

S14. Homelessness & Allocations Outcomes Report 2016/17

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services providing an update on homelessness and allocation outcomes during 2016/17.

The report set out the key findings of the Annual Homeless Statement for 2016/17 which showed a slight increase in homeless applications from 1,067 to 1,142 (7%) compared with the previous year. The report provided context for the rise together with an assessment of the applications. In addition, the report provided an analysis of the Allocations Outcomes Report for 2016/17 which provided an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Allocation Policy in terms of meeting the Policy objectives. Of the 10,858 applicants on the housing list, 4,076 (38%) made a bid for housing in 2016/17. The report provided an analysis of the letting process outcomes compared to the previous year.

The Head of Procurement and Housing Property provided an in depth summary of the key points set out in the report, setting out the Council's role as landlord and its statutory responsibility for homelessness. He then summarised the application of the Allocations Policy and outcomes for 2016/17.

The committee then discussed the report. In response to a question, the Head of Procurement and Housing Property confirmed that data could be provided on a ward by ward level although the data was not collected in this way, it was collated by allocations area. He confirmed, following a question on new builds, that the draft Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP), which would be submitted to the Executive in October, set out proposals to increase the supply of additional affordable homes. However, he stated that while supply was important, turnover was the key factor in houses being available for let. There was general agreement between members of the committee, that, having considered the report and heard from the Head of Procurement and Housing Property, the allocations policy would be an area which they would be minded to recommend to Council for inclusion on the Scrutiny Plan.

In response to a question in regard to the advice available to potential applicants on how the system works and to reduce any potential barriers, given that 62% of applicants on the list do not bid, the Head of Procurement and Housing Property explained that in addition to written information, there was contact with a housing officer who would explain the system. It was important that the system is transparent and as such all available properties are advertised, allowing individuals choice to bid on their preferred property. The biggest challenge was to provide suitable accommodation, in suitable locations of a suitable type to meet all demand.

The Head of Housing confirmed that re-registration was carried out every year with the aim of refreshing the list of available properties. He stated that of the 10,000 applicants, a number were on "just in case" and the 38% referred to earlier were those actively looking and bidding for properties.

He explained the need to engage and provide assistance to customers, with support in areas such as welfare and financial advice available. It was important for example to look at the causes of arrears and provide support. He highlighted the Tenants Incentive Scheme which provided incentives to existing tenants to downsize from their current property. Although uptake in the scheme was low, it was still a valuable means of creating turnover of properties.

In regard to homelessness, members asked whether a recent increase in the last 2-3 years was attributable to the impact of welfare reform. The Head of Procurement and Housing Property stated that this may be a contributing factor but the main factors continued to be breakdown in relationships, although financial pressures were also potentially a factor in these cases. The introduction of Housing Options and a focus on prevention measures since 2010 had resulted in a decrease in the number of homeless people. In the case of each presentation, the applicant is interviewed in order to provide support and to identify a range of housing options, with the aim of preventing an individual from becoming homeless.

The committee then considered the properties available to let, which were listed in the weekly Homespot list. The Head of Housing confirmed that the Service was considering a number of initiatives to redesign the property portfolio either by redesigning current accommodation or through redevelopment. Members noted that in certain locations, the type of property available did not meet the needs of those looking for housing e.g.: larger flatted accommodation. The Head of Housing concurred, using an example where redesign had changed the profile of available accommodation. He acknowledged that should a scrutiny panel be established, the outcomes of any review could lead to recommendations in regard to the profile of available properties. In the meantime, the Service would continue to develop its programme of current initiatives. The Head of Procurement and Housing Property also stated that the challenge in remodelling was to provide attractive accommodation and to increase turnover.

In response to a question from the convener in regard to the waiting time for properties to be adapted to meet special needs, the Head of Housing confirmed that work was on-going to streamline the process for adapting properties and create a more sustainable approach. He highlighted that 10% of new build properties are fully adapted. Members of the committee highlighted concerns regarding elderly people based in high rise and flatted accommodation. In response to a question in regard to a potential sale of the Falkirk Hospital site, the Head of Procurement and Housing Property stated he was not aware of the current status of that land sale and that the site had not been included in the forthcoming Strategic Housing Investment Plan.

Decision

The committee agreed that the Allocation Policy would be included in its recommendations to Council for items for inclusion on the Scrutiny Plan.