

Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 5 December 2023

Housing Emergency Action Plan

Executive/routine
Wards

Routine
All

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that Committee:
- 1.1.1 Notes that, on 2 November 2023, the Council agreed to declare a Housing Emergency;
 - 1.1.2 Notes the draft Council wide action plan outlined in Appendix 1;
 - 1.1.3 Agrees that these actions should form the basis of a programme plan that will be developed and presented to the Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee on the 27 February 2024;
 - 1.1.4 Notes that meetings have been held with partner agencies including Registered Social Landlords, SHAPE, Shelter and Cyrenians to agree a partnership response to the housing emergency; and
 - 1.1.5 Notes that financial projections based on these actions will be presented to Finance and Resources Committee on the 6 February 2024 to inform the Council's budget setting process; and
 - 1.1.6 Agrees to refer this report to the Edinburgh Integration Joint Board and to Education, Children and Families Committee for further discussion and debate.

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Housing Emergency Action Plan

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report sets out the high-level actions proposed in response to the Council's declaration of a housing emergency on 2 November 2023.
- 2.2 These actions are Council wide, covering housing management practice, homelessness prevention, housebuilding and purchase, funding, social care and children's services.
- 2.3 The action plan will be developed into a programme plan for delivery and presented to the Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee on 27 February 2024, with financial projections factored into the Council's budget process.

3. Background

- 3.1 On 2 November 2023, following a motion by Councillor Meagher, the Council voted unanimously to declare a housing emergency in the city.
- 3.2 Edinburgh has one of the lowest proportions of social housing in Scotland with 16% of homes being social rent (compared to the national average of 24%). Demand for social rented homes in the city is high, with an average of 197 bids received for every home that becomes available for let via EdIndex. Edinburgh has the highest cost private rents in Scotland at an average advertised monthly rent of £1,477 (in the second quarter of 2023).
- 3.3 Edinburgh is also a growing city, with the most recent National Records of Scotland Principal Populations Projections (2018) anticipating a 13% population rise over the next 25 years to [584,900](#).
- 3.4 Edinburgh currently has the highest number of homeless households in Scotland, with 4,920 households in temporary accommodation on 24 November 2023. The average length of stay in 2022/23 was 429 days (the second highest in Scotland), with an average case length of 654 days. There are currently 1,360 void homes across the Council's stock.

4. Main report

- 4.1 The latest Housing Need and Demand Assessment 3 shows the need for between 36,000 to 52,000 homes in Edinburgh between 2021 and 2040. It is estimated that between 24,000 to 35,000 of those homes should be affordable. The Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) presented at this Committee details the specific sites and numbers of houses projected over the next five years.
- 4.2 The Housing service is currently purchasing homes through its acquisition and disposals policy, as part of a long-term asset management strategy that seeks to consolidate Council ownership in mixed tenure blocks. The acquisition and disposal policy was updated and approved by Committee in [September 2021](#).
- 4.3 Committee will also consider an update today on the Council's strategy for purchasing land and homes to meet the challenges of affordable housing. The strategy in 2023/24 will continue to focus on seeking land opportunities for building directly, purchasing suitable completed new build homes from the private sector and to work with landowners on partnering opportunities on strategic sites.
- 4.4 On the 3 October 2023, Committee received a [report](#) on the work of the Family and Household Support service. This showed many areas of successful delivery, including the prevention of over 400 homeless presentations since April 2022, representing an estimated avoided cost of £6.3m in temporary accommodation costs. Housing Officers across the city work to prevent homelessness and sustain tenancies every day. This will remain an integral part of service delivery by maintaining a strong focus on supporting householders to sustain their tenancy, and ensuring effective tenancy pre-termination procedures are in place.
- 4.5 Despite this effort, current data shows that homeless presentations are rising with 1,401 presentations between April 2023 and August 2023 (up from 1,363 at the same time last year).
- 4.6 The Council works in close partnership with other social landlords in the city, developers and the Scottish Government to achieve the targets set, as demonstrated in the SHIP report. This partnership work covers different tenures of accommodation including Social and Mid Market rent, and Private Sector Leasing (PSL).
- 4.7 The Council's partnership with Link Housing Group to deliver the PSL scheme provides security of accommodation provision, in suitable accommodation, at significantly less cost than unsuitable Bed and Breakfast (B&B) style accommodation. The Council is actively seeking to increase this provision in order to reduce the social, compliance and financial risks and issues associated with unsuitable accommodation.
- 4.8 Discussions have taken place with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) asking them to review the number of lets to homeless households and will continue through existing forums. There is strong commitment from RSL partners, and a formal written request has been circulated seeking an increase in lets for homeless households, with responses expected by 1 December 2023.

- 4.9 Meetings are continuing with partner agencies including SHAPE, Shelter and Cyrenians to agree a partnership response to the housing emergency.
- 4.10 Appendix 1 sets out a draft Housing Emergency Action Plan, which consolidates identified actions to be delivered by the Council to improve the supply of housing and prevent homelessness.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 A whole Council approach is being developed to address the housing emergency, working closely in partnership with other social landlords in the city (including RSL and PSL providers), developers and the Scottish Government.
- 5.2 As agreed by the Council, a workshop will take place with Committee members to agree the structure and reporting schedule for the Action Plan. The workshop will also discuss the draft action plan as set out in Appendix 1.
- 5.3 Where appropriate, input from the Planning Convener and Planning Committee will also be sought.
- 5.4 Following the workshop, the actions agreed will be developed into a costed programme delivery plan and will be presented to Committee on 27 February 2024.
- 5.5 The financial projections for this plan will be developed and factored into the Council's budget setting process and presented to Finance and Resources Committee on 6 February 2024.
- 5.6 In addition to the actions above, the Council also agreed that the Leader would write to the Scottish Government explaining the actions the Council is taking to address the housing emergency and to seek additional resources to help meet the severe challenges.
- 5.7 It was also requested that the Council Leader should ask for guaranteed resources to accommodate the current unfunded consequences of UK/Scottish Government immigration and asylum policy and to outline the need for a coherent partnership approach to be taken to manage humanitarian programmes going forward. Once received, the responses will be shared with Committee members.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 The financial projections for this plan will be developed and factored into the Council's budget setting process and presented to Finance and Resources Committee on 6 February 2024.

7. Equality and Poverty Impact

- 7.1 Across the city, it is estimated that 1 in 5 children and young people are in poverty. Poverty and homelessness are often linked, and there are currently around 1200

children and young people in temporary and unsuitable accommodation. This action plan has a focus on preventing homelessness occurring, providing secure permanent accommodation timeously where homelessness can't be avoided, and ultimately supporting and enabling families and households to thrive.

- 7.2 It is acknowledged that people with a range of protected characteristics are currently seeking a Council home, through EdIndex or having presented as homeless and currently being supported in temporary accommodation. This action plan will help us target more effectively the support available, for example through moving children and young people out of unsuitable accommodation or ensuring that older people have access to suitable housing when leaving hospital.
- 7.3 Work on the standard of Council property, the time it takes to allocate and move someone in to their new home, and on tenant satisfaction in general will help us address some issues of poverty, for example fuel poverty and food poverty.
- 7.4 These issues will be addressed fully in the report being presented to the February Committee.

8. Climate and Nature Emergency Implications

- 8.1 As a public body, the Council has statutory duties relating to climate emissions and biodiversity. The Council

“must, in exercising its functions, act in the way best calculated to contribute to the delivery of emissions reduction targets”

(Climate Change (Emissions Reductions Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019), and

“in exercising any functions, to further the conservation of biodiversity so far as it is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions”

(Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004)

- 8.2 The City of Edinburgh Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and committed to work towards a target of net zero emissions by 2030 for both city and corporate emissions, and embedded this as a core priority of the Council Business Plan 2023-27. The Council also declared a Nature Emergency in 2023.
- 8.3 As new sites and development opportunities become available, the impacts of those schemes will be assessed and reported as required to the appropriate Committee.

9. Risk, policy, compliance, governance and community impact

- 9.1 Risks related to this report are primarily economic, social, legal and reputational. The Council has declared a Housing Emergency and it is clear that investment is needed in both current and new housing stock. The wider economic and social

impacts of homelessness are considerable and assessed as life changing, especially for children and young people. As homelessness and poverty are so heavily linked, it is clear that risk here lies in the immediate, medium and long term disadvantage faced by households unable to secure permanent accommodation.

- 9.2 There is risk to this programme from UK and Scottish Government policy on asylum and refugee, with potential that Edinburgh will see a significant number of homeless presentations linked to these schemes in the near future. This would negatively impact our proposals to reduce the use of expensive unsuitable accommodation and reduce the number of homeless people in the city.
- 9.3 Consequently, despite our aim to reduce exposure to compliance risk in unsuitable accommodation, our reality may continue to be that a significant number of households, including children and young people, will spend time in accommodation that breaches legislation setting out criteria for suitability.
- 9.4 A full risk assessment will be provided in the report being presented to Committee in February 2024.

10. Background reading /external references

- 10.1 None

11. Appendices

- 11.1 Appendix 1 – Housing Emergency Action Plan: list of identified actions.

Appendix 1

Draft Housing Emergency Action Plan

The following action areas will require a cross Council partnership-based approach.

Each Directorate of the Council will be involved in development these areas, and a deepening of partnership across the sector will be put in place.

1. Increase the return rate of void Council property to lettable standard and allocate them, bringing a significant number of Council homes back in to use.
2. Secure additional 'off the shelf' Council homes available through the Council's acquisitions policy.
3. Increase the number of empty homes brought into use and allocated to homeless people through the Empty Homes Partnership.
4. Continue to focus on seeking land opportunities for direct development, purchase suitable completed new build homes from the private sector and work with landowners on partnering opportunities on strategic sites.
5. Continue working towards the Strategic Housing Investment Plan target of over 9,500 new homes in the city by 2029.
6. Work with partners and with COSLA to investigate funding solutions to meet the identified funding gap of £665m to deliver the Strategic Housing Investment Plan.
7. Purchase additional properties for use as temporary accommodation, with a corresponding reduction in B&B use.
8. Increase the number of Private Sector Leasing properties available to the Council.
9. Ensure the availability of additional supported accommodation bed spaces for homeless people.
10. Accelerate purchase of existing homes aligned to the Council's asset management strategy.
11. Significantly reduce the use of unsuitable accommodation by March 2025.
12. Develop targeted approaches to prioritise permanent housing for those in unsuitable accommodation, recognising the correlation between unsuitable accommodation and children placed on the child protection register and becoming Looked After.
13. Make a minimum 70% of housing allocations to homeless applicants.

14. Target interventions to prevent homeless presentations, using data to support those with protected characteristics, and families supported by protective services.
15. Delivery of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan.
16. Continue delivery of the Housing First model to reduce repeat homelessness.
17. Reduce the average time taken for a new tenant to move into their home.
18. Reduce the average time to complete emergency and non-emergency repairs.
19. Improve tenant satisfaction with their Council home.
20. Optimise the role of the voluntary and community sectors in delivering and sustaining tenancies.
21. Identify dedicated resource to consider the needs of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and children and families with No Recourse to Public Funds.
22. Put in place dedicated resource to work across housing and children and justice services to prevent homelessness and ensure the principles of The Promise are incorporated into the approach, recognising the discreet needs of families, individual adults and young people, including access to the exceptional housing award for Care Leavers.
23. Develop amended models to finance housing delivery utilising all powers available to the Council.
24. Work with the Integrated Joint Board (IJB) to reduce incidences of delayed discharge due to unsuitable or unavailable housing through improved preventative and discharge planning.
25. Work with IJB to address housing needs of older people.

Actions needed as part of partnership approach

1. Work with other local authorities within COSLA to agree temporary reforms in resource allocation policy to ensure Edinburgh receives an appropriate level of funding through the Affordable Housing Supply Programme.
2. **The Edinburgh Housing Partnership Compact:** Work with RSLs and other key third sector agencies across all ages on:
 - a. Tenancy readiness
 - b. Allocations policy
 - c. Investment policy
 - d. Homelessness prevention
 - e. Family and household support

3. Work with COSLA to raise the rate at which local authorities are entitled to claim housing benefit for temporary accommodation with the Department of Work and Pensions and seek to ensure that payment is made in line with current LHA rates in future.
4. **A new deal for housing in Edinburgh:** a partnership between the Council and Scottish Government to deliver sufficient, long term resourcing for homelessness, new build and acquisitions.