ABSTRACT: This report seeks approval to establish a corporate approach to prevent young people becoming homeless.

1. RECOMMENDATION(S)

1.1 It is recommended that the Committees:-

(i) approve the proposal for a 2 year pilot project;

(ii) remit the Community Care and Health Executive Group to review accommodation requirements and the current targeting of housing support services for those with additional support needs;

(iii) remit the Directors of Social Work and Health and Neighbourhood Services to report back to their respective Committees on the success of the project in preventing youth homelessness and;

(iv) bring forward costed proposals for additional supported accommodation;

It is recommended that the Neighbourhood Services Committee:-

(v) agree to develop options for the future use of the homeless persons unit at Queens Close, Montrose and;

(vi) investigate the provision of suitable accommodation for the delivery of a Housing Options Service in an accessible location in Angus.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 A shared approach to meeting the needs of young people sits at the heart of both Central and Local Government policy, be it GIRFEC\(^1\) (Getting it Right for every Child) or Homelessness alleviation and prevention.

2.2 Homelessness poses significant risk factors for children and young people. Early intervention, such as family mediation is often cited as critical to break the cycle before it becomes an established way of life. The Regulations and Guidance on looked after children makes it explicit that care leavers should never leave the looked after system without careful advance joint planning to ensure they do not enter the homelessness system at all. However, for other young people over the age of 16 years, who can be equally vulnerable, there is no systematic response if household tensions make living at home difficult. Often, the only route open to young people to get assistance is to present as homeless.

2.3 While the Scottish Government and COSLA have set up a Joint Steering Group to assist local authorities achieve the 2012 target\(^2\), this could be compromised by emerging welfare reforms.

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\(^1\) GIRFEC: Getting it right for every child is a programme that aims to improve outcomes for all children and young people by promoting a shared approach that builds solutions with and around children and families, supporting a positive shift in culture, systems and practice.
2.4 There is a real concern that the number of 16 year olds and over asked to leave will increase with the introduction of housing benefit changes, which will see an increase in deductions for non-dependents and a reduction in benefits to tenants who have claimed jobseekers allowance for 12 months or more. Increased discretionary housing payments will be available but as the benefit restrictions are introduced, there is likely to be more demand on the funding pot than money available.

3. CURRENT POSITION

3.1 Like many local authorities, Angus Council has seen an increase in the number of vulnerable young people who present as homeless. Models of housing and support are limited with one supported accommodation project at North Grimsby, Arbroath. During the period April – December 2010, 36% (289) of all homeless applications were from young people between 16 and 24 years of age.

3.2 The housing outcomes for vulnerable young people are often negative. In addition to the human cost, a significant amount of Council staff time and money is tied up in having to deal with neighbour issues, vandalism and repairs as a consequence of failed tenancies.

3.3 Assessment data shows that many young people do not have the maturity and skills to manage their tenancy.

3.4 Alternative models of housing and support are limited with only one supported accommodation project at North Grimsby, Arbroath, which is frequently used to provide move-on accommodation for children leaving care, as well as vulnerable homeless people.

3.5 Joint Practice Procedures for housing children leaving care have been operating between the Housing Division and Social Work and Health since 1999. The current review is due for completion in July 2011 and will clarify roles and responsibilities as well as a range of suitable housing options for looked after children.

3.6 During the refurbishment period for Queen’s Close a number of things have arisen which provide the opportunity to investigate its long term future. Notwithstanding the fact there is a degree of community concern about the siting of the unit, the refurbishment period has shown the Council has been able to meet its needs for temporary accommodation through better support for clients and avoiding the use of temporary accommodation including better use and management of the existing stock of dispersed and managed accommodation.

3.7 It is anticipated that the approval of the Housing Options Project, and the emergence of this as a mainstay of homelessness prevention as a national priority, will further enhance the ability of the Council to avoid the need for expensive temporary accommodation of this type, the promotion of this approach is particularly relevant given the impending changes to housing benefit which may reduce the levels of housing benefit payable for this type of accommodation and their long held concerns about the charges associated with supported accommodation of this nature.

3.8 Housing and Social Work and Health have explored the reopening of the Homeless Accommodation Unit in Queens Close in Montrose as supported accommodation for young people in care transitions. However, owing to the high revenue costs associated with this style of accommodation and support, the potential housing benefit impacts; and the size and layout of the property at this time and especially given the financial climate, the unit is not considered to be suitable for a long-term viable project despite the underlying need for such an approach.

3.9 Given the issues surrounding the cost of running supported accommodation of any nature, Members are asked to agree that Officers seek alternative uses for Queen’s Close and report back to a later Committee with options.

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2 As well as giving all unintentionally homeless households the right to settled accommodation, the 2012 target also requires shared leadership and accountability to reduce homelessness with prevention being top of the agenda.
3.10 Members are also asked to note that the Housing Division is keen to explore alternatives to mainstream housing but the Division is not responsible for prioritising revenue funding for the delivery of enhanced housing support. A decision to commit adequate resources to appropriate models of supported accommodation and with budgets becoming ever tighter, a review of the use of supporting people resources may be necessary if the wide ranging needs of vulnerable clients are to be met, especially given the additional commitment to assess support needs for all clients, as previously discussed at Committee as a result of the additional commitments in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010.

3.11 In the meantime, service remodelling is the most appropriate means of ensuring existing resources are used effectively to tackle youth homelessness and as such, it is proposed that a housing options team is set up to prevent young people going down the homeless route as set out below.

4. PROPOSALS

4.1 Encouraged by the Minister to look to the successes in other local authorities that have adopted a more robust approach to homeless prevention, the following proposal sets out how part of existing homelessness and related services in Angus could be restructured to establish a diversification, as opposed to a prevention service, to tackle youth homelessness.

4.2 Details of the project can be found in Appendix 1. To summarise, all young people wishing to apply for housing will be asked to attend an interview to explore housing options to meet their needs. Reducing the levels of homelessness and providing appropriate advice and assistance to achieve sustainable housing solutions are central themes. Where there has been a breakdown in relationship (both parental and non-parental), the project will offer mediation to resolve differences, refer on for specialist assessments or support, and in exceptional circumstances, put in place a plan with the family to allow the young person to leave the family home in a planned manner when the young person can demonstrate they have the necessary skills and maturity to manage their own tenancy.

4.3 Where homelessness cannot be prevented, the young person will be accommodated in the Assessment Facility in Guthrie Hill for a prolonged period of assessment, followed by interim accommodation in an appropriate setting, until able to demonstrate the necessary skills to sustain a tenancy.

4.4 In cases where there is evidence that the young person has had to leave the family home because of unreasonable behaviour, consideration will be given to finding that person intentionally homeless. While it is the statutory responsibility of Housing to make intentionally homeless decisions, given Angus Council’s commitment to Corporate Parenting, in complex and challenging cases, there will be consultation with relevant professionals in recognition of the difficulties and childhood traumas that many care leavers may have experienced and the impact this may have on their behaviour. Following an intentionality decision, a limited period of advice and assistance will be given to all other young people, to help them secure alternative accommodation. At the end of this period, temporary or interim homeless accommodation will be withdrawn.

4.5 There are separate systems in place to address the needs of care leavers and whilst this project is not intended to tackle the housing and support needs of such young people, the service would still be open to this vulnerable group if the exiting processes had not been able to adequately meet their housing needs. When fully established to address the needs of the primary target group, the project might have capacity in the later stages of the pilot to provide prevention advice as part of the care pathways approach.

4.6 Based in the Arbroath ACCESS Office, the one door approach will allow the necessary expertise in a single location to target the service at young people. This will allow the housing options project team to share strengths and avoid duplication and dilution of service as a result of multiple locations.

4.7 The project will be piloted for a period of 2 years. Managed by Housing and overseen by a Multi Disciplinary Project Review Group, the project team will have a combined working knowledge of the homeless legislation, the assessment process, the planning and provision of housing support and be trained in family mediation with support from a Housing Development Officer and a Clerical Officer.
4.8 Success will be demonstrated by:-

- reducing the number of 16 and 17 year olds presenting as homeless by 40% in year one, increasing to 60% in year two;
- reducing the number of 18-24 year olds presenting as homeless by 25% in year one and a further 25% in year two;
- A 50% reduction in the number of young homeless people losing their tenancy within 12 months;
- putting in place SROI (Social Return on Investment) measures by the end of year one to demonstrate the wider savings achieved by the project;
- 100% of all 16/17 year olds who are given temporary accommodation, having support plans in place within 2 working days and reviews carried out weekly for an initial period, with progress reports issued timeously to the project team;
- 75% of all 18-24 year olds who are given temporary accommodation, having support plans in place within 2 working days and reviews carried out on a regular basis, with progress reports issued timeously to the project team;
- 80% of young people in temporary accommodation demonstrating improved ability to sustain a tenancy and economic activity at the end of their assessment period.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Any additional salary costs (arising from the award of a higher grade during the 2 year secondments) or additional office costs will be met by Housing from the Homelessness budget.

5.2 Additional staff mediation training is estimated to cost £5,000 and publicity materials £500. These costs can be contained within existing departmental revenue budgets.

5.3 In total, it is considered that the additional cost of setting up and running the pilot for a year will not exceed £85,000 and this will be contained within budgets as set out above.

5.4 Should the unit at Queens Close ultimately be disposed, a capital receipt will accrue to the Housing Revenue Account capital account.

6. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no Human Rights implications arising as a result of the recommendations contained in this report.

7. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The issues dealt with in this report have been the subject of consideration from an equalities perspective (as required by legislation). An equalities impact assessment has been undertaken.

8. SINGLE OUTCOME AGREEMENT

8.1 This report contributes to the following local outcomes contained in the Single Outcome Agreement for Angus:-

- Children and young people in Angus and their carers will have access to high quality services and be assisted to overcome the social, educational, physical environmental; and economic barriers that create inequality;
- The housing needs of residents in Angus are met;
- Multiple deprivation in Angus is minimised.
9. **CONSULTATION**

9.1 The Chief Executive, Director of Corporate Services, Head of Finance and Head of Law and Administration have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

10. **CONCLUSION**

10.1 The proposed 2 year Housing Options Pilot is designed to significantly reduce the level of homelessness amongst young people. Underpinning the project is a fundamental culture change that will focus on creating independence, not dependence. Achieving this will require a commitment from colleagues in other departments and agencies to ensure that young people and their parents are given back responsibility for their lives. This housing options approach will prevent many homeless presentations but alternative models of accommodation, providing support to eventually move on to more independent living, are required to meet more challenging needs if we are going to succeed in tackling youth homelessness. In the interim, the delivery of Homelessness Housing Support Services will be redesigned to target young people who go on to become homeless to ensure they are provided with support to sustain their tenancies.

**NOTE:** No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report.

Hsg/NS/AMcK/SF

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