk of homelessness – for example the work that The Calman Trust are doing to develop a Training Hotel at the new University of the Highland and Islands campus in Inverness.

## **8 Housing Supply**

- 8.1 The Highlands is an area with an acute shortage of housing options and we want to utilise the private rented sector to help meet housing need.
- 8.2 We also have considerable pressure on temporary accommodation. This could be exacerbated by achieving the 2012 target; which is likely to increase pressure on temporary accommodation and the time clients are placed in temporary accommodation waiting for “permanent” housing.
- 8.3 The shortage of temporary accommodation, particularly in smaller, more remote communities, means that families with children receive priority for housing that prevents breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order. That means single applicants, and young people are more likely to be placed in bed and breakfast or bedsit type accommodation.

## **9 Welfare reform**

- 9.1 Changes to local housing allowance rates are having a negative impact on our ability to secure private rented sector outcomes for young people.
- 9.2 The Council has a shortage of 1 bed properties and currently meets the needs of single people by allocating 2 bedroom properties. In future there will be implications for housing benefit payments to young people as a result of the “bedroom tax”.
- 9.3 The increase in Non-Dependant charges which apply to young people remaining at home can add financial pressure to benefit dependant households and increase the risk of homelessness.

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