

STRATEGIC HOUSING SERVICES AND HOUSING OPTIONS AND HOMELESS SERVICE- SERVICE REVIEW

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Members on progress in addressing the key issues within the Housing Options and Homeless Service after its transfer from Social Work Services to Community and Customer Services.

1.2 In line with the Scottish Housing Regulator's (the Regulator) recommendations set out in the Thematic Study published in May 2014, this report also recommends undertaking a Service Review (the Review) and a change management process that will aim to address a range of challenges facing the Strategic Housing and Housing Options and Homeless Services.

2. Recommendations

Members are asked to:

2.1 note the range of challenges facing the Housing Options and Homeless Service summarised at section 3.4 of this report;

2.2 note the key findings and recommendations of the Regulator's Thematic Study on Housing Options set out in the **Appendix**;

2.3 agree Strategic Housing Services undertake a Review to enable the Council to respond to the recommendations made by the Regulator as well as a range of other operational and strategic challenges faced by the Strategic Housing and Housing Options and Homeless Services;

2.4 agree the broad scope of the Review summarised at section 3.9 of this report; and

2.5 agree to receive regular updates on the Review process with an early action to be to identify revenue funding that will assist in the development of the new service.

3. Considerations

3.1 On 28 April 2014 the Council's Homeless Service transferred to Community and Customer Services and sits within the remit of Head of Strategic Housing, Welfare Reform, Revenues and Benefits.

3.2 The provision of a Homeless Service is a key statutory function for local authorities and the duties include:

- the prevention of homelessness through early intervention
- provision of advice and assistance to Homeless people and those threatened with homelessness
- assessment and determination of homeless applications
- provision of temporary accommodation for homeless
- assessment, provision and monitoring of housing support service to homeless people
- securing permanent accommodation for all statutory homeless households

3.3 The Council is required to take full account of the Scottish Government's Code of Guidance on Homelessness when discharging its duties. In addition the Council is also expected to adopt new policy developments and implement legislative changes.

3.4 It is evident that there are a number of significant challenges facing the Housing Options and Homeless Service, as previously reported to Community and Customer Services on 17 June 2014. These challenges include the need to:

- develop a Housing Options Service and respond to the recommendations of the Regulator
- ensure consistency and quality in homeless investigation and assessment processes
- review the management of the temporary accommodation stock to ensure it meets the needs of clients and reduce the overall financial cost to the Council, including the £600k annual non-subsidised Housing Benefit costs
- review service structures and resources to ensure the Housing Options and Homeless Service can meet demand
- develop robust business systems to support the Housing Options and Homeless Service

Strategic Housing and Housing Options and Homeless Services – Review

3.5 To ensure a comprehensive and holistic approach to improving and developing the Service is adopted, a fundamental review will be required using the Dumfries and Galloway Council Service Review Toolkit.

3.6 A full Review is required to re-focus the activities of both Strategic Housing and the Housing Options and Homeless Services. This is to ensure they are able to meet a range of statutory duties, carry out required service improvements and ensure that all staff and resources can be targeted to best advantage. A Review team will be established that will include:

- Head of Strategic Housing, Welfare Reform, Revenues and Benefits (Review Lead Officer)
- Strategy and Development Manager, Strategic Housing Services (Project Manager)
- Service Manager, Housing Options and Homeless Service
- Homeless Strategy Officer
- Officers representing Strategic Housing and Housing Options and Homeless Services
- Joint Trades Union representation
- Representation from key internal partners will include the Chief Executive Service and Social Work Services

3.7 Given the scale of the work required, the Head of Service will ensure there is sufficient capacity within the Review team to complete this work within a reasonable timescale by prioritising this work and putting in place temporary management arrangements. It is considered necessary to require the Strategy and Development Manager to temporarily focus full time on the Review. He will be supported in this role by the Homeless Strategy Officer. The Head of Service will ensure their normal duties are covered.

3.8 A Challenge Panel will be established to review progress at each stage of the Review. The Challenge Panel will include:

- Director Community and Customer Services
-

- A senior manager from a neighbouring authority representing the Ayrshire and South Housing Options Hub
- Staff representative
- A non-Community and Customer Services Senior Manager
- Joint Trades Union representative
- Finance and Human Resources representatives
- A Representative of the Third Sector

3.9 The main focus of the Review will be to consider:

- the response to the Regulator recommendations and imminent Scottish Government Guidance on Housing Options
- how the Council undertakes statutory homeless assessments
- how the Council commissions and manages temporary homeless accommodation
- how the Council can ensure it meets the statutory duty to provide housing support services
- how the Council discharges its duty, including the role of Common Housing Register, private sector housing and low cost initiatives
- whether the current management, and staffing, arrangements in Strategic Housing Services and Housing Options and Homeless Service are appropriate to meet current and future needs of these Services.

3.10 The Review outputs will need to include recommendations about how the wider Strategic Housing and Housing Options and Homeless Services are structured and resourced and to develop an improvement agenda to sustain both the Strategic Housing and Housing Options and Homeless Services into the future.

Scottish Regulator's Thematic Inquiry – Housing Options in Scotland

3.11 Housing Options has been encouraged by the Scottish Government as a policy approach for local authorities. 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, RSL's 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.”

3.12 On 9 May 2014 the Scottish Housing Regulator published its latest Thematic Inquiry looking at Housing Options in Scotland. As one of 6 case study areas visited as part of the Inquiry process, the Report has particular relevance for Dumfries and Galloway. There are 16 recommendations in the Thematic Inquiry. These recommendations are addressed to both Scottish Government and local authorities and detailed at **Appendix**. They include a requirement to ensure:

- accurate recording and monitoring systems are in place
 - outcomes are consistent, appropriate and meet people's needs
 - look for opportunities for early intervention and prevention
 - support assessment are provided where needed
 - support front line officers with appropriate training, guidance and procedures
 - implement a consistent system of audit to improve the service
-

3.13 As previously reported, the detailed verbal feed-back provided by the Regulator to senior officers has been very valuable. It will assist in addressing the range of challenges identified through the Inquiry process and in developing the strategic approach to the development and delivery of Housing Options in Dumfries and Galloway. It is clear from the work undertaken since the transfer of the Housing Options and Homeless Service from Social Work Services to Community and Customer Services that the Council does not offer a Housing Options service that achieves the Service standards expected by the Regulator. It is highly likely the Housing Options and Homeless Service will be the subject of a future regulatory inspection, so the need for a comprehensive improvement plan is clear. There is a need for the Council to develop a Housing Options Service internally before it is in a position to engage properly with other external partner organisations who may have a role in supporting this approach to service delivery.

3.14 As part of the response to the recommendations of the regulatory inspection, it was identified that the Housing Options and Homeless Service needed additional resource to fund new service development. The Scottish Government has confirmed that new Guidance on Housing Options will be published in November 2014 and the Council needs to ensure it has adequate resources to develop a new service to comply with the Guidance and meet regulatory standards. An early action for the Review will be to identify sources of funding to assist in delivering the Housing Options Service.

3.15 It is intended to develop and implement a Housing Options Service over the next 12 months. However, this is dependent on identifying the required additional resources to develop the new Housing Options Service. The new Service will be led by the Council and will subsequently link to the work of the Common Housing Register and Housing Support Service. However, it is important that in the interim, the Housing Options and Homeless Service continues to strive to provide as comprehensive an advice and assistance service as possible, whilst acknowledging the need for substantive and fundamental changes to the way the Council discharges its statutory duties.

4. Governance Assurance

The Assistant Chief Executive, Chief Social Work Officer, the Head of Adult Services, Head of Finance and Community and Customer Services Senior Management Team, Head of Organisational Development & Human Resources have been consulted and are in agreement with the contents of the report.

5. Impact Assessment

An impact Assessment will be carried out if the Review identifies that significant changes in policy/strategy/plan/project are required.

Author(s)

NAME	DESIGNATION	CONTACT DETAILS
John Lynch	Head of Strategic Housing, Welfare Reform, Revenues and Benefits	01387 273150 John.lynch@dumgal.gov.uk

Approved by

NAME	DESIGNATION
Alex Haswell	Director of Community and Customer Services

Appendices – 1

Appendix - Scottish Housing Regulator- Housing Options In Scotland; A Thematic Inquiry

Background Papers

Minute and Report – Community and Customer Services – 17 June 2014 – Item 10 –
Transfer of Homelessness Service

[http://egenda.dumgal.gov.uk/aksdumgal/users/public/admin/kab12.pl?cmte=CCS&meet=3
&arc=71](http://egenda.dumgal.gov.uk/aksdumgal/users/public/admin/kab12.pl?cmte=CCS&meet=3&arc=71)

Minute – Housing Sub Committee – Item 3 – Housing Support Strategic Commission

[http://egenda.dumgal.gov.uk/aksdumgal/users/public/admin/kab12.pl?cmte=HSC&meet=4
6&arc=71](http://egenda.dumgal.gov.uk/aksdumgal/users/public/admin/kab12.pl?cmte=HSC&meet=46&arc=71)
