

Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee

10:00am, Thursday, 19 March 2020

Homelessness Services – Statutory Returns

Executive/routine
Wards
Council Commitments

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 Committee is asked to note the summary of the Council's statutory homelessness returns.

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Homelessness Services – Statutory Returns

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 All local authorities are required to submit a range of data, quarterly, to the Scottish Government as part of their statutory returns process.
- 2.2 The latest publication of these returns was on 28 January 2020 and covered the period 1 April 2019 – 30 September 2019.
- 2.3 This report will highlight key areas of performance and the link to the full publication can be found in section 8.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Council produces and reports several statistics related to the performance and delivery of homelessness services in the city.
- 3.2 These figures are collated by the Scottish Government through the returns process and are published to allow scrutiny and comparisons between local authorities.

4. Main report

- 4.1 In 2018-19, the number of households assessed as homeless by the Council reduced for the 12th year in a row, on this occasion by 1.5%. This was against a national increase of around 2.5% in households assessed as homeless.
- 4.2 The number of households assessed as homeless for the period of these returns shows a reduction of 2.2% on the same period as the previous year, which is likely to mean a further reduction for 2019-20.
- 4.3 Included in these returns is a further reduction in repeat homelessness. Repeat homelessness is where a household is assessed as homeless, less than a year after their previous homelessness is resolved.
- 4.4 Repeat homelessness was 6.3% in 2018-19. For the first 6 months of 2019-20 this figure was 5.4% of homeless assessments.

- 4.5 The most common reason for homelessness nationally, and in Edinburgh, is domestic ejection (being asked to leave accommodation). The next most common cause of homelessness nationally is dispute within a household, however, in Edinburgh it is loss of private sector tenancy.
- 4.6 To ensure that we prevent homelessness wherever possible, the Council has employed officers to specifically work with people at risk of homelessness from the private rented sector. This team has recently been created and indications are that the focus on this area is leading to a reduction in the number of people assessed as homeless and accessing temporary accommodation.
- 4.7 In 2018-19, the percentage of households sleeping rough the night before presenting as homeless was 7.2%, this was above the national average of 5%. The period April – September 2019 notes the figures as 4.3%.
- 4.8 It is important to note, in 2018-19, the Council significantly increased the bed spaces available to accommodate people who were rough sleeping through the provision of rapid access accommodation. Almost all people accessing this accommodation will have slept rough the night before, which accounts for the rise in this figure.
- 4.9 There are further reductions in the number of service users that the Council has lost contact with. Figures show that the Council maintains contact from advice and assessment to conclusion of the homelessness case in 85% of cases.
- 4.10 The Council continued to report several breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order (families or pregnant women in unsuitable accommodation), over the first two quarters of 2019-20. In this period the order was breached 132 times. However, this is a 55% reduction on the same period of 2018-19.
- 4.11 The Council has secured over 100 additional properties to ensure greater capacity of suitable properties are available to reduce the number of breaches of the Order, however, due to increased lengths of homelessness cases, turnover and therefore availability of suitable accommodation is reduced leading to continued breaches.
- 4.12 The Council has also committed to increasing the capacity of the Private Sector Leading scheme to deliver an increased number of suitable temporary accommodation properties to further support a reduction in breaches.
- 4.13 Included in the initial figures returned to the Scottish Government was a nil return relating to the number of service users that the Council has a homelessness duty towards which it did not accommodate.
- 4.14 This figure was an error. A failure to accommodate occurred on 1079 occasions during 2018-19 and a further 401 times in the first two quarters on 2019-20. Which projects to significant reduction for 2019-20. These figures have now been provided to the Scottish Government.
- 4.15 Following the error in reporting, a review has been conducted and a robust procedure introduced for future returns, which will all now be signed off in advance of submission by a senior officer.

- 4.16 In addition to the introduction of the new processes, Shelter have highlighted some cases where failures to accommodate may have occurred, officers are committed to reviewing these cases with colleagues from Shelter to identify gaps in service and learning opportunities.
- 4.17 Following this nil return, officers have analysed all cases where a failure to accommodate occurred and have reported that in around 80% of these cases, the service user previously had temporary accommodation but was unable to sustain it.
- 4.18 The most common reasons that previous temporary accommodation placements failed were abuse or assault by service users (35%), drug taking on premises (17%) and inappropriate behaviour (12%).
- 4.19 Around 70% of the failures to accommodate also happened outside normal Council opening hours, where the availability of accommodation can be limited, particularly if the service user has had several placements which have ended unsuccessfully.
- 4.20 In order, to tackle the challenges in providing accommodation outside normal hours for vulnerable services users, the Council and its partners have developed rapid access accommodation services. This is accommodation which can be accessed 24 hours per day directly by street-based outreach workers.
- 4.21 There are now 74 bed spaces in rapid access accommodation across the city which has contributed to the reductions in failures to accommodate this year. A link to a recent report provided to Committee on this service can be found in section 8.
- 4.22 The Council's Homelessness Task Force has been reconvened with a focus on identifying further solutions for the most vulnerable service users, as when people have experienced severe trauma in their lives it can make it difficult to sustain traditional forms of temporary accommodation.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Officers will provide a further summary report for committee following the publication of the full year returns, as soon as they are available.
- 5.2 Officers will meet with Shelter in in April 2020 to review cases where a failure to accommodate was highlighted.
- 5.3 Officers are leading on a national review of out of hours homelessness service provision, with civil servants, to identify areas of best practice. This work will take place over the next 6 months.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 None.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

7.1 None.

8. Background reading/external references

8.1 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/homelessness-scotland-update-30-september-2019/>

8.2 [Rapid Access Accommodation and Link Working Report](#)

9. Appendices

9.1 None.