

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: LOCAL HOUSING STRATEGY 2014 UPDATE
Meeting: EXECUTIVE
Date: 17 MARCH 2015
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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report provides an update on delivering the outcomes set in the Local Housing Strategy (LHS) 2011-16. Members will be aware that an update covering the period 2011–2013 was presented to Executive on 18th March 2014 where members noted the progress made delivering LHS outcomes.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2011 places a statutory duty on Local Authorities to prepare a Local Housing Strategy for their area, supported by an assessment of housing. The LHS provides the strategic direction for tackling housing need and informing future investment in housing and related services across the Council area. Local Housing Strategies are the sole strategic document on housing and housing related services across the local authority area including homelessness, housing support and fuel poverty. Appendix 1 to this report provides a comprehensive overview on progress for all LHS outcomes, their actions and indicators.
- 2.2 It is important to highlight the Local Housing Strategy is a ‘living document’, as such, some changes have been made to the actions and milestones pursued by the Housing Service in light of the considerable changes in the strategic landscape of housing since the Local Housing Strategy was developed and adopted by Falkirk Council in December 2011 such as:
- The UK government’s review of Welfare Reform has had a significant impact on staff resources particularly in relation to the changes in Housing Benefit spare room subsidy which now limits Housing benefit paid on socially rented properties deemed to have spare bedroom(s);
 - The Scottish Government changes to the submission of the Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) which is now required every two years but updated annually. Previously a SHIP was required annually;
 - The Scottish Government’s recent advise in relation to the requirement to realign the timescale for submission of the Local Housing Strategy with the approval of the Local Development Plan;
 - Further development of the Reshaping Care for Older People agenda (RCOP) including the integration of Health and Social Care. This includes a requirement for a housing contribution statement as an appendix to the LHS

- 2.3 The Council continues to invest in socially rented housing and Members will be aware that following approval of the SHIP at Executive on 13th February 2015, officers will continue to liaise with the Scottish Government Housing, Regeneration and Welfare Directorate with a view to securing additional Affordable Housing Grant for the Hearthstone PLC/ Castle Rock Edinvar Pension Fund proposal. These discussions are on-going.
- 2.4 In addition, Members will be aware of the report to Council on the Housing Investment Programme 2015/16 to 2017/18 on 11 February 2015 which approved £18m investment over 3 years for buying back former local authority housing which will provide c250 additional properties available for let.

3. ANNUAL HOMELESSNESS STATEMENT

- 3.1 As part of this update a report has been included at Appendix 2 in relation to homelessness outcomes for 2013/14. This is a supporting document to the LHS and the key issues are highlighted below.
- A 4.2% decrease in homeless presentations between 2012-13 and 2013-14. Presentations in 2013-14 were at their lowest for the last five years.
 - In 2011 a Housing Advice Service was introduced and the majority of advice has been in relation to applicants who are looking for a new home.
 - The majority of housing advice cases (62.5%) led to the client being referred for a homeless assessment.
 - Among those assessed as homeless, the vast majority of clients were classed as unintentional (87%) rather than intentional. However, this trend has continued to narrow over the past five years.
 - Household dispute is the most commonly cited reason for a homeless presentation (63%).
 - Most homeless applicants in 2013-14 were single, whether they were a single person (63%) or single parents (26%).
- 3.2 The three key themes within the Homelessness Strategy are Prevention, Accommodation & Support. These themes are incorporated within LHS outcome 2 and are reported on below.

4. LOCAL HOUSING STRATEGY 2011 – 2016 UPDATE 2014.

- 4.1 The LHS sets out a Vision (Homes for Now, Homes for the Future) and is underpinned by 6 outcomes:
1. Best use is made of the existing and new affordable housing stock to address local needs;
 2. Advice and information is provided on a range of affordable housing options in order to prevent homelessness.
 3. People with disabilities are able to adapt their homes or have information they need to make appropriate housing choices;
 4. Housing support and other services are provided to help people live independently;

5. The condition and sustainability of housing is improved and measures put in place to address fuel poverty;
6. All rented housing is managed effectively and efficiently.

4.2 **OUTCOME 1**

Best use is made of existing and new affordable housing to address local needs.

PROGRESS

- The Tenant Incentive Scheme was introduced in April 2013 to encourage tenants living in larger family properties that are too big for them to move to smaller properties. A budget of £250, 000 was made available within the Housing Investment Programme. In total 29 payments were paid out over the period April 2013 to 2014/15. Members will be aware of the Allocations Review report to Executive on 13th January 2015 which recommended that the scheme be reviewed and redesigned to cover both downsizing and low demand properties.
- Members will be aware that an Empty Homes plan was approved by Executive in August 2014. Falkirk Council has been working in partnership with the Scottish Government and Stirling Council on an Empty Homes Shared services pilot since April 2013. Money has been committed by the two Councils and the Scottish Government to fund an Empty Homes Officer overseeing the two Councils in 2013/14 and 2014/15. From 2015/16 the project will be taken “in house” by Falkirk Council with the empty homes officer still working between the two councils. A total of 115 empty homes have been brought back into use in the Falkirk area since the implementation of the project.
- Falkirk Council’s Buy Back Scheme was approved at Committee on 12th February 2013; a provision of £5M per annum over 2 years was made in the HRA Capital Programme to facilitate the purchase of c.50 properties per annum. As at the end of 2014 a total of 139 properties have been purchased.
- The Council’s new house building programme has provided 338 new properties and a further 86 properties will be provided over the next 2 years.

4.3 **OUTCOME 2**

Advice and Information is provided on a range of affordable housing options in order to prevent homelessness.

PROGRESS

- The Peer Education Scheme within secondary schools and with hard to reach individuals is on-going.
- A Housing Options Diagnostic Tool is currently under development to use with clients as a Housing Options self-assessment tool along with a tool to assist people to browse private rented accommodation in Falkirk and surrounding areas.
- RSL/Falkirk Council Stock Information Report 2012/13 has been completed. This assists in providing housing advice information for housing options.
- The NHS led review of hospital discharge protocol is now complete and a new protocol was implemented in May 2014.
- Targeted debt and benefit advice continues to be provided to households affected by the spare room subsidy and other welfare reform changes.
- The Family Mediation Service continues to offer mediation to families to prevent homelessness and also mediation for tenants and private landlords.

- A Prison Housing Advice Officer has been recruited to ensure incarcerated clients are provided with a wide variety of housing options to sustain their tenancies and secure accommodation prior to release.

4.4 **OUTCOME 3**

People with disabilities are able to adapt their homes or have information they need to make appropriate housing choices.

PROGRESS

- An Older People's Housing Plan has been drafted. Focus groups and surveys on the Older Peoples' Housing Plan were carried out/issued to voluntary groups over the period August to December 2014. The Citizens Panel is being consulted in March 2015. The consultation aims to raise awareness and gather opinions on existing services, service users experience and shape future services. This will ultimately inform the Older Peoples' Housing Plan for consideration by Executive later in the year.
- During 2014 the Council were successful in bidding for Change Fund investment for "The Moving Assistance" project which has commenced in January 2015. The project will be operated by "Outside the Box" and monitored by Falkirk Council. The aim is to help 20 older people from all tenures to move to a property more suitable to their needs by providing advice and if required practical assistance.
- Falkirk Council was awarded £55k by the Change Fund to streamline disabled adaptations with the project progressed in partnership with the Joint Improvement Team, Falkirk Council Corporate and Neighbourhood and Social Work Services, NHS Forth Valley, Link Group and Paragon Housing Association. The Change Fund funding for this project will finish in February 2015 however a project steering group and working group have been established with JIT representation. These groups are embedding the work of the Change Fund project through the progression of the project action plan.
- The above project will also be progressed through the "Adapting for Change" demonstration site. The demonstration site is a Scottish Government Joint Improvement Team initiative to progress the work of the National Adaptations Working group to inform the Scottish Government on proposed changes to national policy and procedures for disabled adaptations. Falkirk Council was chosen to be one of 5 demonstration sites following a successful bid to the Scottish Government in late 2014. In addition to linking and progressing on-going work in relation to adaptations this project will also concentrate on areas such as pathways from health for disabled adaptations and performance monitoring. This project will commence in January 2015 and is anticipated to conclude in December 2016.

4.5 **OUTCOME 4**

Housing support and other services are provided to help people live independently.

PROGRESS

- Corporate and Neighbourhood and Social Work services continue to work in partnership to ensure housing support provision and models of delivery better suit the needs of clients.

- A review of supported accommodation is currently underway to determine the options in relation to our hostel and supported accommodation provision to ensure that it remains aligned with our service users' requirements.

4.6 **OUTCOME 5**

The condition and sustainability of housing is improved and measures put in place to address fuel poverty.

PROGRESS

- At the end of 2014 87.3% of the Council's housing stock and 93% of RSL accommodation met the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS). Falkirk Council has investment plans in place to achieve SHQS by 2015.
- Falkirk Council are continuing to deliver subsidised energy efficient boilers to private homes in partnership with Scottish Hydro & the Scottish Government, using Energy Company Obligation (ECO) and Home Energy Efficiency Programmes (HEEPS) funds.
- The Council received funding from HEEPS, subject to take up, to install a variety of energy efficiency measures for owner occupiers and those in the private rented sector in non-gas areas and fuel poverty area. Other projects include the installation of new boilers, cavity wall and loft insulation.
- The Council's 3 year Housing Investment Programme includes gas mains extensions, additional Combined Heat Power (CHP); heating system upgrades and external wall insulation schemes.

4.7 **OUTCOME 6**

All rented housing is managed effectively and efficiently.

PROGRESS

- Two housing options diagnostic tools are currently being developed; to enable the public to complete a self-assessment and browse the local and surrounding areas for private rented accommodation.
- The Private Sector team continue to work with landlords to source additional privately leased and deposit guarantee properties.
- We continue to operate the Private Landlord Forum to provide training for landlords and to share good practice.
- A Strategic Housing Group meets quarterly to discuss housing issues in the Council area. Representatives at this meeting include officers from local Registered Social Landlords, Voluntary Sector, Scottish Governments and Homes for Scotland.

5. **CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 As noted above the LHS provides the strategic direction for tackling housing need and demand and informing future investment in housing and related services across the Council area. Progress is set out in Appendix 1 and shows that significant progress has been achieved across the LHS's six outcomes.

The LHS will continue to provide focus for work relating to housing across Falkirk Council area with particular work on-going in relation to the Older Peoples' Housing Plan.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- **Note the progress to date in delivering the Local Housing Strategy;**
- **Authorise officers to prepare a Local Housing Strategy for the period 2017-2022 and submit for Members approval in late 2016; and**
- **Agree that the update on Local Housing Strategy outcomes for 2015 and 2016 are published on the Council website.**

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Appendix 1 – LHS Update

Appendix 2 – Annual Homelessness Statement 2013/14

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS