

# Housing Strategy and Development Briefing Note 15/09

**Single Homelessness in Scotland (by Crisis July 2015)**

September 2015



## Introduction

Welcome to a series of regular briefings prepared by the Housing Strategy and Development team on the big issues concerning housing. These briefings will be shared with staff, tenants and elected members and keep everyone up to date with regards the ever changing policy context that we are operating within.

The Housing Strategy and Development section is responsible for:-

- Providing the statutory strategic housing authority role within the local authority area;
- Strategic Housing Asset Management delivery;
- The delivery of the Council House New Build Programme and the delivery of the affordable Housing supply programme;
- Supporting the development of a culture of continuous improvement in Housing services and to facilitate opportunities to excel;
- Developing and implementing effective strategies for Housing and Community Safety Services within West Dunbartonshire;
- Developing the Council's housing strategy to ensure that it supports the delivery of our strategic priorities;
- Service development within Housing and Community Safety services; and
- Promoting effective management and the involvement of tenants across all aspects of Housing Services.

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## Briefing Note

### Single homelessness in Scotland Crisis (July 2015)

#### Background

Within the context of significant legislative changes such as the abolition of priority need and the emerging homelessness prevention agenda the Crisis report considers the experiences of single homeless people and evidence that elsewhere in the UK homelessness prevention has resulted in gatekeeping and a variation in assistance offered to this group.

The aim of the report is to **critically examine the assistance offered to single homeless people in Scotland** and it does this by

- comparing the experiences of single homeless people with those of homeless families;
- exploring variations in assistance provided to single homeless people across Scottish local authorities and
- identifying potential policy and practice concerns relating to assistance for single homeless people.

#### Main Issues

##### Homelessness prevention<sup>1</sup>

- *Scale:* Approximately 80% of prevention approaches are made by single people but there is variation between local authorities, with the proportion of single homeless people ranging from 100% to 48%. (WDC 74% prevention approaches made by single people)
- *Reasons for approach:* Nearly 70% of people seek prevention assistance for homelessness reasons (rather than prevention reasons). There is significant variation between local authorities, with the proportion of single homeless people reporting a prevention reason ranging from 71% to 0%. (WDC 3% approach for a prevention reason - 97% for a homelessness reason)
- *Outcomes of homelessness prevention:* These differ between single homeless people and families. Single people are less likely to find alternative accommodation in the social rented or private rented sectors (7% vs 12%), and slightly less likely to have their homelessness ended by remaining in current accommodation (24% vs 26%). Instead, single homeless people are more likely to move in with friends/relatives (3% vs 1%) or lose contact (13% vs 8%). There is variation between local authorities. The proportion of single homeless people enabled to remain or find alternative accommodation ranges from 79% to 9%. (12% in West Dunbartonshire remained or found alternative accommodation – 80% went on to make a homelessness application)

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<sup>1</sup> The Council's previous practice of recording all homelessness presentations on PREVENT1 means that distinctions cannot be made between prevention and homelessness presentations and therefore findings for prevention for WDC cannot be used. Future PREVENT1 data should allow us to adequately assess the success of prevention activities as PREVENT1 and HL1 data should now be recorded separately.

## Homelessness applications

- *Reasons for homelessness:* Single people are far more likely to become homeless because they are asked to leave their accommodation (30% vs 16%), which correlates with the fact that a high proportion of single people become homeless from the parental/family home (29% vs 18%), from the accommodation of friends/a partner (20% vs 16%), or from long-term sofa surfing (3% vs 1%). Single people are also more likely to become homeless on discharge from prison (9% vs. 0%).
- *Factors contributing to a homelessness application:* A higher proportion of single people were recorded as facing drug/alcohol dependency (10% vs 1%), lack of support from friends/family (10% vs 5%), mental health issues (9% vs 4%), criminal/anti-social behaviour (8% vs 4%), difficulties managing on their own (5% vs 2%), and physical health issues (4% vs 2%).
- *Repeat applications:* Repeat homelessness was more common amongst single homeless people than families (7% vs 3%). There is some variation between local authorities as rates of repeat homelessness amongst single homeless people range from 1% to 12%. (WDC 7% v 5%)

## Homelessness assessments

- The proportion of single homeless people found to be unintentionally homeless varies across local authorities, ranging from 91% of decisions to 26%.
- In several local authorities more than 10% of single homeless people were determined to be intentionally homeless. (WDC 3%)

## Temporary accommodation

- The rate of temporary accommodation use for families varies between local authorities, ranging from 0 – 18 households per 10,000. In contrast, the range is far greater for single homeless people, ranging from 6 – 53 people per 10,000. (WDC 4 family households per 10,000 vs 25 per 10,000 for single homeless people)
- Single people are far more likely than families to be accommodated in hostels or B&Bs (35% vs <5%), whereas families are more likely to be accommodated in social rented housing (88% vs 54%).
- There is variation between local authorities. The proportion of single homeless people temporarily accommodated in social rented accommodation ranges from 100% to 12%.

## Homelessness application outcomes

- *Outcomes:* After making a homelessness application, approximately 66% of families were offered a Scottish Secure tenancy or a private rented tenancy compared to 47% of single people. Moreover, contact was lost with 14% of single people compared to 6% of homeless families. Outcomes vary across local authorities. The proportion of single unintentionally homeless people who were offered a tenancy ranges from 33% to 81%. (WDC just over 60% offered)

- *Duration of homelessness applications:* Unintentionally homeless single people are likely to wait approximately four weeks longer for their homelessness duty to be discharged when compared to families (233 days vs 205 days to be dealt with and closed). The duration between homelessness application and case closure varies markedly across local authorities, with the mean time ranging from less than 100 days (approx. 3 months) to more than 550 days (approx. 18 months). (WDC just over 160 days)

## **Conclusions**

Single homeless people face different experiences of homelessness and accessing assistance when compared to homeless families.

Inconsistencies exist in the assistance offered by local authorities to single homeless people.

Homelessness prevention poses an opportunity and a challenge for homelessness services in Scotland.

## **Recommendations**

### *The homelessness legislative framework in Scotland*

1. Forthcoming Scottish Government and COSLA guidance on Housing Options should provide clear direction on how the statutory and prevention processes should interact so that homeless people can access effective assistance on a fair and consistent basis. Local authorities should also set out in their housing and homelessness plans how they intend to address this locally.
2. The Scottish Housing Regulator should plan to carry out an overarching review of the operation of homelessness support in Scotland five years on from the ending of priority need (including homelessness prevention). It will be important for this review to examine variability in outcomes and differences across Scottish local authorities and across household types.

### *Homelessness prevention services*

3. Local authorities should work with Housing Options Hubs to identify ways to encourage people to access homelessness prevention services before they experience homelessness. They should work with advice and support services to ensure early referral where possible.
4. Given that many single homeless people become homeless on being asked to leave their accommodation, Scottish Government and local authorities should examine what more could be done to assist single people to either remain or make a planned exit in order to avoid homelessness (e.g. mediation services).
5. As many people (families and single) are becoming homeless because tenancies are being terminated in both the PRS and the social rented sector, Scottish Government, local authorities, RSLs and the landlords association should consider how to raise awareness among tenants and landlords of the homelessness prevention support available from local authorities, including through the new private tenancy Notice to Leave.

6. Many single homeless people are becoming homeless from prison, despite some examples of good practice. Scottish Government and COSLA should work closely with the prison service to improve the prevention of homelessness amongst prison leavers.

#### *Intentionality and keeping in contact*

7. Scottish Government should continue to monitor the levels of intentionality decisions and lost contacts across Scotland and work with local authorities where levels are relatively high to identify the reasons and ensure these are not used as a means of gatekeeping.

#### *Support for complex needs*

8. Housing Options Hubs should explore how Housing Options services might effectively assist more households with multiple support needs.
9. Homelessness and housing services should be key partners as joint boards are set up to integrate health and social care. The boards should ensure data on homelessness, including on levels of support needs, are used as part of their service planning.

#### *Temporary accommodation*

10. Local authorities accommodating high proportions of single homeless people in B&Bs and hostels should seek to reduce use of these temporary accommodation forms, particularly the use of B&Bs for periods longer than 28 days.

#### *Homelessness statistics*

11. Scottish Government should continue to monitor homelessness prevention data (PREVENT1) and identify any variables which may not be recorded appropriately by local authorities (e.g. vulnerabilities data).
12. Scottish Government should regularly report on statutory homelessness and homelessness prevention statistics by household type.

### **What it means for West Dunbartonshire**

For WDC the prevention data (PREVENT1) used in the report to identify a variation between Local Authorities includes all homelessness presentations. As such key findings/trends around homelessness prevention (scale, reasons for approach and outcomes of homelessness prevention) cannot be applied with any certainty to WDC.

The purpose of PREVENT1 is to allow local authorities to demonstrate and evidence their prevention approaches, what their prevention actions are and the outcomes of such preventative work. The Council has changed its approach and now collates prevention and homelessness applications separately.

The Council should develop a comprehensive homelessness prevention plan which sets out how it delivers a housing options approach and includes:

- how the approach assists household with multiple support needs
- how awareness about the approach is raised with service users, support services, partners and private rented landlords
- how people are encouraged to access homelessness prevention services before they experience homelessness
- how we work with advice and support services to ensure early referral

The Council should continue in its contribution to the Prisoner Support Pathway, in particular the Housing Sub Group and surgeries based at Low Moss Prison.

Levels of intentionality decisions are low in West Dunbartonshire and there is no evidence through our approach that gatekeeping is an issue.

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