

West Dunbartonshire Council

Homelessness, Prevention and Temporary Accommodation Strategy 2017-2022

“More than a Roof”

Consultation Summary Report, January 2016

1. Consultation Process

1.1 Local authorities have a statutory duty to involve, consult and engage with as wide a range of their residents as possible and the process of drafting this strategy and been the subject of a wide consultation exercise including the following:

- Initial survey of staff and key stakeholders, including both internal and external partners;
- A comprehensive online survey available to all residents of West Dunbartonshire and promoted via the Council’s website, the West Dunbartonshire Equality Forum and to staff via e-mail;
- A focus group discussion with the Homelessness and Housing Access Forum; and
- A focus group discussion with residents of all 5 of the Supported Accommodation Projects in West Dunbartonshire

1.2 The Consultation took place within the framework of the Council’s *Consultation Toolkit for Housing and Community Safety Services*, which outlines the Council’s commitment to go beyond the statutory requirements on consulting service users.

Initial Survey – September and October 2016

1.3 A survey was sent out to all staff across Housing Development and Homelessness, Housing Operations and to the Homelessness and Housing Access Forum. The forum is a group that meets quarterly to discuss issues relation to housing and homelessness in West Dunbartonshire. It comprises internal partners such as Working 4U, the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP), representatives from mental health services and addiction services, as well as external partners including housing associations and third sector organisations.

1.4 The questionnaire asked for views around the following areas:

- Have aims of previous strategy achieved;
- Thoughts around aims of new strategy;
- What are the main issues around homelessness in West Dunbartonshire; and
- Thoughts around issues relating to temporary accommodation

- 1.5 There were 42 responses to the survey, 25 of these responses were from housing development and homelessness, 3 were from housing operations, 2 were from WDC officers within other departments and 12 were from external partner agencies. The main feedback is highlighted below:

Had aims of previous strategy been achieved:

- The Council had a long way to go in terms of taking actions to prevent homelessness;
- No clear and consistent approach to homelessness prevention across Homeless Services; and
- Lack of housing options and housing advice available to not just homeless households but also to households seeking mainstream housing advice.

Thoughts around aims of new strategy:

- Young people and welfare reform are two key areas;
- More needs to be done to prevent young people becoming homelessness;
- More options available for young people and more supported projects specifically for young people;
- More staff training required around welfare reform; and
- Need to adequately address the high level of people who have an addiction.

What are the main issues around homelessness in West Dunbartonshire:

- The introduction of housing options as a way to prevent homelessness and to sustain tenancies;
- Needs for more support within tenancies to help people to maintain their tenancy;
- Lack of suitable housing that met the needs of homelessness households;
- Welfare reform as a barrier to accessing housing; and
- Budget cuts resulting in services being provided but not being adequate
- Rethink of the rent deposit guarantee scheme would be worth exploring
- Furniture packs, curtains, carpets and painted walls would all help to increase tenancy sustainment. White goods and bedding were also seen as key to maintaining a tenancy.

Thoughts around issues relating to temporary accommodation:

- Some temporary accommodation seen as a decent quality, others fall below this;
- Temporary accommodation units and the supported projects in areas that do not meet the needs of homeless households;
- Age and gender needs were not met; and
- 70% of respondents agreed there is not enough supported accommodation.

Online survey open to all residents of West Dunbartonshire

- 1.6 A survey was made up and placed on the website with a copy of the draft strategy. The survey was for anyone who wished to have a say in how they felt the council should be moving forward in dealing with homelessness, homelessness prevention and temporary accommodation. The survey was sent out to the homelessness and housing access forum, the housing providers forum, the Section 5 working group and the housing development and homelessness teams. There were 26 responses to the strategy. Some of the responses were groups of people putting in joint responses.
- 1.7 The respondents felt that to prevent homelessness we should be introducing a housing options approach that is consistent across all housing providers in the local authority area. Many respondents felt that we should increase our housing stock. This can be by buying back more of the houses we have sold through right to buy or by building more houses. This would increase the options available.
- 1.8 Most respondents agreed that having support available for people to maintain their tenancy this would reduce the number of people presenting as homeless, especially repeat homeless households.

In addition to this respondents felt that there is a need to provide better advice and assistance to people about the benefit system and help people to maximise their income.

- 1.9 In terms of reducing the number of young people, respondents felt that there should be more partnership working to identify young people who are at risk of becoming homeless. Crisis interventions are too late. As there is such a high number of young people who are homeless, the council should consider introducing more supported accommodation units for young people. In addition, consider looking at shared accommodation as an option for young people who will be affected by the shared room rate for under 35s, due to the local housing allowance cap in the social sector. One respondent suggested there be a particular department that works solely with young people. A common response was to get into the schools and provide education to young people about life skills and budgeting.
- 1.10 All respondents agreed that the strategy should focus on providing prompt and easy access to advice and information as well as providing support to people to remain in their home. 88% of respondents also saw increased choice as an important feature of the strategy.
- 1.11 In terms of the aims of the strategy, 100% of respondents agreed with the aim that the council should be providing a good quality of temporary or emergency accommodation when it is needed. The majority of respondents agreed with the other aims with only 1 or 2 respondents disagreeing.

Focus Group discussion with Homelessness and Housing Access Forum

1.12 A session was held with the homelessness and housing access forum. The forum consists of all internal and external partners including representatives from addictions, mental health, NHS, Blue Triangle, Prep 4 Life and local housing associations.

- Repeat homelessness is a problem because the initial problems are not properly addressed and followed up. This is worsened by the lack of staff and because housing options has not been implemented;
- The council needs to lead on how we mitigate against the effects of welfare reform. It should not be down to individual departments. Information about welfare reform could be made readily available on a website that is updated regularly;
- Make better use of mediation as a prevention to homelessness;
- Affordability is a huge problem. People cannot afford their tenancies, increased rent levels and low income is increasing the number of people in debt;
- Not enough 1 bedroom properties therefore single people are put into 2 bedroom properties that they can't afford – maybe a council initiative to tackle this where reduced 1 bed rate is charged for 2 bed properties in these cases;
- Education, housing and employability all needs to be looked at together as a holistic approach. For example one way of doing this could be pre-tenancy courses;
- Work with schools to educate young people about life skills, budgeting, reality of running a home, the type of houses available and provide statistical information about why young people become homeless or fail to maintain tenancies;
- Ensure services are accessible by all people. Such as young people, people with mental health support needs, etc;
- More support available at start of tenancy to increase sustainment. This could include helping with issues such as isolation and door control; and
- There should be more reference to gender based violence within the strategy.

Focus Group discussion with residents of Supported Accommodation Projects

1.13 The new homelessness and temporary accommodation strategy was discussed at each of the 5 supported accommodation projects within West Dunbartonshire. There was a mixture of ages across the projects. The discussions at each of the projects were similar.

- The residents were asked if there was anything that the council could have done to prevent them from becoming homeless. Most responded that there was nothing that council have been done, whilst others felt earlier

intervention could have helped. Some stated that they had sought earlier intervention but had been told to come back when homeless. One resident had been in contact with a council officer in prison who had organised for him to go attend the housing office upon release. The resident did so and was given a place in the supported accommodation project. Most of the residents did not feel that they had had their options discussed with them.

- A few of the residents at the various projects had come from their own tenancies. These had failed for a number of reasons. Some said it was because they got no support, whilst others stated they were offered too much support and did not wish to engage.
- Most of the residents were not aware of mediation or what it was. When discussed however most felt that it would not have helped. They felt that the damage to the relationship had been done and that they just wanted their own home.
- The residents were asked what would help them to maintain their tenancy when they get it. Whilst some said they just wanted to be left to get on with it, others were concerned. They said they would need support, at least at first. Many felt that a decoration grant or some furniture or carpets would help them to want to live in their tenancy. One resident stated that a package with information about the house, such as how to work the central heating would be beneficial. This resident also stated that local information would be useful, such as information about public transport. Many residents were concerned about the time between getting tenancy and when they get their community care grant.
- Although most of the residents I had spoken to had heard about welfare reform, namely the bedroom tax and universal credit, most were unsure about how it works. This was causing some concern to residents. Some states that they wanted to get a job or go into education but couldn't because of their benefits and the costs of the rent.
- The stigma of being homeless was a concern to many residents. They felt this would hinder their prospects for education courses and for future employment.
- There was a mixed response to the use of the private sector as a housing option. Some felt it was a good idea, due to having more options but some said it wasn't an option because they didn't feel it was secure or because of the cost. None were aware of the local housing allowance. Some did mention the rent deposit scheme and said they would like to be housed through it.
- There was also a mixed reaction to further education within schools. Most said housing and homelessness had not been discussed with them at school and if it had they would not have listened.
- A couple of the residents stated that they would like to have a consistent worked throughout their homelessness journey.
- There was a mixed response to shared accommodation. The majority felt that after living in supported accommodation they would prefer to live on their own.

Outcomes of consultation

- 1.14 The following main issues were raised via the consultation process and the feedback was taken into consideration and either mentioned within the final draft of “More than a Roof” or within the action plan:
- That there is a strong need for a clearer and more consistent preventative approach to homelessness;
 - There is a need to adopt a housing options approach;
 - Priority to reduce youth homelessness; and
 - Increased focus on tenancy sustainment.

Evaluation of Consultation Process

- 1.15 Some of the elements of the formal consultation process worked better than others. A number of Consultation exercises were taking place at the same time and this may have impacted in terms of participation.
- 1.16 In internal evaluation of these Consultation exercises will be undertaken and any lessons learned will be used to improve future exercises.

Next Steps

- 1.17 “More than a Roof” contains a detailed Action Plan which will be monitored as outlined in Section 12 of the main strategy document.

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