

Local Government and Communities Committee

Homelessness

Submission from South Lanarkshire Council

South Lanarkshire Council welcomes the opportunity to set out our views on homelessness, the reasons why people become homeless, what services are available and what can be done to help prevent homelessness.

Since 2012, the Council has received around 2,000 homelessness applications each year reducing from a peak of 3,116 in 2009/10.

We provide homelessness services through 4 local areas: Cambuslang/Rutherglen, Hamilton, East Kilbride and Clydesdale with a geography covering Glasgow outskirts, old mining towns, new towns and a large rural area.

Key South Lanarkshire Council Views

- Homelessness and homelessness prevention needs to be considered on a partnership basis with effective joint working arrangements with other services, particularly social work, health, education and employability services.
- There is a requirement for a broad, integrated approach to preventing homelessness with an emphasis on housing options, promoting choice and achieving sustainable outcomes.
- The Council is concerned about the impact of welfare reform and introduction of Universal Credit, particularly in relation to young people, and the funding of temporary accommodation.
- At a strategic level, there is a need for local authority Local Housing Strategies to focus on homeless prevention and addressing homelessness, linked to Strategic Commissioning Plans
- The integration of Health and Social Care presents an opportunity to align the commissioning of services to meet the needs of people with health care or social support needs that are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Response to questions posed by Committee

Housing Options and Homelessness Prevention

How do you feel housing options and homelessness prevention is working in practice? Are there examples of good practice?

Within South Lanarkshire:

- 33% of homeless applications are due to immediate circumstantial issues, such as loss of job, bankruptcy, asked to leave private rented, marital separation
- 12% are due to domestic abuse
- 5% are due to eviction
- 50% are due to care, health, or social issues – with 30% manageable with support and 20% very challenging or difficult to manage, with people at the multiple exclusion end of the spectrum.

South Lanarkshire Council's homelessness service has been carefully planned to ensure that we can meet the full range of needs and that households can move seamlessly between services without falling between the gaps. This has helped us to reduce the number of cases where contact isn't maintained to duty discharge from 16.9% in 2011/12 to 4% in 2016/17.

The South Lanarkshire Housing Options (Homeless Prevention) service, introduced in 2011, uses a triage model to identify those who needed to make a homelessness application immediately and those who may benefit from an options approach. Overall, our homelessness applications have reduced by about a third since the introduction of housing options although in the 1st 2 years, the combined total of homelessness and options cases was higher than our previous homelessness levels. On average, 70 - 75% of those receiving an options service do not need to make a homelessness presentation. Surveys indicate a high level of customer satisfaction: 93% in relation to the overall approach and 97% in relation to the quality of information provided.

The housing options service is most effective with those households whose risk of homelessness relates to a particular set of circumstances which are mostly housing related and less successful with households whose homelessness is linked to health or social care needs.

The Council has developed a wider options approach in relation to certain client groups:

- Young people leaving care, where we focus on early planning conversations about housing options with young people and their carers
- Long term prisoners, where, in partnership with Social Work Throughcare services, we aim to begin housing conversations 12 months prior to the expected liberation date
- Women experiencing domestic abuse, where in partnership with Women's Aid, we aim to provide confidential advice and assistance that will allow women to successfully leave a violent partner in a planned way.
- Older people, where we are working with partners to support older people to remain in their homes or independently for as long as possible, avoiding the need for residential care solutions.

How effective is the relationship between all of the relevant agencies, including the health sector, and charities working on homeless prevention.

At a strategic level South Lanarkshire Health and Social Care Partnership and other key partners have shared values and objectives in terms of preventing homelessness, focusing on the responsibility of all to work collaboratively to sustain accommodation and build on existing supports. Partners are working together to address challenges around roles, responsibilities, and priorities in identifying risk factors and taking early action to prevent homelessness. It is recognised that where households are not council tenants, other services may be in a better position to recognise and support households at risk of homelessness.

The Council would welcome a joint responsibility for all services to consider and respond to risk of homelessness among their service users as well as assisting once a household is actually homeless.

What needs to happen to improve the delivery of housing options and homelessness prevention services and the outcomes achieved for service users?

There is a need for increased awareness across all partners of homeless risk factors enabling early identification and intervention to prevent homelessness: as well as clarity on shared responsibility to reduce difficulties for homeless people in accessing or using mainstream services. It is important to de-stigmatise homelessness so that people who may be at risk feel able to ask for help at an earlier stage – to this end, the South Lanarkshire homelessness service has been active in schools over the past 5 years to ensure that all year 3 and 4 pupils discuss homelessness and how to prevent it.

South Lanarkshire Council's approach to housing options has recently been reviewed in light of the 2016 Housing Options guidance which highlighted statutory duties in relation to recording an HL1 entry for any individual the Local Authority has reason to believe is homeless or potentially homeless. This involves testing an approach in one geographical area to record an HL1 for all those approaching for assistance which has resulted in a twofold increase in homeless presentations, increase in lost contacts and failure to attend appointments. There has been no notable impact on positive outcomes for applicants but significant extra administrative pressure on staffing resources.

It would be helpful to agree that the Prevent 1 rather than the HL1 system be used to record housing options work and outcomes; and that this be standardised across the country.

What role should the private sector housing providers play in preventing and responding to homelessness?

The private sector manages a significant proportion of housing stock available for rent across South Lanarkshire Council particularly in areas of housing pressure and therefore should have a role in preventing homelessness from the sector; key factors include ensuring accommodation meets acceptable standards, that tenants have access to information, advice and support to help sustain their tenancy and that accommodation is affordable.

The Council welcome the improved security of tenure provided by The Private Housing (Tenancies) (Scotland) Act 2016, as the private sector can provide a realistic settled accommodation option for some households, particularly where settled accommodation stock is under significant pressure. However, restrictions on local housing allowance rates should not result in private landlords discriminating against welfare benefit recipients or impact on private landlords' ability to prevent homelessness.

Temporary Accommodation

What evidence is there of pressure on temporary accommodation in your area? Has this increased in recent years?

The Council has a portfolio of approximately 700 units of temporary accommodation available, including emergency '1st stop' provision, supported accommodation, temporary furnished flats and refuge.

Supply is regularly reviewed to ensure we have the right amount in the right place. The monitoring review of our requirements is considered through the Temporary Accommodation Plan / Business Plan.

Reductions in homelessness presentations have, to some extent, limited the demand for temporary accommodation; however, we have not seen the reduction in demand that we might have expected and continue to experience significant pressure on supply, particularly in relation to having the right size and type of stock in the right places.

Key reasons for this include:

- households with particular needs, including larger families, who take longer to house
- increased sustainability across social rented housing in the past two years reducing turnover and the level of social rented lets available to discharge homelessness duty

- the households who we successfully prevent from becoming homeless are often those who have more resources and are therefore be less dependent on temporary accommodation
- Impact of Welfare Reform on younger people's ability to meet housing costs

How can homeless people's experiences of temporary accommodation be improved? For example, how can the use of unsuitable accommodation be reduced or the length of time spent in temporary accommodation reduced?

Efficient and effective temporary accommodation management means that occasionally, the right temporary accommodation is not available at all times. In these limited circumstances, the use of good quality, secure bed and breakfast (hotel) accommodation is both appropriate and responsible. In South Lanarkshire in 2015/16, we placed 8 households with children in bed and breakfast accommodation and in 2016/17, 13 families. The average length of stay in 2015/16 was 3 days in 15/16 and 4 days in 16/17.

We would also say that length of time in temporary accommodation may not always be inappropriate where the temporary accommodation is suitable, meets the needs of the family and appropriate supports are provided to the household. In South Lanarkshire, in some cases, a household may stay longer in appropriate temporary accommodation to ensure that final offer of settled accommodation is appropriate and sustainable.

Do you have concerns about the funding of temporary accommodation? If yes, how should temporary accommodation be funded?

The Council has significant concerns about the funding of temporary accommodation.

Local Authorities across Scotland have a range of temporary accommodation for homeless people which is mostly provided by local authorities and does not fit the DWP's 'specified accommodation' definition, but nevertheless functions as supported housing. This is contrasted to England where the Supported Accommodation Review acknowledges that "many local authorities with retained social housing stock are also Registered Providers and as such could potentially fall within the exempt accommodation category definition."

The definitions of temporary accommodation and exempt 'specified accommodation' would benefit from a review based on the function and purpose of the accommodation rather than who happens to be the landlord and/or provides the support.

Based on the impact of UC and the LHA cap in temporary accommodation, we estimate a shortfall of £2.567m in our temporary accommodation budget by 2021/22.

We welcome the announcement of funding by the Scottish Government to support the funding of temporary accommodation and note that, taking this into account, we estimate that the amount of our shortfall in 2021/22 will be reduced to £188k. However, if we are to continue to provide temporary and supported accommodation services effectively, and ensure that temporary accommodation is part of the solution for homeless households rather than part of the problem, it must be placed on a secure financial footing.

We commend the work of the national temporary accommodation sub-group who have set out reasonable costs for the provision of temporary accommodation. However, we also recognise that a funding model where management and furniture charges are paid outwith the rental element (ie where the occupant does not pay these charges as part of their rent) would be very helpful in improving the chances of homeless people entering positive destinations, including employment.

Permanent Accommodation

How do social landlord's allocation policies prioritise applications from homeless households and how does choice based lettings work in practice?

South Lanarkshire Council operate a needs based allocation policy with applications assessed according to their individual circumstances. This policy gives clear priority to statutory homeless households who are placed on urgent housing list.

As part of the process, housing officers meet with homeless applicants to discuss and agree what would constitute a reasonable offer of settled accommodation based on their own circumstances, preferences and availability of housing stock.

Multiple and complex needs

What more could be done to ensure that the needs of homeless people with multiple and complex needs are adequately supported? Are there examples of good practice?

In general, we consider that probably the most important element of a successful approach to meeting the needs of homeless people with multiple and complex needs lies in preventing homelessness in the 1st place. Our key challenge is in supporting people and families whose homelessness comes as a consequence of health, care and social needs which are not serious or challenging enough to require statutory intervention but which lead to multiple exclusion – and where the individual or family cannot or will not, for a range of reasons, easily work with services on a voluntary basis.

Whilst homelessness inevitably further complicates their problems, it is homelessness services which then end up with a statutory duty to find flexible and innovative ways to engage, support and accommodate our most vulnerable and excluded citizens. In South Lanarkshire, we have held some useful multi-agency discussions, exploring ideas about how to address these issues.

We consider that there are a number of approaches that may help us respond to people experiencing multiple exclusion and that commissioning authorities in general should consider these issues in their service planning and commissioning strategies:

- Recognising that such exclusion often originates from ACES (adverse childhood experiences) or other trauma that has seriously impaired a person's ability to engage in normal, effective communication and relationships
- Adopting a psychologically informed approach to service delivery to ensure that we don't reinforce patterns of exclusion
- Exploring innovative approaches to housing vulnerable people; for example, the Housing 1st model which can be used in different ways to meet the needs of vulnerable service users in different service contexts
- Commissioning services specifically to work with the most excluded clients; in South Lanarkshire, there are 2, one working with families and one with single people – the latter also providing accommodation tailored to the needs of the most excluded.
- Using a personal housing plan approach to ensure that housing solutions are person-centred

What scope is there for improved joint working with all agencies and groups supporting those with multiple and complex needs, which would also include the health sector?

Multi-agency discussion groups around homeless people with complex needs in South Lanarkshire have already led to improved joint working and communication between services at local level and have influenced the action plan attached to South Lanarkshire's draft Health Needs assessment of Homeless People.

Among others, the action plan contains a proposal for risk of homelessness and/or a full assessment of someone's housing circumstances to be incorporated in any health or social care assessment.

How can access to general health services, including preventative health services, be improved for homeless people?

South Lanarkshire Council, working with NHS Lanarkshire, has recently completed a report on the health needs of homeless people. This is still in draft form but it does

set out what is known about homeless people's health needs and includes an action plan with actions to be taken forward over the next 3 years. The actions include;

- Improve access to screening programmes for homeless people who may be moving around and not able to prioritise their health
- Explore the pathways that homeless people use between temporary accommodation and care and support services, community based health services and acute services. The Community and YPeople have funded 2 Assertive Health Outreach Workers to work with NHS Lanarkshire on progressing this piece of work
- Examine options to reduce the high DNA (do not attend) rate of homeless people using outpatient or community based health services.

South Lanarkshire Council considers it may be helpful to require health outcomes for homeless people be included in Local Health Improvement Plans and/or Strategic Commissioning plans.

What role could the “housing first” model play in improving outcomes for homeless people with multiple and complex needs?

The Council have designed homelessness services to ensure that as far as possible, we can meet the broad range of accommodation and support needs that people present with. We have identified that the key principles of housing 1st are: stable and desirable housing: robust support relationship: wrap around support plan: peer support. The Council adopt a partnership approach to using these elements in our mainstream services, rather than commissioning a specific service that would only deal with a certain number of people based on a specific model. We expect to test different approaches and identify what works and what doesn't.

It has already been identified from the small tests undertaken locally it is helpful if other services can participate in supporting a housing 1st approach, such as substance misuse, mental health & children's services such as education, CAMHS.

Rough Sleeping

How has the pattern of rough sleeping changed in your area? For example, is the number of rough sleepers increasing or have the characteristics of rough sleepers changed? What are the reasons for this?

The pattern of rough sleeping in South Lanarkshire has not significantly changed over the last 3 - 5 years but we believe that we provide more effective services since we carried out some local research with people who had experience of rough sleeping in 2008. We developed our approach to commissioning services that would meet the needs of rough sleepers based on that research.

Over the past 3 years, the number sleeping rough the night before presentation in South Lanarkshire are 2014/15 - 18; 2015/16 - 13 and 2016/17 – 13. The priority, when someone is known to be sleeping rough, is to find the right response to get a roof over the person's head as quickly as possible and work from there to find longer term support and accommodation options that will work for them.

There are some very challenging individuals who we are sometimes unable to accommodate for short periods due to the level of risk they pose and the lack of any suitable accommodation where they do not pose a risk to others. We have developed an approach, based on 'promoting positive behaviour' to support them back into temporary accommodation as soon as possible.

What type of accommodation is offered to rough sleepers?

What type of approaches can contribute to the reduction of rough sleeping and achievement of sustainable housing solutions for rough sleepers?

We aim to provide accommodation and support responses to each applicant based on their own needs and circumstances. South Lanarkshire's Pathways Project (managed by YPeople) provides accommodation for our most challenging individuals. We work closely with the project to monitor rough sleeping patterns and know that on investigation, very few of their clients have experience of rough sleeping as opposed to sofa surfing. Only 2 people in 2016/17 using the project have slept rough and each of them only occasionally, not on a consistent or long term basis. The project is also reach out to any rough sleepers we become aware of who are not connected to services.

Other

What are the barriers to providing homeless people with sustainable housing solutions and how can these barriers be addressed?

The Council considers the main obstacle to providing homeless people with sustainable housing solutions arises where their homelessness is a result of health and care needs rather than housing needs. In these circumstances, if health and social care services are not provided, housing will not be sustainable. Where there is no duty on health or care services to intervene and the homeless person cannot work voluntarily with services, it is unlikely that such services can be provided.

This challenge is evidenced where people make repeat homelessness applications. In South Lanarkshire, in 2016/17, we had 61 households making a repeat application within 12 months of their previous one closing, representing 4% of applicants; 21 of these had made 4 or more applications, all of whom had a priority unintentional

decision on this and their previous applications and 17 of these 21 were single males.

Sometimes the barrier to sustainable housing solutions is particular housing need, having a suitable property of the right size in the right place: for example, where a large house size is required or there are particular needs relating to disability. The Council and their RSL partners aim to meet these needs through a robust programme to increase the supply of affordable housing.

Are there any other issues relating to homelessness which you wish to bring to the attention of the Committee?

There are 2 other issues the Council would like to highlight to Committee:

- The needs of children affected by homelessness are significant but often not recognised or met. Those services in regular contact with children may not know they are homeless whilst homelessness services may never see the children. We believe that homelessness should automatically be classed as a significant event for a child and that we should aspire to complete a wellbeing assessment for any child affected by homelessness. The provision of services to support children affected by homelessness may be significantly more important than the length of time families spend in temporary accommodation.
- There are a number of groups and activities going on at a national and local level, discussing ways to tackle homelessness more effectively. It would be helpful to identify a clearer strategic approach, possibly through Housing Options Hubs, that would co-ordinate discussion and activity and ensure progress is made in the development and implementation of helpful service models.