

HOUSING OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST – STRATEGIC HOUSING FUND

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Argyll and Bute Council has a strategic enabling role in relation to housing in the local authority area. The Council has a statutory duty to produce a Local Housing Strategy (LHS) and a statutory duty to produce a Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) which details the new build affordable housing required in the area to meet housing need and demand. The Council also has a statutory duty to provide a Housing Contribution Statement for the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) to be included in the HSCP Strategic Commissioning Plan.
- 1.2 A key issue which must be addressed by the local authority is to accurately identify households with specific housing needs and have those needs met either by adapting their existing homes or providing a new build housing solution. The importance of this element of the statutory Council function is reflected in the fact that one of the four key outcomes of the Local Housing Strategy is entitled Specialist Provision and Independent Living.
- 1.3 In order to assist the Council to fulfil this key Local Housing Strategy outcome an Occupational Therapist specialising in housing has been employed by the Health and Social Care Partnership over the last 3 years. The funding has been of a temporary nature and will end on 31st March 2021. The post has been a success and is invaluable to maintain the key outcomes of the Local Housing Strategy. As a result the post will be funded by the Strategic Housing Fund going forward to continue to deliver these benefits.

1.4 RECOMMENDATION

Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee:-

- a. Note and consider the success of the Housing Occupational Therapist post.

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This paper details the role of the Housing OT in the delivery of the objectives of the Argyll and Bute Local Housing Strategy.
- 2.2 The post will be based within the Health and Social Care Partnership and will play a key role in linking health and housing to ensure that the housing needs of households with specialist needs are met.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee:-
- a. Note and consider the success of the Housing Occupational Therapist post.

4.0 DETAIL

- 4.1 Housing Services have funded a Housing Occupational Therapist post on a temporary basis since March 2018 in recognition of the importance of effective partnership working between health and housing to ensure the delivery of the statutory obligations contained within the Local Housing Strategy (LHS), the Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) and the Housing Contribution Statement (HCS).
- 4.2 Currently the Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) in Argyll and Bute provide around 1,368 specialist homes, amounting to approximately 16% of their total stock. This covers a range of specialist models, including: amenity housing, sheltered, wheelchair housing, retirement homes, extra care, and adapted properties. In addition to the HOMEArgyll landlords (ACHA, Fyne Homes, Dunbritton and West Highland), the providers include national organisations such as Bield, Blackwood, Cairn, Key Housing, and Trust. In 2019/20 the HOMEArgyll landlords allocated 849 homes, of which around 7.4% (63) were for specialist units. The average time to rehouse applicants in specialist housing was 70 weeks; while the average time to rehouse applicants in general needs housing was 40 weeks.

Combining HOMEArgyll, Bield and other national/specialist re-lets last year, almost 15% of households (136) allocated permanent new homes were housed in some form of specialist accommodation.

- 4.3 The SHIP has a target of delivering 10% of new build housing in the form of specialist provision. In 2019 the Scottish Housing Minister issued guidance for all local authorities requiring them to confirm LHS targets to support the delivery of more wheelchair accommodation across all tenures. Argyll & Bute Council consulted with key partners on the Strategic Housing Forum and Strategic Housing Investment Plan Group; and the HSCP; and also boosted its HNDA Household Survey samples with additional engagement for individual wheelchair users, to gain approval for the proposed targets for Argyll and Bute. It was agreed that the SHIP new build target will remain at 10% for all specialist provision and within this target half, i.e. 5% of all new builds, should be specifically for wheelchair housing as defined within the relevant section of the national Housing for Varying Needs standards (and where possible built to the “desirable” standard set out in that section of the guidance).
- 4.4 In addition to providing new homes for households with specialist needs the Council and the RSL’s delivered 459 adaptations into existing RSL and private homes. It is essential that the needs of households are assessed accurately to maximise the finite resources to deliver the adaptations.
- 4.5 Established in 2018 initially for a trial period, the Housing OT post has proved very successful in delivering positive outcomes and helping to support, foster and facilitate collaborative partnership working across all sectors. Key outputs in 2019/20 included:
- A joint training programme for Housing & HSCP staff;
 - Establishing a formal framework for joint locality-based housing & health group meetings, and improvements to adaptations services;
 - Supporting and co-ordinating the work of the LHS Team to engage and consult with wheelchair users to assess needs and identify strategic priorities.
- 4.6 The Housing OT Action Plan includes the following activities:
- Providing input to the Transformation Working Group around Housing and Care Homes models.
 - Attending local/regional/national advisory groups and feeding back good practice to the Council and RSL partners e.g. taking on the ambassador role for the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations Inclusive living Project.
 - Continue to provide training across sectors e.g. Commence the roll out of Housing Solutions (IHub) train the trainers, Training and support to OT's with regards to developing a consistency of approach across the locality with more mainstream adaptations

- Provide a consultation role for very complex cases including the consideration of introducing an adaptations panel for complex/high cost adaptations
- Improve communications between health and housing partners
- New build development - Attending development meetings. Advise on design in relation to need. Liaison between services.
- Develop a process map for provision of adaptations and develop standard processes across the local authority area.
- Become a member of the TEC and Housing Steering Group to ensure that all TEC opportunities to assist people to remain in their home are taken up across the local authority.
- Investigate and devise a process for allocation of adapted properties – using the principals of “Building foundations for allocating Healthy Homes”
- Improve stakeholder/customer involvement in relation to out of area placements requiring specialist housing in the local authority. Following the principals of the ‘Coming Home – Complex Care Needs and Out of Area Placements’ report issued by the Scottish Government in November 2018.
- Liaising with OTs re Paediatric adaptations pathway.
- Liaising with Dementia OTs and establish or build on links with housing for all relevant stakeholders
- Play a key role in delivering the work identified in the Health and Housing Action Plan which was produced jointly between HSCP and Argyll and Bute Council Housing Services

Funding and Management Arrangements

- 4.7 The Housing OT post is a Band 7 post managed within the HSCP. The permanent funding will come from the Strategic Housing Fund (SHF).
- 4.8 In December 2004, Council decided to exercise its discretion to reduce the discount for Council Tax for second and holiday homes across the whole council area from 50% to 10%.

In line with Scottish Government guidance, which states that additional income arising from the reduced discount of Council Tax on second and holiday homes be retained locally by the local authority and used specifically for the provision of affordable social housing, the Strategic Housing Fund (SHF) was created to allow for allocations in support of priority projects emerging from the Local Housing Strategy (LHS).

Local authorities may use this income themselves and have flexibility to disburse these funds to other organisations and individuals including RSLs. This income can be used by local authorities to support revenue and capital

expenditure related to a range of affordable housing activity including (but not limited to):-

- providing new-build affordable housing through Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) or new council house building
- funding of specified elements of water and sewerage infrastructure for new homes,
- Bringing empty properties back into affordable housing use – including topping up or establishing an Empty Homes Loan Fund;
- Land acquisition for affordable housing development;
- Purchasing off-the-shelf houses from private developers for affordable housing use – including the purchase of developers part-exchange properties.

Local Authorities may use the additional income to fund or support discrete projects. The Housing OT post meets the requirements of the SHF due to the wide ranging activities carried out by the post holder which ultimately result in suitable affordable housing being delivered in the local authority to meet the housing need and demand agreed with the Scottish Government.

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 The introduction of a Housing OT in Argyll and Bute has seen an improvement in partnership working between housing organisations and the HSCP. The Scottish Government recognised the importance of the post in their feedback on the SHIP in 2020 – ‘We are pleased to note that the Council continues to work closely with Health and Social Work to address the needs of elderly and disabled residents and the extension of the dedicated Housing Occupational Therapist post’. The long term funding of the post will enable the post holder to address all the work streams detailed in 4.6 along with any additional health and housing areas of work identified in future Local Housing Strategies and Strategic Housing Investment Plans.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 **Policy:** Proposals are consistent with current Council policy, including the revised policy and Scottish Government guidance in respect of the use of Strategic Housing Fund monies. The Housing OT post is directly aligned with the overarching objectives of the Council’s Outcome Improvement Plan, in particular Outcome 5 – People live active, healthier, independent lives.
- 6.2 **Financial:** The proposal will commit £60 000 per annum plus any inflationary increase amount agreed for future years from the Strategic Housing Fund. There is an ongoing requirement to retain and target SHF

resources to support the delivery of affordable housing to meet assessed housing need and demand in the local authority area.

- 6.3 **Legal:** The Housing OT post will assist the local authority to deliver statutory duties in respect of the Local Housing Strategy, the Strategic Housing Investment Plan and the Housing Contribution Statement.
- 6.4 **HR:** None
- 6.5 **Equalities(Fairer Scotland Duty):** The proposals are consistent with aims and objectives set out in the Local Housing Strategy, which is subject to an EQIA.
- 6.5.1 **Equalities – protected characteristics** There are targets set within the Local Housing Strategy to deliver housing which meet the needs of specialist groups. This post will ensure that the assessed needs are met.
- 6.5.2 **Socio-economic Duty** The delivery of affordable housing across Argyll and Bute with the input of the Housing OT facilitates socio-economic opportunities for all and links with the Child Poverty Strategy.
- 6.5.3 **Islands** The Housing OT post takes full account of housing need on the islands.
- 6.6 **Risk:** The risk of not securing the Housing OT post would be that the Council may fail to deliver some of the objectives contained within the Local Housing Strategy, the Strategic Housing Investment Plan and the Housing Contribution Statement
- 6.7 **Customer Service:** The proposal will deliver increased access to a range of suitable, affordable housing options.

Kirsty Flanagan
Executive Director with the responsibility for Development and Economic Growth

Cllr Robin Currie

Policy Lead for the Economy and Rural Growth

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For further information contact:

Douglas Whyte
Team Lead – Housing Strategy

E-mail: douglas.whyte@argyll-bute.gov.uk
Tel: 01546 604 785