

The Housing Options Process in Argyll and Bute

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 In 2010 the Scottish Government introduced the housing options approach to homeless prevention. Housing Options is the terminology currently used to describe the process whereby housing advice is made available to the public to assist them to make informed decisions on their housing situation. In order to promote this approach the Scottish Government established 5 Housing Options Hubs across the country. Argyll and Bute Council is represented by the Housing Service at the Tayside, Fife and Central Hub, not for any particular reason other than the date staff were available to attend the initial meeting.
- 1.2 The main purpose of this report is to update Members on the operation of housing options in Argyll and Bute. The report highlights the work which has been carried out to develop the housing options approach and the impact that this has had on the number of people presenting as homeless to the local authority. It details the housing options process and how it links in with the Statutory reporting of homeless cases (HL1) and prevention cases (Prevent1) to the Scottish Government.
- 1.3 **RECOMMENDATION**
- It is recommended that the Community Services Committee note the content of the paper.

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Scottish Government set a target that by 2012 all unintentionally homeless households would be entitled to permanent housing. When the target was reviewed in 2009 it was recognised that this target would not be met if local authorities continued to take a traditional approach to homelessness. Argyll and Bute Council met the 2012 target and introduced a Housing Options approach to prevent homelessness occurring whenever possible.

In 2010/11 Argyll and Bute Council recorded 810 homeless applications and by 2014/15 this number had reduced by 47% to 431 applications, largely as a result of this approach. Although there has been a significant reduction in homeless applications during 2014/15, 1080 homeless prevention cases were recorded.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Community Services Committee note the content of the paper.

4.0 DETAIL

- 4.1 The Scottish Government describes Housing Options as:

“a process which starts with housing advice when someone approaches a local authority with a housing problem. This means looking at an individual’s options and choices in the widest sense. This approach features early intervention and explores all possible tenure options, including council housing, RSLs and the private rented sector. The advice can also cover personal circumstances which may not necessarily be housing related, such as debt advice, mediation and mental health issues.

Rather than only accepting a homelessness application local authority homelessness services will work together with other services such as employability, mental health, money advice and family mediation services etc to assist the individual with issues from an early stage in the hope of avoiding

a housing crisis.”

4.2 Argyll and Bute Council are full partners of the HOME Argyll Common Housing Register. Members of the public register for social housing online and complete one application for all 4 Registered Social Landlords (ACHA, Fyne Homes, Dunbritton and West Highland Housing Association). As part of this process applicants are required to complete an online housing options assessment. Advice is provided on the following housing options:-

- Social housing
- Adapted/amenity housing
- Private Rented Sector
- Home Ownership
- Sheltered Housing
- Supported Housing
- Mutual Exchange
- Mortgage to Rent

In addition there is extensive information on the following housing related topics:-

- Homelessness
- Disrepair Prevention
- Under Occupation
- Over Crowding
- Money or Benefits Advice
- Jobs and Training Advice
- Additional Support

4.3 The applicant receives a housing options action plan by e-mail on what action to take next. This will enable the applicant to decide which housing option is most appropriate and will also assist them to access services to sustain their current accommodation e.g. if they are in the private rented sector and have disrepair issues at their tenancy they will be able to access services such as mediation to resolve any problems they may have with their landlord.

4.4 The Housing Options process went live in July 2014 and since then over 3000 housing options self -assessments have been completed. However as this is a self-assessment process it is not possible to report on outcomes. Applicants have the opportunity to request further assistance from the Council and over 500 applicants have taken up this offer. A quarterly InfoGram is produced to summarise the advice and assistance provided (appendix 1).

4.5 In addition, the Scottish Government introduced an additional local authority statutory return (Prevent1) in April 2014. The purpose of the return is to enable the Scottish Government to monitor the effectiveness of homeless prevention activity across the country. Many of the Prevent1 cases start with a housing options assessment leading to the local authority providing

assistance to the household.

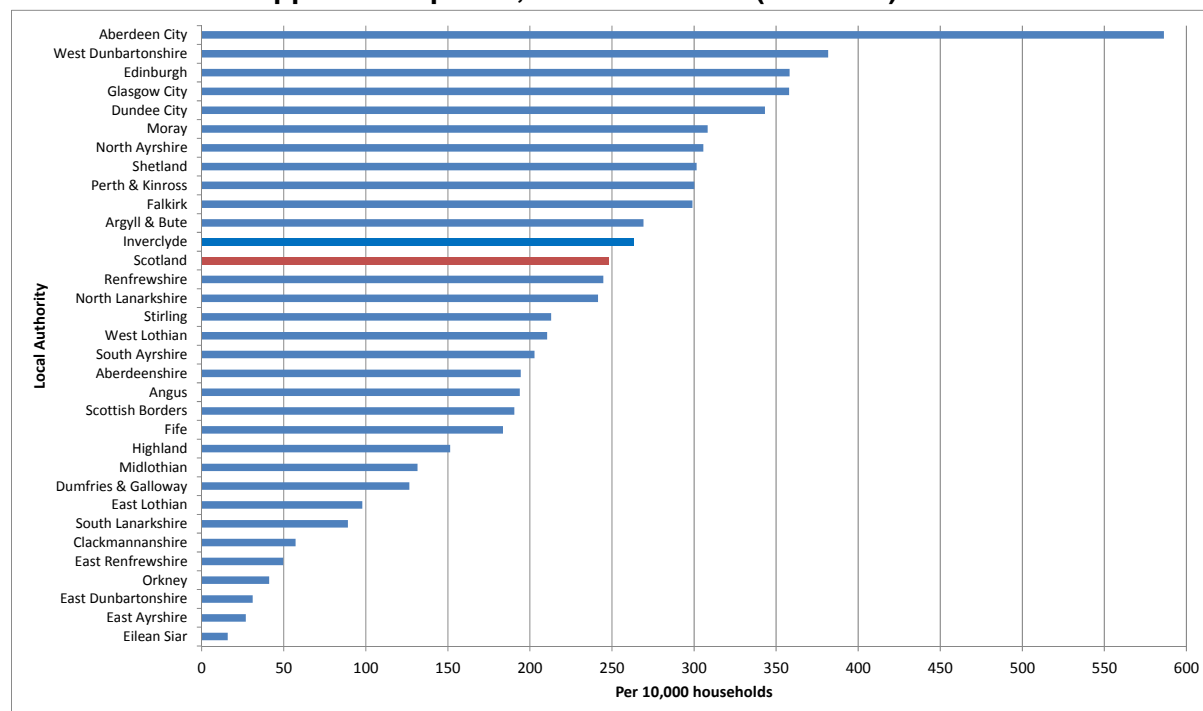
4.6 In addition to the direct contact from the public, there is a requirement for all landlords and mortgage lenders to notify the local authority if they are taking action to evict a householder. Housing Services staff will contact the householder in order to assist the household to remain in their current accommodation. These are recorded as Prevent1 cases.

During 2014/15, 1080 Prevent1 approaches were recorded and of these 852 were concluded. An analysis of the Prevent 1 data for 2014/15 shows:

- 45% remained in their current accommodation
- A need for assistance to sustain their current accommodation was identified in 27% of cases
- Only 17% went on to make a homeless application. 21% made the homeless application on the same day as the advice was provided and a further 59% made a homeless application within 1-4 weeks.
- 30% were in the 20-30 age bracket and,
- The majority were either single persons or single parents.

4.7 Table1. below shows the number of approaches recorded per 10, 000 households in each local authority in Scotland. Argyll and Bute Council is just above the average which means we have had slightly more approaches per 10 000 households compared to other local authorities.

Table 1. Prevent1Approaches per 10,000 households (Scotland)



4.8 To ensure that we share best practice with other local authorities Argyll and Bute Council have participated in the Tayside, Fife and Central Housing Options HUB since 2010. The HUB consists of the following local authorities:-

- Dundee City Council
- Fife Council
- Perth and Kinross Council
- Stirling Council
- Clackmananshire Council
- Angus Council
- Argyll and Bute Council

The HUB has developed service user questionnaires so that we can continually improve the service provided. The HUB is also currently developing Housing Options training for all levels from front line practitioner to awareness raising at Councillor level

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 Argyll and Bute Council has implemented an effective housing options approach which is contributing to a reduction in homelessness in the local authority area. There will always be circumstances where a homeless presentation will be the best option but if we continue the pro-active housing options approach we can make best use of resources to assist the households in most housing need. Customers are well informed about all their potential realistic housing options based on their particular circumstances.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Policy - this approach is consistent with local and national policy and the outcomes set out in the Single Outcome Agreement.
- 6.2 Financial - Prevention of homelessness reduces the financial pressure on the Council's budget.
- 6.3 Legal - none
- 6.4 HR - none
- 6.5 Equalities - none
- 6.6 Risk - none
- 6.7 Customer Service – the preventative approach to homelessness assists customers to find housing solutions to meet their needs and helps to avoid crisis situations occurring.

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 Appendix 1



Enhanced Housing Options

Number of Self-Assessments Completed

1st July 2015 to 30th September 2015



Self Assessments Completed



Contact with Argyll & Bute Council Housing Services Requested

Self Assessments completed by Area



Geographical Spread

Of the 161 households requesting contact 98 (61%) lived in mainland Argyll, 43 (27%) lived outwith Argyll and 20 (12%) lived on one of the 25 inhabited islands in Argyll and Bute.

Of the Argyll and Bute residents who requested contact 17% lived on the inhabited islands .

17% of the overall population live on the inhabited islands according to the 2011 census.

