

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE: Housing & Environment DATE: 11 January 2010

DIRECTOR: Pete Leonard

TITLE OF REPORT: Homelessness Service Performance and
Developments Towards the 2012 Target

REPORT NUMBER: H&E/09/139

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report:

- a) Seeks approval for the use of Aberdon House as a temporary accommodation unit
- b) Seeks approval to increase the relets to those households being assisted under the Part II of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 (as amended by the 2001 and 2003 Acts)
- c) Provides an update on the performance of the Homelessness Service linked to meeting the 2012 target
- d) Provides an update on future developments of the Service following the appointment of the Homelessness Manager

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee: -

- a) Approve in the short-term use, for an initial period of two years, of Aberdon House as a temporary accommodation unit for persons who have experienced the loss of accommodation subject to the a more detailed report on the financial implications, the necessary statutory permissions being secured (HMO licence) and community consultation
- b) Approve the increase of relets to those households being assisted under the Part II of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 (as amended by the 2001 and 2003 Acts) for a three month period, April 2010 – June 2010, to ensure that the Council is fulfilling it's statutory duties
 - Option 1 – increase relets from 50% to 75%
 - Option 2 – increase relets from 50% to 100%
- c) Note the performance of the Service towards the 2012 target
- d) Note the update on future developments of the Service

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are potential resource implications in relation to bringing the property at Aberdon House into use as a temporary accommodation unit.

Robinson, Low, Francis, Construction & Property Consultants (RLF) are currently preparing costings for using the property in this way and this will be available for Committee by February 2010 at the latest.

The existing accommodation units are funded through charges and/or housing benefit. Any deficit is funded by the hostel deficit grant from the Scottish Government.

4. SERVICE & COMMUNITY IMPACT

The proposal links to the Single Outcome Agreement and Vibrant, Dynamic & Forward Looking to 'increase the number of temporary homes for homeless people across the City' and 'retain the 24 hours contact point for homeless people'. It also links to the National Indicator and Target 'All unintentionally homeless households will be entitled to settled accommodation by 2012'.

Our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs.

VDFL - this report is in line with the Council's key aim to enhance the total environment in social housing areas.

There are direct links to the Housing Service Plan 2009-2012 – Modernisation of Service, the Resettlement & Homelessness Strategy and the Temporary Accommodation Strategy.

5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

If this property is used in addition to existing temporary accommodation units, then an additional staff group will require to be recruited although this should be contained within income generated by the service.

If those who require temporary accommodation insist on it being provided there would be significant additional expenditure required.

There would be a change in policy with regard to the percentage allocation of relets to homeless households but this is for a defined period of three months.

A range of protocols require to be established which would enhance a corporate approach to issues.

Arrangements will be made in relation to community consultation.

6. MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 Overall

The demand on the Service remains consistently high with indicators that demand could further increase. Areas of concern include – providing sufficient temporary accommodation as is required by statute; discharging the statutory duty into permanent housing and ensuring that adequate support is provided to individuals to take up accommodation and sustain it.

Ensuring service improvements will prove extremely challenging within the current level of resources. The lack of temporary accommodation means the considerable use of bed & breakfast establishments which this year has cost the Council £390,800. Such resources could be utilised better.

If all those who were entitled to temporary accommodation insisted on this being provided this would result in additional expenditure of approximately £500,000.

6.2 Presentations

An average of 222 households per month presented to the Homelessness Service between 1 April 2009 and 30 September 2009, There was a total of 1,334 presentations in that period. 956 of these (an average of 159 per month) were in a crisis or potential crisis due to loss of accommodation. This represents an average of 72% of those presenting. Just under 85% of those assessed as were in priority need.

Presentations Apr 2009 – Sept 2009	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Average	Total
Presentations	251	262	233	202	194	192	222	1,334
Assessed as in a crisis or potential crisis due to loss of accommodation	173	150	180	156	151	146	159	956
	69%	57%	77%	77%	78%	76%	72%	

In terms of progress towards the 2012 target, Aberdeen has set an interim target of 82% of households being assessed as in priority need. In 2008 – 2009, 87% were assessed as being in priority need and, therefore, the target has been exceeded.

Progress towards 2012 target	2007/2008	2008/2009	Target	+/-
% assessed as being in priority need	66%	87%	82%	+5%

The latest national figures available (2008 – 2009) show 2 councils assessed fewer than 70% as priority in 2008-09; 11 councils assessed between 70% and 80% as priority; 13 councils assessed between 80% and 90% as priority; and 6 councils assessed over 90% as priority.

In summary, 14 councils reached or exceeded the 2009 interim target for all assessments in 2008-09. A further 5 councils reached or exceeded the interim

target in 1 or more quarters in 2008-09. Priority assessments in 6 councils in 2008-09 were 10 or more percentage points below their 2009 target.

By the end of 2012, 100% of all unintentionally homeless households will be considered to be in priority need. Using this years' figures, this would mean that a further 25 households per month would require to be assisted. We need to decide shortly whether we increase our target in stages towards 100% or whether the 100% target will be implement only in 2012.

A recent Scottish Government analysis of Section 11 referrals (where a landlord/owner/mortgage provider raises proceedings for possession of a dwellinghouse, the landlord must give notice of the raising of the proceedings to the local authority in whose area the dwellinghouse is situated) for the first six months of 2009 – 2010 showed Aberdeen had 78 and 80 referrals in each of the three months, 23/23 from RSLs.

The number of referrals is well below the other major cities – Glasgow: 592 and 737, Edinburgh: 204 and 290, Dundee: 82 and 83 and North Lanarkshire: 215 and 289. Either the economic stability of the area means that fewer properties are being subject to re-possession or there is still a lack of awareness of the responsibilities.

There is a distinct likelihood that these numbers will rise in Aberdeen leading to more pressures on the Homelessness Service.

Based on 11,000 properties registered, the Landlord Registration Service will have an income of around £500k over three years yet, it is understood that there are only 2 permanent employees and two temporary employees. There appears to be scope for this service to contribute to the advice & information that will be require to be provided to landlords and the burden of administering notifications.

6.3 Temporary accommodation

Temporary accommodation was only provided for 260 households (including non-priority households) in the first 6 months of 2009 - 2010 with a larger proportion, 289, not being offered any temporary accommodation because of lack of capacity. This is clearly a breach of the duties under housing legislation.

A further 478 households made their own arrangements or the outcome was not known. Part of the reason for household making their own arrangements is understood to be the high charges that they are required to pay in City Council's temporary accommodation.

Temporary accommodation Apr 2009 – Sept 2009	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Average	Total
Provided with temp	57	40	57	30	38	38	43	260
Not offered temp - lack of capacity	49	54	44	68	44	30	48	289
Own arrangements/ONK	110	82	69	67	55	95	80	478

At 31 March 2009, 216 households were in temporary accommodation and, of these, 77 households had dependent children/pregnant women. There were no breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order in 2008 – 2009 compared with one in 2007 – 2008. All such households were accommodated in the Council's own stock.

There is currently insufficient temporary accommodation available in the city and this is being addressed. The Crown Street and Bon Accord Street Temporary Accommodation Units have between them 44 rooms and we normally utilise around 90 units of bed & breakfast accommodation. The situation could be exacerbated if the temporary accommodation unit in Crown Street fails in the appeal against the refusal of an HMO licence. 21 rooms would be lost.

Formal arrangements to access commissioned services such as the Cyrenians do not yet appear to have been put in place and this will be addressed shortly.

There is some concern about the void levels in the temporary accommodation flats but this issue is being addressed by the new Private Sector Leasing & Temporary Accommodation Senior Officer.

The Internal Audit Report (September 2009) recommended that options for increasing temporary accommodation should be investigated and reported to Committee.

It is being proposed that the former Aberdon House residential home in Tillydrone is utilised for an initial period of two years as temporary accommodation providing 35 single rooms, 1 x 1 bedroom flat and 1 x 2 bedroom flat. This accommodation, which was purchased from the General Account by the Housing revenue Account for redevelopment for new Council housing, could be used if the Crown Street Temporary Accommodation Unit is closed or to provide additional capacity until more permanent solutions are found.

RLF are currently preparing costings for using the property in this way and this will be available for Committee by February 2010 at the latest.

Arrangements will be made in relation to community consultation.

It is anticipated that Aberdon would not be used on a permanent basis. Aberdon could be brought into use relatively quickly (by June 2010 – on the understanding that a Housing in Multiple Occupation Licence can be granted timeously) as it would not require a great deal of work to bring it up to standard. This provision would be cost neutral. The use of Aberdon, if used in addition to existing facilities, would provide an opportunity for households with complex needs not to be so concentrated in so few places within the city centre. A bulletin report from Resources Management & Delivery will also be available for Committee.

Aberdon House in addition to Croft House, Spring Gardens and Victoria House are being considered as a longer-term solution to the provision of temporary accommodation. This would incorporate a Housing Access Centre, managed accommodation; flats; with flexibility for the future.

Other planned initiatives:

- There are currently 148 temporary flats in use for homeless households and this is due to rise to 200 by June 2010. These flats are cost neutral.
- A Private Sector Leasing scheme is being planned with a potential capacity in 2010 – 2011 of 150 units with a further 150 in 2011 – 2012 and another 100 in 2012 – 2013 (400 in total)
- A Winter Care Shelter has been commissioned to provide 15 places during January – March 2010
- Commissioning is planned in relation to a furniture grant scheme and the provision of advice & information

6.4 Access to permanent accommodation

Aberdeen City Council has agreed to allocate 50% of all lets to homeless households. As can be seen from the table below, we are still below this target.

% of lets to homeless households Apr 2009 – Sept 2009	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Average	Target
Homeless lets as % of all Council lets	48%	44%	39%	41%	40%	49%	43%	50%

The lack of permanent accommodation is reflected in the additional time that households remain in temporary accommodation and the length of the total journey time for assessment and outcome.

In temporary accommodation longer than targets Apr 2009 – Sept 2009	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Average	Total
In flats longer than 3mths	39	35	39	39	50	56	43	258
In accommodation unit longer than 3mths	7	8	5	4	5	8	6	37
In B&B longer than 2 mths	21	23	35	21	24	26	25	150

At present the total journey times are well above target but this includes households where the Council's duties might be limited. There are currently 47 families waiting over 10 weeks (70 days) and the average time for them is 155 days or 22 weeks.

The longest household wait is 87 weeks with the next longest 57 weeks but in both cases there are specific reasons for the delays in allocating permanent accommodation.

Journey time in days Apr 2009 – Sept 2009	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Average	Target
Decision to discharge	64	63	63	85	85	90	75	60
Total journey	89	81	88	101	104	106	95	80

The actual numbers of tenancies allocated to homeless households are outlined below.

Tenancies allocated to homeless households Apr 2009 – Sept 2009	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Average	Total
Allocation of tenancy	82	82	65	66	53	77	71	425
Total all relets							155	931

There is clearly a major problem in relation to the lack of temporary accommodation, the blockages in temporary accommodation and with the availability of permanent accommodation.

In order to address this in the short-term, approval is sought to increase the allocations to homeless households to **either 75% or 100%** of all relets for a three month period, April and June 2010, to clear the backlog of households waiting.

The table below shows the impact of the increase of relets if these were increased from 50% to 75% or 100%. The waiting list of homeless households stands at 223. The current average number of allocations during a three month period would be 210. A further 480 would come into the system during a three month period (approx. 160 per month).

Increasing relets to 75% could bring the number of households waiting for a tenancy down to 145 and increasing relets to 100% could bring the number of households awaiting a tenancy down to 82.

Impact of increase in relets	Increase from 50% to 75%		Increase from 50% to 100%	
Currently awaiting allocation	223		223	
Additional requirements during 3 month period	480		480	
Total requiring tenancy		703		703
Duty discharged - own arrangements/NK	159		159	
Relets with 50% policy	210		210	
Additional relets with revised temporary policy	189		252	
Total provided with tenancy		558		621
Revised total awaiting allocation		145		82
Net reduction in waiting list over 3 months		78		141

The percentage of homeless applicants from the waiting list in 2008 – 2009 was 33% compared with the Scottish average of 35%.

We will also do more work with the local Housing Associations/Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to raise the percentage of allocations they make to homeless households. At present we appear to work on a voluntary agreement with RSLs and we will now look to a more formal agreement with respect to Section 5

referrals. (Section 5 referrals are the formal means by which local authorities can ensure that homeless people are housed by RSLs). We should be looking at the percentage of allocations being similar.

There were 76 appeals against decisions relating to offers of permanent accommodation, intentionality, etc. of which over half were successful. The Internal Audit Report (September 2009) recommended procedures need to be updated. This requirement will be complied with by 31 March 2010.

Appeals Apr 2009 – Sept 2009	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Aver age	Total
Appeals	7	8	15	17	13	16	13	76
Appeals upheld	2	3	8	9	9	10	7	41
% Appeals upheld	29%	38%	53%	53%	69%	63%	51%	54%

6.5 Homelessness Service Developments

The new post of Homelessness Manager and Private Sector Leasing & Temporary Accommodation Senior Officer were filled on 9 November 2009 and, with these additional posts, a number of outstanding developments in the Homelessness Service will be moved forward.

It is expected that the service will relocate to the first floor at Upperkirkgate, St Nicholas House in early 2010. This move will address a number of the criticisms contained in the Communities Scotland Inspection and the recommendations in the Internal Audit Report (September 2009). The reception for the Service will now be accessible for disabled people, privacy in interview rooms will increase and the overall environment will improve greatly. This relocation could assist the move to a more preventative approach described below.

The Homelessness Manager has set out a vision for future services which has Prevention as its top priority. Prevention is even more important if supply does not improve but this should not be a new form of “gate-keeping”. Prevention should be central to service delivery, embedded in all operational processes with the structures to deliver. Time previously used for priority needs assessments would be used for prevention.

The “toolkit” of prevention activities might include:

- Mediation/counselling, home visits
- Refuge schemes
- Advice, landlord mediation/negotiation, rent deposit guarantee
- Debt counselling, advocacy in court, resolving HB problems
- Advice and support, life skills, budgeting
- Prevention Fund
- Early, proactive intervention, advice and good range of options

Aspects of this approach are consistent with the pilot currently going on in the former north 2 area.

Another key plank of this vision is wider engagement which includes:

- Corporate responsibility – Social Work (Child care/protection, Criminal Justice), Substance Misuse, Housing Benefit, Community Planning, Health
- Housing Associations – contribution to temporary/permanent accommodation, support
- Private Sector Leasing – contribution to temporary/permanent accommodation
- Voluntary sector - contribution to support services, increased joint working
- Customer involvement – developing a strategy
- Access points
- Agreement on each agency’s responsibility
- Protocols/procedures being put in place
- Information sharing protocol
- Utilising an outcomes tool
- Shared understanding of issues including complex needs/risk factors

This wider engagement seeks to involve other agencies in a more cooperative manner with a focus on working together to resolve homelessness rather than an adversarial approach.

In line with this, the Homelessness Manager has responded to the consultation on the Social Care & Wellbeing Service’s Commissioning Strategy for Adults welcoming that Housing has been included as a key partner in the Strategy and hoping that the issue of homelessness and the general accommodation needs of citizens are seen as a corporate issue for the Council and its services.

This would be in line with the “Essential Connections, Linking housing, health & social care report” (2005) from the Joint Improvement Team/ADSW/CiHS which concluded that there is now a consensus that partnership working is essential in order to design, develop and deliver personal services for those requiring support and assistance to optimise their independence and happiness.

In the response to that consultation, the support needs below were outlined as per the modeling undertaken by the Scottish Government.

Aberdeen City						
Support needs of those assessed as homeless in 2008-09 by broad age range						
	Mental health problem	Learning disability	Physical disability	Medical condition	Drug or alcohol dependency	Basic housing management/ independent living skills
16-19	17	2	0	7	4	67
20-24	29	5	1	16	6	64
25-39	96	5	9	52	51	94
40+	59	2	10	67	19	37

As % of all in age group						
16-19	5.7	0.7	0.0	2.3	1.3	22.3
20-24	6.2	1.1	0.2	3.4	1.3	13.6
25-39	12.7	0.7	1.2	6.9	6.8	12.5
40+	15.0	0.5	2.5	17.0	4.8	9.4

Ensuring the support needs of those in a crisis or potential crisis due to loss of accommodation will be challenging and sufficient resources from the former supporting people funding will be required to meet these challenges.

There is still considerable work to be done in relation to a corporate approach to families in a crisis situation as a result of the loss of accommodation particularly those who might be assessed as intentionally homeless.

In these situations, the Council Service responsible for debt recovery might be taking action to evict the family thereby potentially leaving the children in the family at risk resulting in interventions being necessary by the Social Care & Wellbeing Service.

The likely reason for such evictions would be rent arrears but it would be far more costly to evict the family, provide it with temporary accommodation and possibly take the children in care.

Some elements of these processes are controlled by Continuous Improvements i.e. rent collection, which may be at odds with tenancy sustainment or child welfare issues. A protocol for joint working needs to be developed.

The above actions will contribute towards ensuring:

- the implementation of the Homelessness & Resettlement Strategy
- the implementation of the Temporary Accommodation Strategy
- delivering the Tenancy Sustainment Action Plan
- delivering the improvements from the Communities Scotland Inspection
- delivering the improvements from the Internal Audit – September 2009

The Homelessness Service will also be commissioning:

- Advice & Information Services
- Furniture Provision
- Refuge Provision

The post of Homelessness Strategy Officer is a permanent post but is currently filled by two part time secondments of permanent staff. The secondees have been working on a number of major issues including the commissioning of services and these secondments will be continued until a fuller review of the structure has been carried out.

Once a number of these actions have been moved forward a communications plan will be formulated in line with the recommendations in the Internal Audit Report (November 2009).

7. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Scottish Government – Operation of the homelessness legislation 2008 – 2009
(September 2009)

Resettlement & Homelessness Strategy

Temporary Accommodation Strategy