

Customer and Housing Services Performance Report Quarter Three 2019/20

Cabinet
Tuesday 3 March 2020
Item No.5.9

Midlothian 

Progress in delivery of strategic outcomes

Homelessness and Housing Services: Good progress has been made in respect of the 4 strategic outcomes set out in Midlothian's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) 2019 - 2024:

The supply of permanent accommodation for homeless household's increases. Bed and breakfast accommodation is no longer routinely used as emergency accommodation for homeless households and the time household's spend in temporary accommodation reduces. Homeless households with support needs are supported to access and maintain permanent accommodation. Housing options and support are in place to prevent homelessness.

Examples of work to achieve these strategic outcomes are detailed below for information.

A Revised Housing Allocation Policy was agreed by Council in December 2019. This places a renewed focus on addressing homelessness, with a significant increase in the proportion of lets to homeless and increased flexibility in the properties being allocated which will reduce waiting times. The impact of these changes will also begin to reduce the demand for bed and breakfast accommodation during 2020/21 and beyond.

A large number of sites now have planning permission and are under construction as part of the council's new build housing programme. Areas with sites under construction or due to go under construction during 2020 include: Bilston, Bonnyrigg, Dalkeith, Danderhall, Gorebridge, Loanhead, Mayfield, Newtongrange, Penicuik and Pathhead. There has also been significant numbers of open market acquisitions undertaken with 45 purchases undertaken in 2019/20.

Additional temporary accommodation services are progressing which will reduce reliance on using bed and breakfast accommodation. These are: Mayfield Family Service (operational from April 2020); Jarnac Court, Dalkeith; and the former Loanhead Police Station (both operational from October 2020).

The Housing First programme will commence in May 2020 providing 20 secure council and housing association tenancies per annum targeted at hard to reach and vulnerable homeless households. Many of these households have previously spent lengthy periods living in emergency accommodation. A tender process is currently underway to appoint a specialist support provider as these household's will require intensive support in order to sustain their accommodation.

The use of shared temporary accommodation (2 people sharing a two bed flat with own bedroom) as an alternative to B&B will be rolled out in Spring 2020.

A service provider has been appointed to manage the supported accommodation services and deliver a tenancy support service. The significant tender exercise was concluded in December 2019. This service will commence as from 1st April 2020.

Discussions have commenced with Women's Aid to review the existing Nomination Agreement and to propose an increase in the number of nominations made per annum to household's experiencing domestic abuse. In addition, discussions are also taking place with East Lothian Council to develop a Nomination Agreement which will complement the existing Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) arrangements to safeguard household's affected by domestic abuse.

Discussions are ongoing with Children's Services to develop a homeless prevention pathway for care experienced and looked after young people providing sustainable homes and a community of support that enables young people to have confidence in themselves and their future. It is proposed the National House Project will commence later this year.

A review of the rent model for temporary accommodation commenced in line with the recommendation from the Scottish Government's Homelessness Strategy that rents should be set at a level in order to provide a more equitable system and provide a clearer path for people to move on from Temporary Accommodation.

Customer Services: Following on from the telephony upgrade, a Queue buster system has been introduced which offers a call back to customers during periods of high demand. Phase 3 of the Customer Services Review has been concluded. The new library opening hours commenced from the 1st October 2019 delivering efficiencies and savings. There have been a number of national and local events in libraries for Book Week Scotland and the Midlothian Science Festival with some highlights including erupting volcanoes, author visits and a teddy bear's sleepover. The Online Payments and Services (OPAS) project solution has been through the procurement process and next steps are in progress.

Challenges and Risks


Welfare Reform: The additional pressures presented by Welfare Reform are monitored in relation to income disruption to housing rent payments and Council Tax Reduction scheme, evident in increased arrears and increased demand for crisis grants from the Scottish Welfare Fund. The impact in Year 3 of Universal Credit Full Service in Midlothian, has demonstrated that although there continues to be an impact on rent arrears, the impact has been reduced by the slower pace of new claimants applying to Universal Credit. DWP commenced the Move to UC pilot scheme in Harrogate in July 2019 and state that the pilot will end in 2020, with full migration to be achieved by the end of 2023. During the migration period the accurate and secure administration of Housing Benefit remains with Midlothian Council Revenues Services as required service provision for citizens across Midlothian. Demand and budget expenditure will continue to be monitored and priorities updated, if required, in relation to the number of applications received to the Scottish Welfare Fund.

Financial Strategy: Customer Services have delivered part of the 2019/20 savings and efficiencies identified across teams. Some savings are reliant on the performance of other services so there is a risk that these might not be realised. Transformative changes such as putting the Scottish Welfare Fund process online may assist for some areas but will not take into consideration all proposed savings.

Homeless: There continues to be a significant demand on the homeless service set against an ambitious and challenging legislative environment. Some examples of current work to mitigate these challenges are highlighted above.

Delays accessing self-contained temporary accommodation due to lengthy void timescales have resulted in increased demand for emergency accommodation for family households and longer periods of time spent in such accommodation. An external voids contractor has now been appointed which will assist in reducing the time that both council housing and temporary accommodation properties are empty. A 'Test of Change' experiment has also commenced including front line staff which will report findings and lessons learned in early March 2020.

Customer and Housing Services

Midlothian 

Successes and Challenges

Corporate Performance Indicators (latest)

● 4 ● 9 ? 0 ? 6

Service Plan Actions (latest)

▲ 2 ● 10 ? 0

Service Plan PIs (latest)

● 5 ● 4 ? 0 ? 8

Service Risks (latest)

▲ 5

Corporate PIs Off Target as at 31st January 2020

PIs ● 4

Average number of working days lost due to sickness absence (cumulative)

Performance against revenue budget

% of Service PIs that are on target/ have reached their target. (does not include Corporate PIs)

Percentage of complaints at stage 1 complete within 5 working days

Service Plan Actions Off Target as at 31st January 2020

Actions ▲ 2

Minimise re-let timescales for temporary accommodation.

Minimise re-let timescales for mainstream housing.

Service Plan PIs Off Target as at 31st January 2020

PIs ● 5

Re-let time permanent properties (days)

Percentage of housing units provided for particular needs with existing and new build stock.

Average processing time for change of circumstances claim (internally calculated)

Re-let time temporary accommodation properties

All recovery overpayments - as a % of all HB overpayment debt

High Risks as at 31st January 2020

Risks ▲ 0

5 Risks at Medium and 0 Risks are high

Key PIs
● Off Target
● On Target
? Data Only Indicator
? Data is not yet available

Key Actions
▲ Off Target
● On Target/Complete
? Data is not yet available

Key PIs
● Off Target
● On Target
? Data Only Indicator
? Data is not yet available

Key Risks
▲ High Risk / Medium Risk
? Data is not yet available