

## **Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan – Youth Homeless Prevention and Support Service**

**Report by Kevin Anderson, Executive Director Place**

### **Report for Decision**

#### **1 Recommendations**

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- a) Approve the procurement and development of a Youth Homeless Prevention and Support Service
- b) Approve the funding of the Youth Homeless Prevention and Support Service from Midlothian's allocation of the Scottish Government's Ending Homelessness Together Fund

#### **2 Purpose of Report/Executive Summary**

This report outlines the proposal of a pilot Youth Homeless Prevention and Support Service as part of Midlothian Council's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP).

The objective of this service would be to prevent youth homelessness by supporting young people to remain in their current accommodation, or secure alternative accommodation as part of a planned move.

Where this is not possible young people would be supported through their homeless journey and into permanent accommodation. Support would also be available to Midlothian Council tenants at risk of eviction due to rent arrears or other breaches of their tenancy agreement to prevent recurring homelessness.

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### 3 Background/Main Body of Report

- 3.1** Following the recommendations of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group the Scottish Government published its Ending Homelessness Together: High Level Action Plan. This included a commitment to develop preventative pathways for those groups at highest risk of rough sleeping and homelessness. This resulted in the Away Home Scotland coalition developing two pathways - Youth Homeless Prevention Pathway: Improving care leavers housing pathways, and Youth Homeless Prevention Pathway: For all young people.
- 3.2** The High Level Action Plan contained a further action specifically relating to youth homelessness – *‘We will ensure a clear, effective focus on preventing and responding effectively to youth homelessness’*. This requires that Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans (RRTPs) respond to the needs of young people experiencing homelessness, including the planning and development of pathways and a range of affordable housing options and associated supports for young people.
- 3.3** As part of its RRTP Midlothian Council has committed to focus on activities which seek to further reduce the number of homeless applications made and the amount of time people spend in temporary accommodation before securing permanent housing. The RRTP has a clear emphasis on the prevention of homelessness, tenancy sustainment and early intervention.
- 3.4** The Youth Homeless Prevention Pathway highlighted that young people across Scotland are disproportionately represented in the homeless system. 16-24 year olds account for just 12% of the population, but comprising nearly 25% of homeless applicants. This disproportionality is further highlighted in Midlothian. According to National Records Scotland 16-24 year olds account for 9.2% of the population of Midlothian. In 2020/21 34.5% of homeless applications received by Midlothian Council were from 16-25 year olds.
- 3.5** A snapshot of open homeless cases was taken in August 2021:
- 57% of young people were made homeless as a result of being asked to leave by parents/relatives. 67% went on to access temporary accommodation.
  - When reviewing these cases officers believe 70% would benefit from some level of support. Those aged 21 or under were more likely to be in need of support to successfully setup/sustain a tenancy.
- 3.6** The range of housing options available to young people, without dependent children, are very limited. In Midlothian, the majority of households under the age of 35 only receive a limited amount of assistance with housing costs in the private rented sector (the same restrictions apply to mid-market properties) and most Housing Associations in the area do not under occupy accommodation i.e. they will not allocate a 2 bedroom property to households without children. For many this will mean the only realistic housing option for young homeless people in Midlothian is the Council's housing stock.

- 3.7** As a result of the limited alternative options available it is important this vulnerable group are provided with as many opportunities to prevent homelessness as possible, and where this is not possible they are supported to establish sustainable tenancies to prevent future/recurring homelessness.
- 3.8** The Scottish Government supports local authorities in the delivery of their RRTP through its Ending Homelessness Together Fund. Local Authorities are required to submit an activity and spend monitoring report to the Scottish Government each year. As part of this report Councils are required to provide an update on the projects funded, and the transformative nature of the project. Therefore it is important any initiatives which utilise this funding are not just a 'copy and paste' of existing services.
- 3.9** A specialised Youth Homeless Support and Prevention Service would ensure young people at risk of homelessness in Midlothian are supported to remain in their current accommodation, or where this is not possible support people to move into accommodation in a planned way. The proposed scope of the new service includes the provision of:
- **All aspects of a traditional housing support service** - in addition to young people assessed as being homeless the service would also be available to those at risk of becoming homeless. This includes those who may be referred by other agencies through the forthcoming homeless prevention duty.
  - **A single point of contact for those being supported by the service** - it is likely that for many young people presenting for homeless assistance will be their first experience of approaching this type of service. Others may have a negative experience of previous involvement with council services. The service would provide a single point of contact for young people in regard to housing and homeless applications.
  - **Support beyond general settling in and pre-tenancy** – develop close links with services such as Communities, Lifelong Learning and Employability, Skills Development Scotland and local colleges. Actively supporting service users to engage with opportunities these services can provide further increases the chances of successful tenancy sustainment, builds sustainable communities and reduces the number of young people on low incomes.
  - **Mediation** - this would be offered, where appropriate, to help young people remain in their current accommodation, either on a long term basis or until such time a planned move into settled accommodation is facilitated. This would also be offered to people who are homeless to help build supportive relationships with family members - these relationships can further aid successful tenancy sustainment by provided positive supportive relationships in the local community.
  - **Support to young tenants at risk of losing their Midlothian Council tenancy** - adopting an early intervention approach to support people to address issues before escalation to court action

- **Peer support/mentoring during the contract to further enhance tenancy sustainment** - providing the opportunity for young people to become mentors will lead to further opportunities for personal development and building sustainable communities.

- 3.10** It is proposed that at launch the service would be accessible to all 16-21 year olds. As the service becomes more established and wider capacity is known this would be expanded to those in the 22-25 age group who are identified as most likely to benefit from the supports provided.
- 3.11** To ensure sufficient capacity within the service it is proposed that any service procured provides three full time members of staff. This will ensure continuity of service during periods of annual leave and other potential staff absences.
- 3.12** It is widely reported that many organisations who provide support services are experiencing difficulties with staff retention. To help prevent this becoming an issue it is proposed the service is procured for an initial 2 year period, with an option to extend the contract for a further two years on an annual basis. This would also help to attract the interest of organisations that have experience of delivering services that specialise in supporting young people.
- 3.13** The cost of procuring a service with the scope and capacity as detailed above is estimated to be approximately £100,000 per annum. This initial £200,000 to fund a service for two years can be met from Scottish Government's funding already received by Midlothian Council through the Ending Homelessness Together Fund, with no additional burden on other budgets.

## **4 Report Implications (Resource, Digital and Risk)**

### **4.1 Resource**

The cost associated with setting up this project and operating as a two year pilot can be met through funding already received from the Scottish Government's Ending Homelessness Together Fund.

### **4.2 Digital**

There are no IT issues for staff from Midlothian Council. It is proposed that support workers have some access to appropriate modules of CAPITA housing including, homelessness, housing advice, application and tenancy basic. This type of access has previously been provided to support workers from the existing tenancy support service who were embedded within the homelessness team

### **4.3 Risk**

There is a risk of negative scrutiny from external agencies such as the Scottish Government and interested third sector organisations if the Council is not seen to be addressing the needs of vulnerable groups such as young people as part of their RRTP activities.

### **4.4 Ensuring Equalities (if required a separate IIA must be completed)**

Social landlords perform all aspects of their housing services so that every tenant and other customer has their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.

An Integrated Impact Assessment was undertaken as part of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan ensuring all actions have taken account of the needs of equality groups in relation to homelessness. A further Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed when developing the Youth Homeless Prevention and Support Service.

### **4.4 Additional Report Implications (See Appendix A)**

See Appendix A

## **Appendices**

**Appendix A – Additional Report Implications**

**Appendix B – Background information/Links**

**Appendix C – Integrated Impact Assessment**