

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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COMMITTEE: Housing & Environment      DATE: 13 April 2010

DIRECTOR: Pete Leonard

TITLE OF REPORT: Practical Measures being adopted by Housing & Environment in supporting the Council's Anti-Poverty Strategy

REPORT NUMBER: H&E/10/013

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### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To provide an update on the practical measures being adopted by the Housing & Environment Service in supporting the Council's Anti-Poverty Strategy – "Achieving our Potential, Tackling Poverty and Income Inequality in Aberdeen City".

### **2. RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Committee: -

- (i) Note the measures the Housing and Environment Service are currently taking to address poverty and inequality, and measures planned for the future, and also note that,
- (ii) The Housing and Environment Service is currently being redesigned to provide a customer focused housing service, to achieve more effective management of tenancy support and sustainment ( preventing eviction and homelessness ), and more effective management of customer relations.

### **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

None arising from this report, however, it is recognised that the implementation of the Anti-Poverty Strategy needs to ensure value for money from existing funding invested in Anti-Poverty interventions and action by the Council and its partners.

### **4. SERVICE & COMMUNITY IMPACT**

This report relates to the Scottish Government priority of Wealthier and Fairer. It also links to the strategic priority for the City: to improve the quality of life in our most deprived areas.

## **5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

Legal: None arising from this report.

Personnel: None arising from this report.

Property: None arising from this report.

Equipment: None arising from this report.

## **6. MAIN CONSIDERATIONS**

### **6.1 Background**

The Corporate Policy & Performance Committee of 10 September 2009 agreed to remit the draft “Anti-Poverty Strategy, Achieving Our Potential: Tackling Poverty and Income Inequality in Aberdeen City 2009-2012”, to the other Committees of the Council for consideration and comment, along with each Service Directors’ advice on action taken or planned by that particular Service to address issues relating to tackling poverty.

Recent research commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (“Devolution’s impact on low income people and places”, January 2010) , recognises that trends in social and economic disadvantage are affected by policy developments in four key areas – improvements in these areas can make a significant difference to people affected by poverty:

- Housing and Homelessness
- Employment;
- Neighbourhood regeneration, and
- Long term care for older people.

The Housing & Environment Service plays a key role in supporting a number of these key areas and in particular the aims of the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy within the following strategic objective areas.

### **6.2 Reducing Income Inequality - Employment**

The Anti Poverty Strategy notes that “getting people into work is a major focus of the Government’s national poverty reduction policy”. The Housing and Environment Service is currently taking a number of practical measures to support this.

The Service has established a partnership with Aberdeen Foyer, through their social firm Foyer Works, to provide employment opportunities for severely disadvantaged young people. Housing and Environment and Foyer Works work in partnership to provide a property maintenance service to the Council’s void properties. The Foyer’s employability programmes, of which this initiative is an example, can help to support young people who would otherwise struggle to find mainstream employment. Trainees on the programme all live in areas of multiple deprivation within Aberdeen.

Young people on the Housing and Environment supported programme get experience in property cleaning, painting and decorating, joinery repairs, removals, and basic ground maintenance. A Supervisor from the Council oversees the painting and decorating element of the work. The scheme has been in operation since January 2008, and in that time twenty four young people have been through the programme, three of whom have gone on to get permanent employment.

The Housing and Environment Service also support measures to boost employment opportunities in the City by providing employment for twenty four apprentices in Contract Services each year.

An initiative to boost employment opportunities for young people, The Trades Project, is run by the Social Care and Well Being service annually for 12 pupils between the ages of 13 -16, and normally takes in pupils from the more deprived areas of the city. The Project runs over two years, with pupils attending two days a week and going to school for the remaining three days; this is due to change to pupils attending the Project one day per week from the 2010 intake, so that more pupils can get the opportunity to attend. The Project enables pupils to work towards the SQA in Construction. The Course covers units in trades like painting and decorating, bricklaying, plumbing, joinery, and roof tiling. Housing and Environment provided a joiner to teach the pupils the joinery element of the course, paid for by the Project, and have donated wood and paint. Staff involved in the Project hope that the relationship that's been established with the Housing and Environment service will continue to develop.

The Housing and Environment service is currently engaged in a number of new build programmes to provide affordable social housing. Although not part of the first phase of this work there are plans to look at how to make community benefits - like boosting employment opportunities in a local area – an integral part of the procurement and planning process for future phases of the work.

### **6.3 Reducing Income Inequality – Maximising Income**

Income maximisation can make a contribution to addressing poverty by ensuring available sources of income like welfare benefits, and tax credits are pursued and controlling money going out through budgetary and debt advice.

Trading Standards, are part of the Housing and Environment Service, and through their Money Advice Service their staff regularly look at ways of increasing people's incomes through uptake of benefits and application to charities. The Fairer Scotland Funded Cash in Your Pocket Partnership is also regularly used by Money Advice staff and they receive referrals to their service through the system. Staff also take part in financial awareness sessions for communities and citizens in Aberdeen organised by the Partnership.

The Homelessness service operates a Furnished Tenancy Grant Scheme which provides previously homeless households with basic essential household items to assist in settling in to their new tenancy. In this way it prevents people taking on additional debt when they can least afford it. The scheme currently receives £100, 000 per year and operates through services commissioned from the Instant Neighbour charity and directly.

The Care and Repair service is aimed at assisting older and / or disabled homeowners to maintain independence by keeping their homes in a good state of repair and suitable to their needs. The service is funded from Private Sector Housing Grant through the Housing and Environment Service and in 2009 / 10 received £280,000. PSHG funding provides a total budget of £750,000 for adaptations to properties in the private housing sector to make them suitable for use by owners who have disabilities.

#### **6.4 Supporting Those Experiencing or at Risk of Poverty – Fuel Poverty**

Fuel poverty is determined by a combination of factors, most notably low household income and the high cost of fuel. But poor energy efficiency in the home also contributes significantly. Housing and Environment are taking a number of measures in this area in support of the Council's Anti Poverty Strategy.

The Combined Heat and Power (CHP) Scheme - a system where "electricity is generated locally for sale and the heat produced by the generator is captured and used to heat properties instead of being released into the atmosphere" – has been operating in Aberdeen since 2003. Currently 850 flats within multi storey blocks are linked in to CHP heating networks and as a result fuel poverty proofed. The previous heating systems in the blocks were expensive to run causing the majority of occupants to be identified in 2002 as being in fuel poverty – having to spend more than 10% of their income on fuel bills. In contrast CHP is a very efficient method of producing heat and power and keeping the costs to users low - fuel costs are approximately half what they were before the blocks were linked into the CHP scheme – a reduction from £20 per week to £9 per week on average. In addition to being linked into the scheme, work to improve energy efficiency in the blocks, improved insulation /cladding of buildings, is carried out at the time.

Funding for the CHP scheme comes from the HRA Capital Programme and also from external bids to a fund established by energy companies. The Capital budget provides a contribution of £1.02M to support Aberdeen Heat and Power in the creation of Combined Heat and Power Plants. Future plans are to extend the CHP scheme to a further eight blocks sited in the Seaton and Balgownie areas of the city.

The Housing and Environment service also operate the Heat with Rent Scheme whereby charges for both rent and the costs for heating for a property are combined. This method of charging is applied to all sheltered

housing properties and properties that have a communal heating system, like those covered by a CHP scheme. A cost matrix is used to determine the level of charges depending on the size of the property / number of bedrooms. This system helps to address the issue of fuel poverty for residents of these properties and ensure that heating costs are always affordable.

Private Sector Housing Grant contributes £70,000 per year to an overall funding plan of £100,000 for initiatives to fulfill the Home Energy Conservation Act in the private sector. This money is used to lever in additional monies, from local and national funding sources, like bids to national grants provided by energy companies as noted above, to enable a range of work on measures to address fuel poverty to be carried out within the city.

As part of ongoing improvement to properties all of the council's housing stock will have cavity wall and loft insulation to Scottish Housing Quality Standard by 2012/13. The Housing and Environment Service, from its Capital Programme budget, invests in energy efficiency and insulation measures to its housing stock to help to tackle fuel poverty. In 2009/10 a budget of just over £3M is identified for window replacement programmes – upgrading to double glazing, loft insulation, and replacing heating systems with more efficient systems or boilers, as necessary. The current New Build programme of general needs and housing for varying needs also includes a number of measures to improve the energy efficiency of the properties to minimise energy costs e.g. solar panels, triple glazing, etc and in this way contribute to addressing fuel poverty.

## **6.5 Supporting Those Experiencing or at Risk of Poverty – Financial Inclusion**

An important element of financial inclusion is improved access to affordable financial products and services. One of the ways that this can be achieved is to improve access to affordable credit, particularly for people on low incomes. The Housing and Environment Service helps St. Machar Credit Union to raise the profile and accessibility of their service through use of Tillydrone Housing Office as a collection point, one morning a week.

## **6.6 Supporting Those Experiencing or at Risk of Poverty – Advice and Information Services**

Quality advice and information is key to addressing complex issues like poverty.

The Money Advice Service based within Trading Standards provides advice to people experiencing financial difficulties. Figures provided by the service show that in 2008 / 09, 760 enquires or requests for advice were received and 170 full clients were provided with negotiation, advocacy or representation. The total debt handled by the service in 2008 / 09 was £4,136,369.46.

Through the Housing Revenue Account, Housing and Environment fund one Welfare Rights Officer post and two Assistant posts. The staff are employed through Social Care and Wellbeing but the costs are recharged to the HRA - £98, 000 in 2009 / 10. The Welfare Rights service provides information and advice and representation in relation to welfare benefit entitlement. The Welfare Rights Officer funded by the HRA assisted 139 clients - 72% of whom were council tenants in the 2008 / 09 financial year and achieved a total of money attained for clients over the year of £629, 577.

In the current financial year 114 clients have been assisted by the HRA funded Welfare Rights Officer – 67% of these being council tenants. The Welfare Rights Assistants have only been in post since the end of September 2009 and have assisted 34 clients to complete claims for benefits – of this number 79% were council tenants.

Housing Officers are currently working jointly with CRM officers on a project to achieve early intervention with tenants who are at risk of losing their homes because of financial difficulties and non payment of rent.

The Council and the Housing and Environment Service are providing funding of £162,425 for 2009 / 10 from the HRA and the General Fund to SCARF; an organisation which provides advice and information on energy efficiency measures and how to lower fuel costs. The Housing and Environment Capital Programme budget provides £20,000 to fund SCARF's work to individual council properties under the Energy Efficiency programme. This includes the provision of advice and information and installation of loft insulation, draught proofing and provision of energy saving light bulbs. SCARF also provides information to people about grants that are available to help with this. Staff from the organisation are currently advising tenants of one of the Council's multi storey blocks in which new heating is being installed on what they need to do to set up new electricity accounts to ensure that they don't receive large bills in the future.

The Warm Zone Scheme is a pilot scheme designed to reduce fuel poverty by focusing in on a specific geographic area of the city the boundaries being the Beach / Harbour area and Bedford Road / Leslie Terrace - 8000 households in total. The scheme is designed to maximise income and improve energy efficiency. It looks at both of these aspects by providing advice and information on energy saving measures and assisting householders to identify whether they are receiving all the income they are entitled to through benefit health checks, and providing help in applying for any extra benefits, if they are eligible. The Scheme received £58,000 in 2009 / 10 from the HRA.

Part of the Warm Zone Scheme focuses on Victorian tenements, which make up 12% of the housing stock in the area covered. This aspect of the scheme focuses on improving the energy efficiency of these properties by encouraging owners to install loft insulation, or draught proofing measures to the communal areas of their buildings, 40% of the staffing costs for this work are funded by the HRA.

The Aberdeen branch of Citizens Advice Bureau received £14,000 from the HRA for 2009/10 to help people in long term health care at Woodend Hospital to resettle, by providing advice and information on their financial entitlements.

## **6.7 Using a combination of methods to support the Strategy**

The Affordable Warmth Scheme provides advice and assistance and also offers low interest loans to older, disabled people or those with long term illness, or on a low income, to provide energy reducing measures in their homes and help to reduce levels of fuel poverty. Funding is made up 50 / 50, from the HRA and the General Fund, the HRA contribution is £58,000. As part of the Scheme SCARF offer householders and every new council tenant advice and information on energy efficiency measures to help prevent fuel poverty. The advice is mainly delivered to low income and vulnerable households. Private Sector Housing Grant funding in conjunction with funding of £56,000 from the HRA jointly fund 4 energy advisors to provide energy saving advice to help prevent fuel poverty, 9000 households in total have benefited from this service.

Homelessness is identified by the Research and Statistics Service as one of the key indicators of poverty in the city, as noted in, "Achieving Our Potential: Tackling Poverty and Income Inequality in Aberdeen City 2009 -2012". It follows then that measures taken to address homelessness are key to supporting the Council's Anti Poverty Strategy.

The Homelessness Service is funded by direct (formely ring fenced) grant from the government and the General Fund. Funding for work to progress the Homelessness Strategy comes from the General Fund element of the Housing and Environment budget - a total of £885, 000 in 2009 / 10. This budget provides funding of £50,000 to Citizens Advice Bureau and £30,000 to the Cyrenians to provide advice and information on a wide range of housing and related issues; including security of tenure, homelessness, rent arrears, housing benefit, mortgage problems and private sector issues. The Cyrenians are also funded from the Homelessness Strategy budget to provide an education programme on Leaving Home and Housing to all Secondary 4 students and the Service commissions the Aberdeen Health and Homelessness on-line Directory.

This Service provides temporary accommodation to people at a vulnerable period in their lives. Temporary and Supported Accommodation provides support to individuals and families to address underlying issues, including debt. Around 300 households are provided with temporary accommodation at any one time; in the Accommodation Unit which has 44 places, Bed and breakfast Accommodation – 90 places, homeless flats – 150 places, Winter Care shelter -15 places. The net cost to the Council is £284,000 after the income generated from temporary accommodation is taken into account. The Housing Account General Fund also provides a budget of £597,000 - this funds the provision of a range of services which aim to prevent homelessness and sustain tenancies of people formerly homeless. Supported

Accommodation is also commissioned by the service through, The Aberdeen Cyrenians, Aberdeen Foyer, Grampian Women's Aid and provided directly with the Young Single Persons Housing Project.

Aberdeen Families Project aims to tackle the root causes of antisocial behaviour in families with a view to breaking the cycle and enabling families to return to, or maintain, mainstream housing. The Project provides intensive support and supervision to troubled and troublesome families – families with longstanding serious antisocial behaviour who are at risk of losing, or have lost, their home due to this. The Project works with seventeen families in total, three being housed in the Project's core block who receive intensive support and supervision on a 24 hour basis.

Run by "Action for Children" the Project is funded 100% by the Council, with a budget of £410, 000 in 2009 / 10, the majority of the funding coming from the HRA, with a small contribution from the mainstream community safety budget. The balance of funding is due to change in 2010 / 11 with a larger contribution coming from the mainstream budget, recognising that not all families benefiting from the project will be Council tenants but may also come from other social landlords and the private rented sector.

The Project consistently achieves a 70% success rate – defined in terms of a cessation of anti social behaviour, tackling of other social problems and a return to mainstream housing.

## **6.8 Other Measures**

The provision of new build council housing is important as a significant practical measure being taken to increase the supply of affordable housing in the City, and as noted earlier in the report, through new ways to heat and insulate the properties to address fuel poverty as well. The table below sets out the provision of new social housing by the Council through the Housing and Environment Service in the period 2009 to 2012.

Year	New build completions - actual	New Build completions - anticipated
2009/10	33	
2010/11		85
2011/12		35

The Housing Service is currently being redesigned to provide a customer focused housing service, to achieve more effective management of tenancy support and sustainment (preventing eviction and homelessness), and more effective management of customer complaints about antisocial behaviour. The HRA provides funding for four members of staff within the Housing and Environment Service to carry out a specialist Tenancy Support function. Their



role includes providing advice to tenants on sustaining their tenancy and referring them on to other specialist staff within the council, and other agencies, to provide the appropriate direct support on debt, personal, or other issues that may be compromising their ability to maintain their tenancy. It is intended that as part of the redesign of the housing service, initial provision of this type of information and advice will be incorporated into the role of the frontline Housing Officer.

#### 7. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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#### 8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

“Achieving Our Potential: Tackling Poverty and Income Inequality in Aberdeen City 2009-2012”, Anti-Poverty Strategy document, and report to Corporate Policy and Performance Committee 10 September 2009 - Achieving Our Potential: Tackling Poverty and Income Inequality in Aberdeen City 2009 - 2012

## Key practical measures Housing and Environment Services are taking to support the Council's Anti Poverty Strategy

Local Outcome	Objective	Action Area	Measures being taken	Future plans
<p><b>Aberdeen will have high quality employment opportunities.</b></p> <p><b>Ensure pupils leave school with skills essential for living.</b></p>	<p><b>Reduce Income Inequality</b></p>	<p><b>Employment</b></p>	<p>Partnership with Foyer Works Apprenticeships Trades Project</p>	<p>Local employment to be included in procurement process for future phases of New Build programme</p>
<p><b>Improve the quality of life in our most deprived areas</b></p>		<p><b>Maximising Income</b></p>	<p>Money Advice Service Furnished Tenancy Grant scheme Care and Repair Scheme</p>	
<p><b>Enhance the total environment in social housing areas.</b></p>	<p><b>Support those experiencing or at risk of poverty</b></p>	<p><b>Fuel Poverty</b></p>	<p>CHP schemes Warm Zones Affordable Warmth / SCARF Heat with Rent Scheme Energy efficiency measures - modernisation of properties and New Build programme include number of measures</p>	<p>Extend the CHP scheme to a further eight blocks Review the Warm Zone Scheme and look to extend to other areas.</p>

<b>Local Outcome</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Action Area</b>	<b>Measures being taken</b>	<b>Future plans</b>
	<b>Support those experiencing or at risk of poverty</b>	<b>Financial Inclusion</b>	St. Machar Credit Union weekly session at Housing office	
<b>Improve the quality of life in our most deprived areas</b>		<b>Advice and Information provision</b>	Money Advice Service Welfare Rights officer post and two Assistant posts funded by HRA Rent arrears initiative Homelessness Strategy budget funding for organisations to provide advice and information.	
<b>Enhance the total environment in social housing areas.</b>  <b>Integrate employment, housing and community services within settlements.</b>	<b>Tackling the drivers of poverty and low income</b>	<b>Regenerating Disadvantaged Communities</b>	New Build programme	To look to include community benefits elements into future phases of the programme.

