

## Local Government and Communities Committee

### Homelessness

#### Submission from the City of Edinburgh Council

##### Introduction

On Wednesday 3 May 17, the Scottish Government Local Government and Communities launched a call for views from all interested organisations and individuals as part of the work it is undertaking on homelessness. The City of Edinburgh Council was invited to respond.

Organisations and individuals are invited to submit written evidence to the Committee setting out their views on homelessness, the reasons why people become homeless, what services are available and what can be done to help prevent homelessness.

The call for views can be accessed at:

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/104570.aspx>.

##### Question responses

##### Housing Options and Homelessness Prevention

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

In Edinburgh, the number of homeless presentations has fallen year on year, since peaking 2006/07 at 5,500. In 2016/17, this has fallen to 3,400 representing a 38% reduction. The main reason for this reduction is an increase in early intervention and prevention work, focusing on a multi-agency approach.

Some examples of a multi-agency approach to early intervention and prevention include:

A team comprising officers from various departments including homelessness services; communities and families; and through care and aftercare has been created. This team works in partnership with a third sector organisation to provide increased support to 16/17 year olds and carer leavers under 21 who present as homelessness. This initiative has resulted in a reduction in young people presenting as homelessness (from 285 in 2012/13 to 198 in 2016/17) as they are supported through mediation services to return home if it is a suitable solution. The team also offer tailored support from the point a young person presents as homelessness and will support them with their housing advice interview, benefit application, and provide them with emotional and housing support as well as travel with them to accommodation if this is required.

The creation of a family and household support service has brought together housing support, community safety and family solutions teams into a single multi-disciplinary team. The team will help to tackle inequalities, improve health and well-being and to support more resilience and safer communities. Part of the team's role is to build relationships with families, and support them to sustain their tenancies.

As Edinburgh has a buoyant private rented market, it is difficult for homeless clients who are welfare dependant or on low incomes to access this form of accommodation. The changes to the welfare benefit system has also made it much harder for homeless clients to access the private sector.

## **2. How effective is the relationship between all the relevant agencies, including the health sector, and charities working on homelessness prevention?**

The Council works with a range of third sector partners to provide services for homeless people. Some of the services provided in partnership with the third sector include, street based outreach, hostels, supported accommodation, multiple and complex needs services and housing support.

The Council continues to work in partnership with the third sector and several co-production processes are currently underway to ensure that services commissioned by the Council are developed in partnership with third sector organisations and service users, to better meet the needs of homeless people.

The Council has well established and maintained positive working relationships with the third sector despite considerable funding reductions for commissioned service in recent years.

The Council continues to work with the third sector to look at best practice, innovation and service improvement through forums and working groups. The Edinburgh Homelessness Forum takes a lead role in tackling homelessness across Edinburgh and has Elected Member representation alongside council officers and third sector partners.

The Council and its housing association partners have committed to delivering 16,000 new affordable and low cost homes in the city over the next decade, providing a range of affordable housing options to meet the varying needs and circumstances of different households. The significant investment in house building provides an opportunity to strengthen joint working between housing and health and social care partners to develop homes and integrate services in a more planned and strategic way. There is a commitment from housing partners to invest up to £300 million of the housing investment programme to build around 3,000 affordable homes, integrated with health and social care services, to meet the needs of older people and people with complex physical and health needs.

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

To improve the delivery of housing options and homelessness prevention services, investment is needed to increase the resources available to provide prevention and early intervention services. In order to cope with the demand expected and provide a more holistic housing options, employability services, welfare benefit advice and income maximisation needs to be embedded into homelessness case management. There is an opportunity to review the pathway for homelessness clients when accessing health or social care services, and identify better linkages with the homelessness teams to ensure opportunities for prevention are identified before the client's situation becomes urgent or critical and preventative services are too late.

However, there is a recognition that there will be reduced budget settlements over the next few years and the changes and impact of welfare benefits haven't had the impact expected, however this assumption could possibly change next year.

The Council alongside housing association have committed to building 16,000 new affordable and low cost homes in Edinburgh over the next 10 years. It is the largest house building programme in the country and will provide a range of affordable housing options. As stated earlier, 3000 of those homes will be designed and allocated for older people, and people with complex needs, helping to support better integration between health and care services.

#### **Temporary Accommodation**

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

Pressure on temporary accommodation services has increased significantly in recent years. Although homelessness presentations have decreased, the average homeless case length has increased from 175 days in 12/13 to 286 in 16/17 which is an increase of 111 days. This is primarily due to the current acute shortage of affordable housing in the city. A buoyant private rented market and welfare benefit changes are also major contributing factors to this.

### **5. 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?**

An increase in available housing options would assist in reducing the stay in temporary accommodation. In the longer term (and mid-term), the creation of 16,000 affordable homes in Edinburgh will help to relieve some of the pressure within temporary accommodation.

There is also an opportunity to look at ensuring that benefit checks and income maximisation checks are carried out as early as possible to make homeless client's

experience of the homelessness pathway and temporary accommodation pathway as seamless and easy as possible.

Where there is high usage of temporary accommodation officers are ensuring, where families are placed in bed and breakfast, that their stay is kept as short as possible and they are moved as soon as alternative accommodation is available. Due to the demand for temporary accommodation, placing families in bed and breakfast is only carried out as a last resort. Reducing the length of time spent in unsuitable accommodation doesn't consider the challenges local authorities are currently facing in managing demands. However, the proposal does not consider that some local authorities do not have alternative options to bed and breakfast.

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

Edinburgh has significant concerns about the funding of temporary accommodation. There are growing pressures on the Council thus:

- Year on year growth in the use of bed and breakfast due to a lack of move on accommodation;
- The impact of the removal of management fees from April 2017. It is anticipated the additional grant from Scottish Government will only address 50% of the funding gap created from the removal of the management fee.

It is expected there will be further budget pressures relating to Welfare Reform which is due for implementation beyond 2017/18. This will include:

- The risk of non-recovery of rent from tenants when full universal credit rolls out;
- Loss of income to the Council due to the restriction in claims to Local Housing Allowance rates.

The lack of clarity, as well as continual changes in policy has created confusion and implementation of welfare reform and makes financial planning in future years difficult due to uncertainty about the welfare reform proposals and the impact of this on the local authority.

The implementation of welfare reform as expected currently could potentially cause significant financial pressures for temporary accommodation. To mitigate some of the financial pressures reconsideration could be given to the timing and scope of the welfare reform programme.

Due to the unique position of Edinburgh and other local Authorities where demand for accommodation outstrips supply, additional Scottish Government funding would help support the development of additional sustainable housing reducing the reliance on temporary accommodation.

## Permanent Accommodation

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

Edinburgh Council operates a choice based lettings scheme in conjunction with several Registered Social Landlords. Additional priority is awarded to homelessness clients, by allocating additional priority a significant number of the properties advertised through the choice based lettings scheme are allocated to homeless clients.

## Multiple and Complex Needs

### **8. 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?**

Work is ongoing to develop a service that focussed on getting it right for everyone. The service will focus on those clients with multiple and complex need and aims to help adults achieve their full potential by delivering services that are person centred and focussed on delivering appropriate outcomes. A psychologically informed environment will also be developed to support wellness; promote safety, security and respect; and allow continuous, joint improvement through consistent learning, development and reflection.

A good practice example is the multi-disciplinary service for those with multiple and complex needs in Edinburgh called The Access Point. This service combines homelessness services, social work services and health services, including access to GP's. The service has been in operation for several years and currently operates over several sites, although most of the staff are co-located but managed through separate structures

The forward plan is to eventually move to a one site where all services will be offered in a single location. The main advantage to this being that it will be managed by a single manager, and will aim to achieve aligned goals.

Consideration needs to be given to working with individuals with multiple and complex needs as long as the service is needed. Restricting support to a timescale can be detrimental to the client as there is a recognition that those with multiple and complex need require support over a longer period. It is also recognised that the levels of support clients require will fluctuate over time. Sufficient funding should also be flexible enough to accommodate the needs of the individual.

### **9. 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?**

As part of Edinburgh Council transformation programme and the recognition that the Access Point required service integration. Work is now underway to redesign the

Access Point, by developing a service so that it focusses on “getting it right for everyone”.

The service will continue to focus on those clients with multiple and complex need and aims to help adults achieve their full potential by delivering services that are person centred and focussed on delivering appropriate outcomes. A psychologically informed environment will also be developed to support wellness; promote safety, security and respect; and allow continuous, joint improvement through consistent learning, development and reflection.

As part of the service redesign, new ways of working will be developed to strengthen and improve services, while working more effectively with key partner agencies and the third sector.

There is further work required to identify rough sleeper profiles to better respond to the needs of a rough sleeper. There is also a significant problem when dealing with clients from abroad, with no access to benefits due to financial restrictions on what services can be provided, and/or accommodation paid for.

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

In Edinburgh, many areas of good practice exist which ensure homeless client can access health services and this should be further strengthened by the integration of Health and Social Care services. A Housing, Health and Social Care Forum has been set up within the Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership’s governance structure. It has key representatives from housing, health and social care, including representation from the Council’s homelessness team. This forum will provide further opportunities to discuss the complex relationship between health and homelessness and to seek solutions to issues such as information sharing between partners, which continues to be a challenging area. The Council is engaged with health partners to assess how we can improve information sharing to provide a more joined up approach to reducing demand for acute services such as accident and emergency.

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

Housing First could work for several customers who have multiple and complex needs. The Council is currently assessing whether a pilot of this model would be viable. Edinburgh Council recognises that Housing First has been successful in other areas and is looking at implementing or adapting the model to meet the needs of vulnerable homeless clients in Edinburgh. There should be a recognition that Housing First should be an option as part of a range of options available to homeless clients and not the sole option available.

## Rough Sleeping

**12. 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?**

In terms of rough sleepers, the number of homeless clients who have slept rough the night before has decreased from 368 to 114 in 16/17 showing a significant decrease. This reduction is also confirmed by the number of homelessness clients who have slept rough in 3 months before presentation reducing from 571 in 12/13 to 237 in 16/17.

**13. What type of accommodation is offered to rough sleepers?**

Accommodation is allocated based on the needs of the person who presents for advice, assessment and accommodation. Where support needs exist we will attempt to match the person to the correct accommodation, either at the point of presentation or at the earliest point possible.

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

Effective street based outreach, flexible routes into service provision and accommodation options which recognise the additional needs of rough sleepers.

## Other

**15. What are the reasons behind why people become homeless?**

The primary reasons for homelessness clients presenting as homeless, is due to:

- domestic ejection from parents, family, friends or non-violent dispute with a partner;
- the loss of a private sector tenancy; and
- domestic violence.

Over the last five years, there has been a 6.9% increase in the number of clients who have become homeless due to the loss of their private sector tenancy.

**16. What data is used to measure homelessness numbers in an area?**

All homeless cases, (both assessment and ongoing case management) are recorded on an in-house bespoke database. All questions for HL1 and Prevent 1 return are logged on the database. The HL2 and HL3 questions are also logged on the system and this allows Edinburgh Council to provide the data for the relevant statutory returns to the Scottish Government.

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

Changes to the welfare benefits system has reduced the amount of money available to people who are welfare dependent, this combined with the buoyancy of the private rented market limits people's housing options significantly.

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