

REPORT TO: Cabinet

MEETING DATE: 12 April 2016

BY: Depute Chief Executive (Partnerships and Community Services)

SUBJECT: Provision of Temporary Accommodation

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To seek Cabinet approval to increase the number of properties used to provide temporary accommodation to allow the Council to more effectively meet its statutory requirements under the homelessness legislation.
- 1.2 To explain the context, the legal position and rationale for the proposed action.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves the proposal that there is an increase in the provision of temporary accommodation across all tenures.
- 2.2 That within this increase, the property level within the contract for the provision of private sector leased temporary accommodation be increased to 200 properties, subject to a further financial review of the impact of Universal Credit on the financial viability of the contract.
- 2.3 To continue the current housing allocation targets until the Cabinet has the opportunity to review these for financial year 2016/17.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 This report represents the second part of a 3-stage approach to improving the re-housing activity in relation to delivering the Council's statutory homeless responsibilities, which will aim to reduce time spent in temporary accommodation by homeless people and reduce the Council's reliance on the use of B and B accommodation.

- 3.2 The first stage of this process was an agreement in October 2015 to increase the level of allocations to general needs applicants (which includes homeless clients). This ensured that the allocations ratios between General Needs and Transfer applicants more closely reflected the relative level housing need of both groups on the Housing Register.
- 3.3 A further paper on housing allocation targets for 2016/17 will be presented to the next meeting of the Cabinet.
- 3.4 The third stage of the process will be the further development of the housing options and advice service with a focus on preventing homelessness and the development of new housing options, such as mid-market rent, flat share and other opportunities to assist clients to access appropriate housing before homelessness occurs.
- 3.5 The Council has a statutory obligation to provide temporary accommodation, if required, to applicants for assistance under the homelessness legislation. At present, the Council has access to 360 houses used for temporary accommodation in a range of tenures.
- 3.6 The Council also accesses 38 units of specialist supported accommodation, providing services to specific groups such as young single people, the victims of domestic violence and older single people with support needs.
- 3.7 Any demands outwith these resources are met, initially at least, by the provision of B and B accommodation. Since 2012, the time spent by clients in such accommodation has increased significantly despite the increased provision of temporary accommodation.
- 3.8 A further area of concern is that the Council recently breached the terms of the Unsuitable Accommodation (Scotland) Order 2004 as amended by The Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2014 for the first time in several years.
- 3.9 A family with children were accommodated in B and B accommodation for longer than the 14 days specified by the order. This occurred because of the lack of supply of suitable temporary accommodation caused by the limited turnover of such accommodation and the limited supply of permanent allocations.
- 3.10 It remains a concern that it is likely that further breaches will occur unless we address both the allocations and supply of temporary accommodation issues.
- 3.11 As part of the process to increase the provision of temporary accommodation, the Council has provided 26 units via recent open market acquisitions and plans further investments for a similar purpose.

3.12 The table below shows the stock of temporary accommodation on 31 December 2012, i.e. the time of the legislative changes and the average time an applicant spent in such accommodation in comparison to the current position.

Temporary Accommodation	31st Dec 2012	Average stay at 31/12/2012	1st March 2016	Average stay at 1st March 2016
East Lothian Council Properties	99	191	167	336
Leased from RSLs	54	270	47	338
Leased Private Sector	101	208	146	359
Total Furnished units	254	215	360	339
B and B	22	35	58	72

3.13 The Council's responsibilities in relation to temporary accommodation have altered and increased because of the 2012 legislative changes when the concept of priority need was removed from the homeless legislation.

3.14 Prior to December 2012, where a person was found not to be in priority need, the Council's responsibilities were to provide temporary accommodation for a period sufficient for them to receive and act on advice to allow them to secure accommodation.

3.15 With the change in the legislation, what were previously seen as "non-priority applicants" achieved the right to re-housing and crucially from the perspective of temporary accommodation, a right to such accommodation until re-housing was achieved.

3.16 This has led to a growth in demand for temporary accommodation, especially from single people below the age of 60 years, along with an increase in the time spent in temporary accommodation. This increase in demand has been identified nationally, however because of the relatively small proportion of one bed-roomed houses in East Lothian's housing stock, the Council has been particularly badly affected by this legislative change.

3.17 In terms of demand, the Council introduced a Housing Options service in 2010, aimed at assisting people to resolve their housing difficulties without homelessness occurring. The impact of this approach has been to reduce homeless demand by 39%. Whilst this has been a success, it has meant that a greater proportion of homeless applicants are in circumstances where temporary accommodation is required.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The existing housing allocation targets will assist the Council to meet its legal obligations under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003.
- 4.2 A paper outlining the proposed targets for 2016/17 will be presented to the next Cabinet meeting, following a review of the year-end position. Clearly if the Council is to meet its legal obligations, the allocation of houses to homeless applicants will have to remain a priority within any targets which are established.
- 4.3 The Council will be reviewing its Local Housing Strategy during 2016/17 and will consider future Temporary Accommodation requirements as part of this process.

5 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 A Combined Impact Assessment was undertaken as part of the implementation of the new Allocations Policy and was separately lodged in the Members' Library.
- 5.2 The Combined Impact Assessment has found no negative impacts.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Financial – This increase in provision of temporary accommodation will help reduce the financial strains on the General Services Budgets caused by the provision of temporary accommodation in B and B accommodation. This along with the allocation policy changes agreed in October will assist throughout from all forms of temporary accommodation to settled accommodation.

The Council is, however, in a difficult position because of the decision of The Department of Work and Pensions to implement the digitalisation of the Universal Credit process in East Lothian in March 2016. It is still too early to comment precisely on the full impact of these changes, but initially it appears that the changes with regard to Private Sector Leased accommodation will have a significantly negative impact.

It is therefore recommended that a full financial review be completed to establish exactly what these impacts are likely to be, as part of the review of the Temporary Accommodation Strategy. This will be undertaken later this year as part of the review of the Local Housing Strategy.

- 6.2 Personnel – None.
- 6.3 Other – None.

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 Council Report –Housing Allocations Policy Review 2013/14 – February 2014

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