

Housing Strategy and Development Briefing Note 15/11

Housing Options Guidance

October 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.

For further information on Housing Strategy and Development please telephone 01389 737889 or e-mail: housing.strategy@west-dunbarton.gov.uk

Briefing Note

1. Background:

- 1.1 Housing Options Guidance jointly developed by the Scottish Government and COSLA is about to be published. The guidance has been developed in order to support the development and embedding of Housing Options at all levels of local authorities. This briefing outlines the key principles of the Housing Options Guidance and what it means for West Dunbartonshire.
- 1.2 Scotland has a comprehensive legal framework for homelessness which gives rights to homeless people and places duties on local authorities. Local authorities are also required to adhere to a Code of Guidance on Homelessness and Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers.
- 1.3 The Housing Options approach has evolved from homelessness prevention and housing advice services within local authorities and was seen as an important way for local authorities to meet the 2012 target to provide permanent settled accommodation to all unintentionally homeless people.
- 1.4 Regional Hubs established to promote a housing options approach to homelessness prevention focus on development through a combination of sharing practice, commissioning joint training and research. West Dunbartonshire Council is a member of the West Hub which also includes Glasgow Housing Association (GHA), East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow City, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire and Stirling Councils.
- 1.5 The Scottish Housing Regulator carried out a thematic enquiry into the delivery of Housing Options and in 2014 published a number of recommendations, one of which was that 'the Scottish Government should provide enhanced guidance for local authorities on the delivery of Housing Options'.
- 1.6 Housing Options is regarded as providing advice under Section 2 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. Although the Guidance is not statutory it is to be used as a tool for local authorities when developing their Housing Options approach

2. Main Issues:

- 2.1 A Housing Options approach will contribute to meeting demand for housing through prevention activity and other solutions out with Council resources. Its person-centred approach focuses on positive outcomes for customers.
- 2.2 West Dunbartonshire Council is still to fully implement a Housing Option approach.

2.3 The national guidance is intended to support local authorities to develop and deliver their Housing Options services and contribute to the sharing of good practice across local authorities. It also provides some clarity around how the housing options approach interacts with existing duties under the homeless legislation (an issue previously raised by the Regulator). Key sections of the guidance include:

- Strategic – that there is support and leadership from councillors and senior managers who have a good understanding of housing options and the core principles on which the options are based
- Operational – staff and managers of frontline delivery teams are trained and supported and that operational mechanisms and partnership working is in place to deliver a comprehensive options service
- Performance management – measuring the outcomes and achieving continuous improvement

2.4 Alongside the guidance is a detailed Training Toolkit which will cover everything staff need to know in undertaking a Housing Options role. This is currently at an advanced stage of procurement (led by the West Hub) and is expected to be available in the coming months.

2.5 Local authorities are required to ensure that all outcomes in Housing Options cases are recorded in accordance with the Scottish Government's recently introduced monitoring system (PREVENT1). This information is used by the Scottish Government, the Scottish Housing Regulator, the Housing Options Hubs and other statutory and third sector organisations to monitor and review the development and delivery of Housing Options approaches

3. What it means for WDC:

3.1 The Council should set out how it's going to develop its Housing Options approach in line with the Housing Options Guidance. This includes but is not limited to:

- reviewing how far the Council currently delivers Housing Options;
- providing clarity around the relationship between Housing Options and our duties under homeless legislation;
- setting out a Housing Options approach which is not seen as solely the responsibility of housing but also partner organisations/departments and taking account of important links with the Health and Social Care Partnership;
- provision of training and information at all levels within the local authority to embed the housing options approach;

- development of a performance management framework and customer feedback mechanisms and development of clear policies and procedures relating to Housing Options

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