
Report To:	Health and Social Care Committee	Date: 4 March 2010
Report By:	Corporate Director (Designate) Health & Social Care	Report No: SW/14/10/RM/BK
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Subject:	Abolition of Priority Need	

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To advise members of the progress and monitoring arrangements for the Homeless Service to meet the 2012 target to abolish the Priority Need test for homeless applicants set by the Scottish Government.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 sets a target that all homeless people who are unintentionally homeless will be entitled to permanent accommodation from 2012.
- 2.2 It is further identified that Councils should offer homeless people a genuine choice of accommodation and take account of their needs and social support networks, as this is more likely to result in a sustainable tenancy. There is no doubt that this will be a significant challenge for the Council, particularly as demand for social housing is high, and due to housing re-provision and development locally, there will be increased pressure on available housing stock.
- 2.3 As part of the progression towards the 2012 target an interim target was established for 2009 by the Government. Within Inverclyde we were able to meet this interim target set at 83%, and in fact exceeded this by achieving 85% of representations being deemed as having a priority need.
- 2.4 There is however a clear challenge for us for the future which will require a comprehensive and partnership agreement if the target is to be met beyond 2012. It is highly likely that there will be significant pressures placed on the Council in terms of increased need for temporary accommodation within both the registered social landlord sector and that of the private rented sector.
- 2.5 At present the Homelessness Service in conjunction with the registered Social Landlords and through the Homelessness Strategy Group are continuing to examine the homeless applications and relating these to the issues surrounding priority need. In this context the Homelessness Service has identified that there are some 250 "live" homeless cases at any one time. There are around 115 – 120 of these living in temporary accommodation with the remainder residing with family and friends. The progression of these cases is being analysed with targets being developed in accessing accommodation on a temporary nature and on a permanent basis. This will inform progress towards 2012.

3.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 Members are asked to note the progress made in achieving the 2009 target while recognising that we will work closely with our partners to secure a positive outcome by the end of 2012. It is important to stress the difficulty in achieving this outcome. However the concerted efforts of all partners will allow us to be best placed to set realistic targets over the next twelve months.

Robert Murphy
Corporate Director (Designate) Health &
Social Care

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The Scottish Government in preparation for the 2012 target set all Local Authorities a target for 2009 based on the decision made in the reporting year 2003/04. In that year Inverclyde Council made a priority need decision on 67% of applicants deemed to be homeless. As a result our target for 2009 was set at 83%.
- 4.2 Inverclyde Council's Homelessness Strategy for 2007 – 2009 adopted the approach of raising the lower age group and lowering the higher age group of those who would qualify for automatic priority need status. This re-classification of age groups gave an automatic priority to all applicants found to be homeless under the age of 25 and over the age of 55.
- 4.3 Taking such an approach the Council through the Homelessness Service successfully exceeded the target set by achieving 85% of all applicants deemed as homeless being given a priority need decision in 2009.

5.0 PROPOSALS

- 5.1 In order to achieve the target set for 2012 continued monitoring of our presentations, decisions and outcomes has been established and is reviewed through the Homelessness Strategy Group. Further the Homelessness Service / Registered Social Landlord liaison group meets bi-monthly to review section 5 referrals and offers of housing.
- 5.2 The figures for the reporting year 2008/09 indicate that 93 applicants deemed as homeless were found not to be in priority need and the projected figure for this year is in the region of 55 applicants. This however only provides us with the picture in respect of priority need it does not evidence the prospective housing allocation outcomes at that time.
- 5.3 From the above systematic approach it also became apparent that there is a need to develop a robust and comprehensive assessment process which will allow us to determine the need for accommodation. Ensuring accuracy of assessment can help alleviate the possible use of homelessness in creating a perceived advantage in securing accommodation.
- 5.4 Our close working arrangements with the Alcohol Detox Team and the Drugs Outreach Worker greatly assist the homeless assessment process by increasing understanding of how such issues directly affect vulnerability and subsequently priority need decisions. The value in this working arrangement is demonstrated in the reduction from 93 cases in 08/09 to the projected figure for this year of 55.
- 5.5 The Scottish Government have also made available a simplified version of their monitoring tool, (The Waugh Model). This allows mapping of the percentage of offers of housing to presentations and decisions and therefore will also give a framework which will allow us to be more robust in our monitoring of the move towards 2012. The service is presently exploring the use of this locally.
- 5.6 The pressure upon accommodation is an issue locally, both at a temporary and permanent level. In this context the Service, in conjunction with one of the Social Landlords has been involved in developing a service through the private sector which has been of benefit. We have also explored the provision of a rent deposit guarantee scheme to facilitate individuals to secure accommodation within the Private Sector and thus tackle their housing need.
- 5.7 As a component of the strategy to meet the 2012 target it was identified as important to further develop preventative action. This has been informed by the need through

section 11 of the Homelessness etc (Scot) Act 2003, which places a responsibility on all non- Council landlords and mortgage lenders to inform the Council of any impending action for eviction.

- 5.8 The strategy group are collating and analysing these referrals and identifying actions which can be taken to sustain individuals in their accommodation, where possible, by providing a more reactive and responsive service.
- 5.9 Within the Homelessness service a structure review is ongoing which aims to create a more efficient service with clear lines of contact for individuals. The development of service pathways with identified case managers will provide a more targeted and supportive role in conjunction with our partners to secure and sustain tenancies and reduce repeat referrals.
- 5.10 The implementation of Section 32A of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 planned for 25th February, 2010 will assist the process further by giving the option to discharge duty to the Private Rented Sector under prescribed circumstances. However consideration needs to be given to the fact that the restraints imposed by current Housing Benefit Regulations, along with higher rents and expensive management fees, could create employability and affordability issues which could lock tenants into “poverty trap” situations.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 At this stage there is no significant Legal, Financial or Human Resource implications. It may well be that as we move towards the 2012 deadline there will be a need to consider the resource implications for the Council in meeting the legislation

7.0 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 There is ongoing consultation with the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group and the Registered Social Landlord liaison Group. Regarding this issue.

8.0 CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The continued increase in priority need decisions will inevitably signal a rise in households seeking accommodation and therefore a possible increase in the levels of section 5 referrals. This will undoubtedly place pressure on both the Council and our Social Landlord partners
- 8.2 The difficulties of accessing permanent accommodation will impact negatively on temporary accommodation both in terms of quality and the length of time individuals and families spend in temporary accommodation.
- 8.3 The move towards the 2012 target will place particular challenges on Inverclyde Council and our partners considering the present redevelopment of the local housing stock. It will be important therefore that we maintain a robust assessment process and further develop our prevention strategies as part of our effective partnership agreements.

