

RAPID REHOUSING TRANSITION PLAN ANNUAL UPDATE

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update on Argyll and Bute Council's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP).
- 1.2 A number of key pieces of work were taken forward in 2020/21 within the complexities of Covid lockdown.
- 1.3 Funds were made available to stabilise tenancies, make a house a home and provide immediate assistance for emergencies.
- 1.4 Funds are provided annually by the Scottish Government to fund the RRTP and unspent funds from 2020/21 have been rolled over to 2021/22.
- 1.5 Members are asked to note and consider the progress in Argyll and Bute of our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan within the complex environment of Covid lockdown in 2020/21.

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG) was established by the Scottish Government in 2017 and tasked with making recommendations on immediate actions needed to tackle rough sleeping and longer term recommendations on the transformation of temporary accommodation and how to end homelessness in Scotland. The Scottish Government accepted all of the recommendations in principle, introducing the Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan backed by £50 million of funding. As part of the plan to transform temporary accommodation and homelessness services, all local authorities in Scotland were asked to develop a five year Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP). The RRTPs set out local context and challenges and how each local authority plans to reduce the use of temporary accommodation (especially hostel and B&B accommodation), moving towards housing people in mainstream accommodation as quickly as possible if they have low support needs or providing Housing First for people with more complex needs.
- 2.2 The attached document “**Argyll And Bute Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan Update June 2021**” and “**Monitoring Report - activity and funding**” give an update on progress in Argyll and Bute in 2020/21.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Members are asked to note and consider the progress in Argyll and Bute of our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan within the complex environment of Covid lockdown in 2020/21.

4.0 DETAIL

- 4.1 Argyll and Bute Council’s RRTP stated that “Rapid Rehousing is an ambitious proposal which should be delivered in the context of creating and sustaining mixed and diverse communities across the whole of Argyll and Bute. There are

particular and competing demands on the affordable housing stock, for homeless people, for our ageing population and to house the workers essential for our future economic prosperity, as well as for the general needs of those who simply want to live here. Balancing these competing demands has been a major consideration in creating our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan.”

4.2 Argyll and Bute Council’s RRTP built on existing processes and services that were in place. The Council had previously had a strategy to minimise the use of Bed and Breakfast style accommodation and it was largely out of use, apart from for short term emergency stays, by the time the RRTP was developed. Additionally, the Council had in place:

- a Mediation Service;
- a Rent Deposit Guarantee scheme;
- a funded post in the Housing Benefits section to give a named person contact for benefits issues for Homeless applicants;
- a funded Occupational Therapist post to build links to the HSCP, provide expertise on complex cases and lead on bespoke new build solutions where required

In terms of working with Women’s Aid, the Council own the Refuge in Argyll and Bute and fund a management agreement with Argyll and Bute Women’s Aid to provide services both at the Refuge and across the communities of Argyll and Bute by outreach services.

Accordingly, the RRTP sought to build on the services that had been put in place and move towards a full rapid rehousing service.

4.3 This RRTP update details statistics and progress for 2020/21, and also considers the complexity of delivering transformational change within the reality of the Covid pandemic and the need to provide immediate front line solutions as lockdown changed all our working practices and lives in 2020/21. Scottish Government funding is made available annually to support RRTP works.

4.4 416 homeless applications were recorded during the period from 1st April to 31st March 2021. Our original RRTP aim was that the number of homeless applicants would reduce from 517 per annum (2017/18) to 300 (2023/24). 460 homeless applications were taken in 2018/19. 434 homeless applications were taken in 2019/20.

4.5 The number of Prevention and Advice cases reduced from 1,456 in 2019/20 to 1,114 in 2020/21 which is a reduction of 342 cases (24%),

4.6 These figures however may not indicate a trend in Argyll and Bute. Rather, they may just be a reflection of the reality of Covid related changes to legislation that meant landlords had to provide extended notice periods for legal action to end tenancies, and there was also an eviction ban in place. At this stage it is therefore impossible to predict whether this level of downward trend will continue.

4.7 Despite the complexities of the lockdown, a number of key pieces of work were undertaken during 2020/21:

The Rent Arrears Prevention Fund was reviewed in 2021 in conjunction with our RSL partners to realign it to emerging Covid issues. Due to Covid, it had become clear that people were facing issues of reduced income and increased household costs due to lockdown. As Argyll and Bute is predominately off gas grid, lockdown meant that household utility bills increased as people spent significantly more time at home, and this was identified as putting pressure on rent payments. As at 31st March 2021 the Rent Arrears Prevention Fund has assisted 36 households at a cost of £60,945.

Decoration Project - The aim of the project is to assist households on low incomes to sustain an RSL tenancy provided to them through the statutory homeless process. Many homeless households cannot afford to decorate their properties or bring them up to a standard where they take ownership of their house and see it as their home. The decoration project aims to assist households to make a house a home and have a greater chance of sustaining that home.

Principally, the project aims to ensure that properties are decorated to a good standard and ready for occupation. Whilst it is recognised that decoration is often a barrier to new tenants, it is also the case that other items can be crucial to providing the homely environment that is essential for tenancy sustainment. There has been good uptake of the decoration fund during 2020/21. 38 new tenants have been assisted at a spend of £25,172. To date all tenancies that received funds from our Decoration Project have been sustained successfully.

Flexible Emergency Fund - The aim of the Fund is to ensure that funds are available at local locations to provide immediate solutions for clients. This can be funds being provided to facilitate gas or electricity top ups, or food or any range of crisis interventions that can be resolved simply by having funds available. The fund is held by local support providers and they administer it and there was a total fund of £8,250 available in 2020/21. This fund became invaluable during Covid Lockdown as it gave a means for support agencies to provide phones to clients, which were essential for people to be able to stay in touch with all services during that time.

Unspent RRTP funding from 2020/21 has been carried over to 2021/22. The Rent Arrears fund, Décor Fund and Flexible Emergency Fund will continue. Additionally a Mental Health Practitioner Post will be taken forward, along with our first set of Housing First tenants in partnership with our RSL colleagues.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 2020/21 was particularly challenging for providing a front line homeless service. However, within that complex environment a number of key pieces of RRTP work have been taken forward and these have provided significant benefit to members of our community during the Covid pandemic.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Policy None
- 6.2 Financial Funds are provided by the Scottish Government
- 6.3 Legal Argyll and Bute Council is required to present and action a RRTP
- 6.4 HR None
- 6.5 Fairer Scotland Duty: (please refer to guidance on Hub) None
 - 6.5.1 Equalities - protected characteristics None
 - 6.5.2 Socio-economic Duty None
 - 6.5.3 Islands None
- 6.6 Risk None
- 6.7 Customer Service None

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APPENDICES:

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Appendix 1 **Argyll And Bute Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan Update
June 2021**

Appendix 2 **Monitoring Report - activity and funding**