

# Aberdeen Cyrenians

## Summary Response to Aberdeen City Council Housing Emergency Action Plan (HEAP)



October 2025



## Aberdeen Cyrenians Feedback on Aberdeen City Council Housing Emergency Action Plan (HEAP)

Aberdeen Cyrenians welcomes the Housing Emergency Action Plan (HEAP) as a timely and thoughtful response to the challenges facing individuals and families experiencing homelessness in Aberdeen.

The plan demonstrates a clear commitment to trauma-informed principles, wraparound support, and improved housing pathways.

We recognised that some of the reflections below will sit across other associated plans, including work being driven through Homewards, the Housing Asset Plan and 30-Year Business Plan.

Feedback was gathered through a structured question set developed by the Aberdeen Cyrenians team, followed by a collaborative review session. Responses were then mapped thematically to align with the structure of the HEAP.

### 1. Sharing Insights: Perception of the System and Expectations of the Journey

From our frontline experience, we offer the following insights to support the HEAP's continued development.

- **System Navigation:** Many individuals find the housing journey complex and overwhelming. Simplifying language, improving digital access, and offering face-to-face engagement can significantly enhance understanding and confidence.
- **Trust and Authority:** While the dual role of Housing & Support Officers is understood, individuals often misinterpret enforcement actions such as noise complaints, anti-social behaviour reports, or eviction proceedings due to unpaid rent; as punitive.

These actions, whilst necessary, can feel abrupt or threatening, especially when trust hasn't been established. Early, compassionate engagement, ideally before escalation, helps build rapport, clarify intent, and reduce fear, ultimately improving outcomes.

*Example insight:* In several cases, individuals have disengaged from support services following perceived punitive action, even when the enforcement was proportionate. Where early engagement occurred (e.g. pre-ASB warning), individuals were more likely to remain engaged and take corrective steps.

- **Communication and Clarity:** Confusion persists around timelines for remedial work and property allocation, particularly for those in temporary accommodation. While ACC's allocation policy is clear, managing expectations and supporting comprehension remains a challenge.

Long periods without updates, even when no new information is available, can heighten anxiety and lead to disengagement. Third sector practitioners often provided repeated clarification and would benefit from clearer insight into ACC's internal processes to better support service users.

- **Housing Voids and Repairs:** The average times for turnaround of voids and repairs reflect our experience however, extended stays in temporary accommodation can negatively impact recovery and wellbeing. We recognise the operational challenges involved, particularly when multiple trades or contractors are required.
- **Visualisation and Confidence in Property Offers:** Viewing properties before remedial work is completed, has in our experience, not significantly increased acceptance rates. In fact, it often discourages individuals from accepting tenancies due to the unfinished condition of the property. This approach tends to increase refusal rates and longer stays in temporary accommodation.

The proposed "show home" concept offers a promising alternative; allowing individuals to visualise a completed property, build confidence and make informed decisions without the drawbacks of viewing incomplete homes.

## 1. Sharing Insights: Perception of the System and Expectations of the Journey (continued)

- **Suitability and Sustainability:** Choice Based Lettings (CBL) empowers individuals to select properties that best meet their needs. However, a notable number of properties are later withdrawn following Occupational Therapy assessments, indicating that suitability is not always identified early enough. The system is well-intentioned but can be confusing, especially for those with limited digital literacy or support.
- **Expectations vs. Reality:** Some individuals hold aspirational expectations that do not align with available stock. Challenges include location preferences, proximity to work or school, and avoidance of areas linked to past trauma or ASB. Managing these expectations with empathy and transparency is essential.
- **Flexible Support Models:** Support needs fluctuate. Offering flexible, non-linear support pathways would better reflect the realities of recovery and housing stability.

We appreciate the inclusion of lived experience in shaping the HEAP and encourage continued co-design with third sector partners and service users.

## 2. Reflections on the Housing Emergency Action Plan: Areas of Strength and Opportunity

The Housing Emergency Action Plan (HEAP) provides a strong and strategic foundation for addressing housing challenges in Aberdeen.

We affirm that the personas used by ACC accurately reflect the individuals we support, and we welcome their use as tools for empathy and understanding.

Key strengths identified included:

- **Trauma-Informed Approach:** The use of trauma-informed language and framing is welcomed. It reflects a compassionate shift in how housing services engage with individuals, and we support further operationalisation through training and reflective practice.
- **Strengthening Relationships with RSLs:** The emphasis on deepening partnerships with Registered Social Landlords is a vital step toward improving access, prioritising statutory homeless individuals, and ensuring property standards are met.
- **Use of 80 West North Street:** The proposal to utilise 80 West North Street for short-term accommodation is a practical and dignified solution to reduce breaches of Unsuitable Accommodation Orders (UAOs). The use of self-contained units offers a more stable alternative to hotel placements.
- **Focus on Void Properties:** The plan's attention to accelerating turnaround times and improving property standards post-void is a welcome development. Beginning remedial work earlier will reduce delays and improve access to safe, suitable housing.
- **Lived Experience Insight:** The use of personas and lived experience narratives is a powerful tool for empathy and understanding. It helps demystify housing systems and ensures that services are designed with real-world complexity in mind.
- **Exploration of Rough Sleeping:** The inclusion of rough sleeping as a focus area within HEAP is important and aligns with the realities faced by many individuals supported by the Third Sector.
- **Show Home Approach:** We fully support the show home model as a strategic tool to improve tenant engagement and confidence. It offers a realistic, positive visualisation of what a completed tenancy can look like and helps reduce refusals linked to viewing unfinished properties.

## 3. Recommendations

### 3.1 Directly Related to Housing Emergency Action Plan Implementation

These recommendations align closely with the current scope and strategic direction of the Housing Emergency Action Plan:

#### a. Accelerate Property Turnaround

Begin remedial work at the void stage and strengthen collaboration with RSLs to prioritise statutory homeless individuals. Improve clarity around when individuals are informed of property allocation and when work begins, as uncertainty during this phase can exacerbate distress.

#### b. Support and Scale the Show Home Model

Formalise and expand the show home approach to improve tenant engagement and confidence. The model aligns with trauma-informed practice by reducing uncertainty and enabling informed choice.

*Suggested actions:*

- Create a permanent or rotating show home reflecting typical property standards.
- Embed show home visits into tenancy readiness pathways.
- Use the show home as an educational tool.
- Gather feedback from service users to assess its impact on confidence and acceptance rates.

#### c. Embed Early OT Assessment into Property Matching

Integrate Occupational Therapy assessments earlier in the property matching process to ensure suitability is assessed proactively.

*Benefits:*

- Reduces withdrawn offers due to late-stage accessibility concerns.
- Improves tenant satisfaction and sustainability.
- Supports efficient use of housing stock and reduces time in temporary accommodation.

#### d. Improve Communication and Accessibility

Use plain language, visual aids, and face-to-face engagement to reduce barriers. Third Sector practitioners would benefit from a clearer understanding of ACC's internal processes, particularly around CBL.

*Suggested action:* Develop a simplified, visual guide to the housing process for service users and frontline staff, alongside regular refreshers for Third Sector partners.

#### e. Continue Co-Design

Maintain lived experience involvement in shaping and reviewing the HEAP to ensure it remains responsive and grounded in real-world insight.



## 3. Recommendations (continued)

### 3.2 For Wider Consideration

These recommendations extend beyond the immediate scope of HEAP but should be considered for long-term system improvement and sustainability:

#### f. **Strengthen Trauma-Informed Delivery**

Embed trauma-informed training and reflective practice across housing services to ensure consistent, compassionate engagement.

#### g. **Enhance Wraparound Support**

Offer emotional, practical, and digital support proactively not just at crisis points. Embed mental health, substance-related harm support, and peer networks into housing pathways to support relapse prevention and long-term tenancy sustainment.

#### h. **Support Digital Access**

Ensure individuals have access to devices, connectivity, and digital literacy training to fully participate in housing and benefits systems.

#### i. **Clarify Roles and Processes**

Balance enforcement actions with early, compassionate engagement to build trust and reduce fear. Individuals often misinterpret cause and effect in enforcement procedures, which can lead to disengagement.

#### j. **Invest in Tenancy Readiness**

Expand access to furnishing schemes, budgeting support, and tenancy preparation resources. While existing models (FLS, FIT, Housing First, Aberdeen Foyer) provide valuable support, gaps remain in practical tenancy education and readiness.

*Suggested action:*

- Review how tenancy education is delivered and tracked across support models.
- Embed budgeting, furnishing schemes, and tenancy responsibilities early and consistently across pathways.
- Address referral breakdowns and disengagement to reduce missed opportunities.

#### k. **Shared Data and Insights**

Establish mechanisms for sharing anonymised frontline data and lived experience feedback to inform continual improvement and system learning.

#### l. **Joined-Up Working**

Address differences in interpretation and delivery across services to reduce confusion and missed opportunities for individuals.

#### m. **Feedback Loops**

Create mechanisms for service users and Third Sector partners to provide feedback on housing processes and experiences. This will support continual improvement and build trust across the system.

## 4. Acknowledgement of Progress

We recognise and appreciate the significant work already undertaken by Aberdeen City Council in developing the Housing Emergency Action Plan (HEAP). The inclusion of trauma-informed language and the recognition of wraparound support are positive and encouraging steps forward.

We strongly welcome the proposal to use 80 West North Steet for short-term accommodation. This is a practical and timely measure to reduce breaches of Unsuitable Accommodation Orders (UAOs). The use of self-contained units offers a more appropriate and dignified alternative to hotel placements, which can often lack privacy and stability.

We also fully endorse the early embedding of OT assessment into property match which supports the HEAP's goal of improving housing outcomes and aligns with trauma-informed practice by reducing uncertainty and repeated disruptions for individuals.

The HEAP provides a strong foundation for meaningful change. Through continued collaboration between statutory services, RSLs, third sector partners and those with lived experience, we are confident that we can build a system that is not only efficient but also compassionate, empowering and equitable for citizens of Aberdeen.