

## **EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**

### **HOUSING COMMITTEE – 2 NOVEMBER 2005**

#### **HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY UPDATE**

##### **Report by Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services**

#### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To advise of the funding awarded by the Scottish Executive for 2006/2007 to assist in the delivery of the Homelessness Task Force Recommendations; obtain approval to submit the enclosed response to the Scottish Executive consultation paper on proposals to abolish priority need by 2012; and to recommend a change in the remit of one post within the Homelessness Service.

#### **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Since enactment of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, and the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003, funding has been available to implement legislative changes and the recommendations made by the Homelessness Task Force in its final report "Helping Homeless People - An Action Plan for Prevention and Effective Response."

#### **3. SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE FUNDING**

- 3.1 The Scottish Executive has recently awarded the Council Homelessness Task Force funding of £498,867 for 2006/07. The Local Outcome Agreement and Profile of Grant Award detailing proposed expenditure will be presented to the next meeting of this Committee for members approval.

#### **4. THE ABOLITION OF PRIORITY NEED**

- 4.1 The Homelessness Etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 requires a Ministerial Statement this year on the abolition of priority need by 2012. As such, a Consultation of the future implementation of legislation was published by the Scottish Executive in August 2005.
- 4.2 The consultation seeks views on the content of the statement to be made by Scottish Ministers and will cover the current situation and future action needed to meet the target that, by 2012, all people who are unintentionally homeless will be entitled to a permanent home. The proposed response to this consultation is appended to this report.

#### **5. STAFFING PROPOSALS**

- 5.1 The post of Housing Education Worker, funded via Homelessness Task Force Funding, delivers a comprehensive range of housing advice and education to

secondary school pupils in order to assist in the prevention of youth homelessness. However, the post is currently vacant and it is recommended that this post be amended to include other forms of housing outreach work.

- 5.2 The provision of a housing information and advice service within HMP Bowhouse is well established and is resourced from a pool of Homeless Persons Officers. It is recommended that this function is adopted within the Housing Education Worker post, and the post be re-designated as Housing Options Officer.

## **6. LEGAL AUTHORITY/IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The Council requires to comply with the legislative provisions contained within the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and the Homelessness Etc (Scotland) Act 2003 in relation to homelessness. The allocation of funding awarded by the Scottish Executive will assist the Council in continuing its strategy for preventing and alleviating homelessness.

## **7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The proposals within this report pertaining to the amendment to the Housing Education Worker post will streamline services and assist in meeting objectives within the Homelessness Strategy.

## **8. CONCLUSIONS**

- 8.1 The provision of funding for financial year 2006/07 will allow the development of the second homelessness strategy beyond 2006. Proposals will be reported to the next meeting of this Committee.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 It is recommended that Members:
- (i) Note the Scottish Executive funding awards as outlined in paragraph 3.1 and that detailed proposals for expenditure will be submitted for members consideration at the next meeting of this Committee;
  - (ii) Approve the terms of proposed response to the Scottish Executive consultation on Homelessness and the Abolition of Priority Need by 2012, as set out in Appendix 1;
  - (iii) Authorise the Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services, in conjunction with the Head of Personnel, to submit the staffing proposals as outlined in Paragraph 5 for approval by the Corporate Governance Committee;
  - (iv) Otherwise note the content of the report.

William Stafford  
Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services

CMCA/NT/LA

### **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 1. East Ayrshire's Homelessness Strategy 2003 – 2006**
- 2. Offer of Funding Letter**

Any person wishing to inspect the background papers listed above or requiring further information should telephone 01563 576986 and ask for Nicola Thom.

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## **Consultation on Abolition of Priority Need by 2012**

### **What other sources of information should be considered in assessing capacity to meet need?**

Information on the local private rented sector requires to be strengthened to assist in the development of a private sector database of all local properties. Similarly, an analysis of vacant properties could be undertaken to ascertain potential options that could be developed for future use.

### **What are the main gaps in the evidence base in relation to assessing the capacity to meet need?**

Whilst capacity can be forecast using data held on recent year's presentations, there is no information held on "hidden homelessness". It is recognised nationally that this is a significant issue according to the Scottish Household Survey 2003, yet little has been done to quantify the extent or nature of this homelessness, or analyse why this sector of the population does not seek assistance and support.

### **Would it be useful to re-run the pro forma exercise at a later date and if so when? If not then what process would be helpful to inform local authority planning for 2012?**

It would be useful to re-run the pro forma exercise, possibly in 2007 to ascertain if the projections for that date have proven to be accurate and therefore allow a more confident prediction for meeting demand in 2012.

### **Are there other policy areas which are relevant to the 2012 target which should be considered? What are there priorities?**

Supporting People strategy and funding will require to meet demands from an increasing number of homeless people who will access housing. Current funding levels are at capacity and there is no scope for service expansion.

### **Are there specific actions which would contribute to the 2012 target which the statement should contain? In particular are additional actions required to ensure homelessness is prevented, and sustainable solutions achieved for homeless people and local communities?**

Whilst all parts of the Council can strive toward homeless prevention, there is often a conflict between different priorities, for example, the need to ensure income maximisation for the Council as opposed to eviction for non payment of rent, or the need to provide housing for a homeless person who is the perpetrators of anti social behaviour and thus risks causing disruption within the community.

Similarly, prevention of homelessness from housing sectors other than Council housing requires to be strengthened. The proposals that other

landlords should inform the Council of legal action against their tenant should be expanded to ensure that all appropriate actions have been taken to assist in homeless prevention prior to legal action.

### **What are the barriers to diverse housing outcomes for homeless people and how can these be overcome?**

Homeless people have varied and wide ranging housing and support needs. To attempt to identify and offer mainstream housing as a sustainable solution for all is inappropriate. In developing and delivering homelessness strategies, it is apparent that there requires to be different models of housing options available for all needs, whether that be older people, young people or those with additional complex support needs. The demonstration projects – Breaking the Cycle: Intensive Intervention and Supervision will provide a useful insight into the success or otherwise of this type of accommodation. However, there is a need for such a facility not only for families but for other client groups as well.

Barriers will include the physical location of such a facility as local support from the community will play a crucial part in the reintegration into society from those whose behaviour is challenging. However to gain this type of support will prove to be extremely difficult in most areas.

### **Could existing funding streams be used more effectively to prevent and tackle homelessness? How could this be done?**

The short term funding arrangements currently in place do not assist in taking a strategic view on long term homeless prevention. In addition, the provision of the Furniture Grant for Homeless People is only available to those who are homeless or at risk in terms of the Code of Guidance. This not only provides an incentive for individuals to present as homeless, thus accessing the grant, as opposed to seeking housing via the waiting list, but also takes a very short term view to homelessness. For example, a young person in his/her first tenancy is more at risk of tenancy failure for a host of reasons, not least that he/she is unable to access goods that are deemed to be “essential” in terms of the Grant to assist in tenancy sustainment. This young person is at risk of tenancy failure and subsequent future homelessness, however, current restrictions of the dispersal of the Grant prohibit assistance until homelessness actually occurs.

### **How should capacity be measured and is it possible to set relevant benchmarks?**

Capacity should be measured locally based on recent and historic statistics and trends. Benchmarks do not always serve their intended purpose due to the diversity across local authority areas, and would therefore require to be relevant and useful at a local level.

**Should local authorities be required to report against a broader set of targets?**

Local authorities could report on a broader set of targets, with a shift toward qualitative information as opposed to current targets which are mainly quantitative. However, it is essential that this process is developed and implemented via the HL1 system to avoid an onerous burden on authorities for statistical collation.

**Would it be useful to resubmit homelessness strategies following the publication of the statement?**

Many strategies will be due for renewal within the coming 18 months. It would be useful to reassess and resubmit the strategies for guidance and assessment on the authority's capabilities to meet the 2012 target. However, issues surrounding short term funding will prohibit long term objectives to be identified with confidence.

**Should the statement contain an interim objective in relation to the abolition of the priority need test or is this precluded by the current position?**

The statement should contain an interim objective that avoids the "big bang" approach. It is favourable to look locally at the capacity within each authority and to specify a minimum objective that will allow local political support and thus assist in support from local communities.

**If an interim objective on the abolition of the priority need test is incorporated, how should it be framed?**

An interim objective could look at age grouping, intensive support needs due to addiction, or reason for homelessness. For example, an individual who is homeless due to family no longer willing to accommodate is often found to be non priority. However, in reality these applicants are more likely to be in need of intensive support due to the lack of any strong family or social network which may lead to a downward spiral of life circumstances that can exacerbate the problems encountered.

**What other interim objectives should be set?**

None at this time.