

Response to Glasgow City Council's Local Housing Strategy Consultation

September 2016

Introduction

Shelter Scotland welcomes the opportunity to comment on the strategic priorities set out in the first draft of the Glasgow City Council Local Housing Strategy for 2017-22. We note that further work is being undertaken to identify actions and outcomes under each of the themes before the final draft strategy is consulted upon in the autumn.

In our response we will focus on the strategic priority to Prevent and Address Homelessness.

About Shelter Scotland

Shelter Scotland helps over half a million people every year struggling with bad housing or homelessness through our advice, support and legal services. And we campaign to make sure that, one day, no one will have to turn to us for help. We're here so no one has to fight bad housing or homelessness on their own.

In March 2016, Shelter Scotland marked 40 years of providing advice and support services in Glasgow with a stakeholder engagement event from our Glasgow Community Hub. In 2015/16 Shelter Scotland advisors helped 3,300 households in Glasgow, 20% of the total number of households we helped across Scotland. In addition, 25% of all calls handled by our free national helpline in 2014-15 came from Glasgow City.

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Do you think that Preventing and Addressing Homelessness should be a strategic priority in this housing strategy?

Yes, Shelter Scotland welcomes the inclusion of Preventing and Addressing Homelessness as a specific strategic priority within the Local Housing Strategy. We recognise that other strategic areas identified will also make a contribution to tackling homelessness, but strongly agree that the extent and nature of the problems of homelessness that Glasgow is facing, along with the acknowledged failure of GCC to meet its statutory duties to homeless households merit specific focus.

There is a great deal of evidence from Shelter Scotland, and other agencies working directly with homeless people in the Glasgow area, of significant problems for homelessness households in accessing their legal right to advice, assistance and access to temporary accommodation. This includes evidence of homeless applicants sleeping rough after having presented to Glasgow city council as homeless. We recognise the role the Scottish Housing Regulator has played in working with the council to improve performance but are concerned about the rate of progress.

Once assessed as homeless, too many households have had to spend long periods in temporary accommodation waiting to secure a permanent home. In 2015/16, 52% of homeless cases closed in Glasgow had settled accommodation as an outcome, the average for Scotland was 67%. Shelter Scotland recognises that registered social landlords in the Glasgow area have a central role in improving performance on this measure. We are supportive of measures to coordinate efforts to facilitate housing access across the city through the Housing Access Project, but are concerned about the length of time this is taking and the absence of data illustrating progress.

Addressing these problems, and the other areas identified in the draft strategy should be an immediate priority for Glasgow City Council, and a plan to monitor and report on progress should sit alongside the identified actions

Do you think that the proposed actions we have included in this section are the right actions?

We have provided a response to the actions we feel are the most effective in preventing and addressing homelessness.

Creating a Community Homeless Service

This is a positive step which will link up homeless services and health services. Detail around which health and social care services will be involved would be helpful as particular attention must be paid to mental health services. More details are needed on how the service will look in practice and in particular, what the expected benefits of this approach are and how it will provide a better service.

Commission a Homelessness Prevention Mediation Service

Again, this is a positive prevention step although it should not be used as a tool to deter households from making a homeless application if they wish to do so and also not be used inappropriately e.g. in cases of violent disputes.

Strengthen the network of Specialist and Community based Money, Debt & Legal Advice Provision

This outcome aligns with the Scottish Governments aims in developing a Social Security system for Scotland and the service should be used to ensure that households are maximising income. We support the idea of using assertive outreach instead of service users having to attend appointments which are far away from them and may pose difficulties in terms of accessibility. We also support efforts to work more closely with external agencies and share best practice.

Strengthen the focus on homelessness prevention across the Homelessness Service

In principle we support strengthening homeless prevention provision however, again, this should not mean that service users are deterred from making a housing application or asked to remain in unsuitable circumstances. This must tie in with better recording of housing approaches and the outcomes relating to them. This is an opportunity to work closely with partners to ensure joined up services and reduce the risk of people falling through gaps and becoming homeless.

Effective Provision for Prison Leavers

This is an area that Shelter Scotland particularly welcome improvements in. Research published by Shelter Scotland in 2015 highlighted the importance of improving partnership working in this area and support the introduction of pathways for people leaving institutional settings such as prison due to them being most at risk of homelessness. Additionally, the pathways approach may help to minimise the risk of recidivism for prison leavers. This links closely with GCC's other aim of ensuring effective service pathways for the most vulnerable clients.

Increase the supply of temporary & settled accommodation for homeless households

This is a particular area of concern for Shelter Scotland as helpline advisers frequently inform us of instances whereby individuals are unable to access temporary accommodation in Glasgow due to a shortage of spaces. We encourage GCC to address this issue as a matter of priority in the new LHS so that the local authority's statutory duty to provide temporary accommodation can be met in full. We would also suggest that partnership working is employed to attach good quality support to temporary accommodation provision.

Improve outcomes for Multiply Excluded Homeless Service Users

While we welcome a renewed focus on multiply excluded homeless service users, any outcomes set for this group must be designed around the individual and effort must be made to ensure that they are not being set up to fail by imposing unattainable goals. In order to do this, research should be done in partnership with other agencies with specialist knowledge. Effort should be made to pull together all the work that has previously been done in this area and work with other agencies such as Shelter Scotland and GHN to better understand the needs of the group and to develop a coherent approach to engaging with individuals within the group. Consideration should be given to amending the entry requirements of temporary/emergency accommodation to allow for multiply excluded individuals (and especially those who may be rough sleeping) to access accommodation where they can settle for a longer period of time and allow them to re-engage fully with the services they require.

Develop Two New Build Emergency Accommodation Units

This is a welcome development although it is unclear how many bed spaces this will provide, what the access arrangements will be, whether they will have specialist support provision on site and what the location in relation to services that individuals will be asked to attend.

Ending the need to Sleep Rough

We support this aim although recognise that a significant amount of joint work must be carried out in order to understand the root causes of rough sleeping. This aim should also include addressing the systemic issues which prevent these individuals from accessing accommodation and support.

Ensure Access to Training and Learning Development

We support any upskilling of staff that will result in better service for individuals approaching for assistance. Experience of Shelter Scotland advisors is that provision of temporary accommodation and standards of housing options vary and so work should be done to ensure that all service users are receiving parity of service. We particularly support training in the area of welfare reform given the changes that are ongoing in order that each individual is receiving accurate information and are able to claim their full entitlement.

Information Sharing

We support plans to share information with relevant agencies and suggest that joint case management systems could be used to serve this purpose. Information sharing is pivotal in ensuring an effective, holistic service for each individual.

What other actions do you think we should include?

Alongside the actions contained in the draft strategy, Shelter Scotland would like to see commitment and a plan for monitoring and reporting on progress to tackling homelessness set out under the leadership of the Health and Social Care Integrated Board who are responsible for developing the Homelessness Strategy. This plan should show political leadership and clear lines of accountability to enable monitoring of progress.

Many of the above actions overlap and not many mention support – good quality support provision should be available as and when required. We welcome publication of the revised draft LHS and recommend that the broad objectives be grouped into smaller objectives such as “Access to TA”, “Prevention”, “Staff and Organisational Improvements” and then prioritised, with access to TA top of the list. Consideration of a feedback and review system and timescales by which outcomes and aims will be measured should be set out i.e. GCC will review the effectiveness of their approach into multiply excluded homelessness by establishing terms of reference agreed by all stakeholders.

For further information please contact:

Rosemary Brotchie – Policy and Research Manager - rosemary_brotchie@shelter.org.uk

Sharon Berrie – Glasgow Hub Manager - Sharon_berrie@shelter.org.uk

Shelter Scotland helps over half a million people every year struggling with bad housing or homelessness through our advice, support and legal services. And we campaign to make sure that, one day, no one will have to turn to us for help.

We're here so no one has to fight bad housing or homelessness on their own.

Please support us at shelterscotland.org

RH7439. Registered charity in England and Wales (263710) and in Scotland (SC002327)

Shelter Scotland
Scotiabank House
6 South Charlotte Street
Edinburgh EH2 4AW

shelterscotland.org