



Mayfield Homeless Families Project

Report by Allister Short, Joint Director Health and Social Care

1 Purpose of Report

This report seeks Cabinet approval to use an existing council-owned building for use as temporary accommodation for homeless families in Midlothian.

2 Background

- 2.1 In December 2018 Midlothian Council published its Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan. Proposed actions include reducing the use of bed and breakfast accommodation. Currently an average of 47 households are accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation every night in Midlothian. Provision of increased temporary accommodation units will help to reduce the use of bed and breakfast and associated costs.
- 2.2 In October 2018, Midlothian Council agreed to the refurbishment of the upper two floors of Jarnac Court in Dalkeith for use as a House in Multiple Occupation for homeless households. This project is still being progressed but there is a delay in progress due to the need to undertake some additional works to repair the external fabric of the building. The building is now planned to open for use as temporary accommodation in August 2020.
- 2.3 In addition, The Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2017 requires that families should not be housed in unsuitable accommodation, such as bed and breakfast accommodation or HMO type accommodation except in exceptional circumstances and for a maximum of 7 days. Many local authorities in Scotland breach this time limit. In Midlothian, despite significant reduction in use of bed and breakfast accommodation, the Council still makes use of units leased by bed and breakfast providers and private landlords. These are expensive and not ideally suited for families. Sometimes homeless families need to stay in a studio flat until longer term accommodation can be sourced. In recent years the annual expenditure on bed and breakfast accommodation for families has been approximately £250,000. Making use of other council-owned buildings for emergency accommodation would facilitate a significant reduction in spend on bed and breakfast accommodation.
- 2.4 Officers have identified specific accommodation which would be suitable for use as emergency homeless accommodation specifically for homeless families. There are blocks of maisonettes on Blackcot Road, Mayfield which are grouped as a block of 8 maisonettes in one building. This is unusual in Midlothian as most council properties accessed via a common stair are blocks of 6 flats or less. It is not

intended that families would stay in these properties for prolonged periods, it would be intended that most families would stay in the building for less than four weeks before being matched with longer term temporary accommodation.

- 2.5 Using these properties will generate enough revenue to provide an on-site concierge service within the building. This member of staff can undertake a variety of duties including:
- Providing access to households who require emergency accommodation out of hours.
 - Ensuring safety of occupants and appropriate supervision to ensure tenants are adhering to the conditions of their occupancy agreement.
 - Being available to answer queries.
- 2.6 Officers from the Housing Service were aware that two properties at the block of 8 properties at 39 Blackcot Road had recently become empty with the other 6 properties being all council tenants with no privately owned properties. Officers met with tenants within the building at an arranged meeting date to explain their interest in using this building for a temporary accommodation project. Midlothian Council would not ask any tenant to move against their wishes and will provide support in order that these households can be rehoused quickly in alternative council housing. Of the 6 tenants Officers spoke to, 5 tenants are willing to move. One tenant wishes to remain in the building but is supportive of the other properties in the building being used for temporary accommodation. Officers recommend progressing with the use of 39 Blackcot Road for use as temporary accommodation for families. The target date for use of this building as temporary accommodation is by December 2019 but this is dependent on suitable housing being identified for the current tenants to move to.
- 2.7 In order to support the rehousing project, Appendix 1 of this Report details support being provided to tenants in order that they can move to alternative council or housing association accommodation. Key points include:
- Each tenant will complete a housing application form. Regardless of circumstances all households will receive 300 points which will put all tenants at 39 Blackcot Road at the top of the Housing List in Midlothian.
 - In the event that tenants at 39 Blackcot Road are shortlisted for the same property, the tenant who has been resident at 39 Blackcot Road for longest period will be given the offer for the property.
 - Midlothian Council will continue to undertake open market purchases and continue to build out new developments which should help to address concerns of others at the top of the housing list that they are being disadvantaged by their list position moving down.
 - If there are rent arrears, or any other debt owed to the Council e.g. council tax, court costs, rechargeable repairs, housing benefit overpayments, former tenant arrears, that amount will be deducted from the Home Loss payment.
 - Tenants can receive discretionary payments to cover the actual expenditure occurred in relocating. These payments are based on

receipts provided by households and therefore vary between households. Payments will cover expenditure such as floor coverings and decoration.

3 Report Implications

3.1 Resource

In February 2018 Midlothian Council approved the Housing Revenue Account Rent Strategy for 2019/20 – 2021/22 and this included £6 million for investment in temporary accommodation. This budget would be used to support the rehousing project for 39 Blackcot Road and fund any alteration and improvements made to the building in order that it can be used for homeless families.

The additional works identified for Jarnac Court will cost an additional £92,000 and will also be resourced via the budget identified for temporary accommodation.

3.2 Risk

Use of the property reduces the risk of the Council failing to achieve the intended aim of reducing the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless households. Providing onsite staff support provides greater security to occupants and ensures that residents adhere to their occupancy agreement.

3.3 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

Themes addressed in this report are:

- ☒ Community safety
- ☒ Adult health, care and housing
- ☐ Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- ☐ Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- ☒ Sustainable growth
- ☒ Business transformation and Best Value
- ☐ None of the above

3.4 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

Midlothian Council and its Community Planning Partners have made a commitment to treat the following areas as key priorities under the Single Midlothian Plan:

- Reducing inequalities in the health of our population
- Reducing inequalities in the outcomes of learning in our population
- Reducing inequalities in the economic circumstances of our population

The themes addressed in this report impact on the delivery of the Single Midlothian Plan outcome particularly in terms of priorities in relation to the delivery of affordable housing, homelessness and health and social care outcomes.

3.5 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

Changing the use of the building for the provision of homeless accommodation has a positive impact in terms of providing an improved quality of homeless accommodation.

3.6 Adopting a Preventative Approach

Addressing the needs of homeless clients will assist in moving the balance of services and resources into preventing the need for longer term or crisis support

3.7 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

Stakeholders including Midlothian Tenants Panel, Registered Social Landlords and voluntary organisations have expressed support for the aims of Midlothian's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan including reducing bed and breakfast accommodation and improving the quality of accommodation.

3.8 Ensuring Equalities

An Equality Impact Assessment has not been undertaken in regard to this specific report. However, an Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken as part of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan ensuring that proposed actions have taken account of the needs of equality groups in relation to homelessness.

3.9 Supporting Sustainable Development

The proposed use of this building provides a use for an existing building in a residential area of Mayfield.

3.10 IT Issues

None.

4 Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- a) Approve the conversion of 7 out of 8 properties at 39 Blackcot Road for use as homeless temporary accommodation for families.
- b) Approve the policy for rehousing existing residents.
- c) Note the revised timescale for the refurbishment of the upper floors of Jarnac Court for use as homeless accommodation.

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