

**EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**  
**HOUSING COMMITTEE – 30 JANUARY 2002**

**HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY**

**Report by the Director of Homes and Technical Services**

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To advise members of the allocation of funding awarded by the Scottish Executive to develop the homelessness strategy in East Ayrshire and a proposal detailing how it will be used. The report also provides an up-date on the development of the homelessness strategy and the homeless services in general.

**2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Part 1, Section 1 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, which commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2001, introduced a new duty on Local Authorities to produce a homelessness strategy. Each Local Authority must assess homelessness in their area and produce a strategy to prevent and alleviate homelessness.
- 2.2 In October 2001, the Scottish Executive announced that all Councils would receive a funding allocation to develop the homelessness strategy. The allocation was calculated on a baseline amount then added to depending on the number of homeless applications received by the Council each year.
- 2.3 East Ayrshire Council was allocated £72,600 to spend in the current financial year. The guidance issued with the announcement of funding clearly stated that this initial allocation should primarily be used to fund the assessment of the extent and nature of homelessness in the area.
- 2.4 The Scottish Executive has also advised that a further two years of funding will shortly be awarded using the same formula.

**3. STRATEGY FUNDING PROPOSAL**

**3.1 Research**

- 3.1.1 Appendix 1 details how the allocation of £72,600 will be spent in this financial year.
- 3.1.2 The funding guidance clearly states that where necessary, this year's allocation should be used to assess the nature and extent of homelessness in the area. A baseline study into homelessness is currently being carried out in the area and will provide a clear picture of the current problem.

3.1.3 This research will also provide the Council with an understanding of the gaps in the current service and what needs to be put in place to provide an improved service. The homelessness strategy guidance quite clearly states that to be effective strategies must be produced and implemented on a corporate basis. This recognises that homelessness is not just a housing issue and that implementing effective measures to deal with it must involve all council departments.

## **3.2 Homelessness Services**

3.2.1 Research is vital to the development of a comprehensive and well-targeted homelessness strategy but at an operational level, it is necessary to ensure that the Council is providing an effective service to homeless people. Work is currently being undertaken to assess the current services being provided by the Council, with a view to establishing dedicated staff to deal specifically with homelessness.

3.2.2 Part of the funding allocation will be used to establish both front line and strategic posts, to deal with the new duties placed on the local authority as well as offering a dedicated service to homeless people. The structure of this new section will be shaped by the results of the main research project, which specifically examines the design of the existing services.

## **3.3 Information and Advice**

3.3.1 Much emphasis is placed upon the prevention of homelessness and good quality information and advice is at the core of this. Within this year's funding allocation, a substantial proportion will be used to establish new and innovative information and advice tools.

3.3.2 Work has already begun to develop a 'Young Persons Housing Advice Booklet' which will be widely available in East Ayrshire when it is completed. The booklet is being written and designed by a mixture of young people from YIPWorld.com, START Project and those who currently access Social Work services.

3.3.3 The 'Housing Education Project' will be piloted in a secondary school, to provide basic awareness of housing issues using the Scottish Council for Single Homelessness' teacher training pack called 'I'm Offski'. All S4 pupils will receive a basic level of education and a copy of the Young Persons Housing Advice Booklet. The detail of the pilot scheme is currently being developed with the Doon Academy secondary school.

3.3.4 The 'Housing Options Guide' is an advice tool kit for anyone in the East Ayrshire area who is involved in providing housing information and advice. When completed in March 2002, the Guide will contain all relevant information on the housing options in the area, covering basic details about the Council's allocations policy right through to details on grants available to owner occupiers.

3.3.5 A paper version of the 'Housing Options Guide' will be made available to all housing advice providers in the area and an electronic version will be made available to the public via the Councils web pages.

### **3.4 Access to the Private Rented Sector**

3.4.1. Extending the housing options for homeless or potentially homeless people will be an integral part of the homelessness strategy. The private rented sector have an important role to play in meeting need but access to this sector can be problematic for those who cannot find the required deposit.

3.4.2. Preliminary research has highlighted the need for a rent deposit scheme to operate in East Ayrshire. This scheme would provide a 'guarantee' of the deposit to private landlords on behalf of tenants accessing the scheme. Tenants accessing the scheme need to meet a certain eligibility criteria.

3.4.3. In partnership with the Health Board, North Ayrshire Council and a local housing association, a pilot rent deposit scheme will operate in the area in the next financial year. The pilot is being funded by the Health Board and if the scheme is successful the future funding of the scheme will be determined at the end of pilot.

## **4. FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The funding of £72,600 is an allocation from the Scottish Executive to be spent in the financial year 2001/02. There is a requirement to ensure that funding is clearly spent on the development of a homelessness strategy.

The funding will be provided via Communities Scotland on receipt of official invoices, with supporting evidence of spend.

4.2 The Council is obliged to comply with the statutory requirements of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. The allocation of funding awarded by the Scottish Executive will assist the Council in assessing homelessness in its area and preparing a strategy for preventing and alleviating homelessness.

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Committee:

- (i) acknowledge the allocation of funding for the development of homelessness strategies; and
- (ii) approve the spending proposals contained within the report and otherwise note the content of the report.

James Lavery  
Director of Homes and Technical Services  
AC/JL/WT  
30 January 2002

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

1. Housing (Scotland) Act 2001

Members wishing further information on any of the above should contact Joseph Cassidy, Policy Manager, on 01563 576617

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**AGENDA**