Housing Options and Homelessness Prevention

- **How do you feel housing options and homelessness prevention is working in practice? Are there examples of good practice?**

The reduction in numbers of homeless applications in Angus from 2011 is consistent across Scotland and mainly driven by the impact of the introduction of housing options services and the focus on prevention. The Young Person’s Housing Options Service pilot was established in March 2012 and made significant progress in reducing and preventing youth homelessness in Angus. The team worked with young people to prevent them becoming homeless and to explore various options to enable them to sustain current and/or future accommodation. Key to their success was preventing homelessness via family mediation and negotiating a planned approach to leaving home when remaining in the family home was not feasible. In 2014 the posts were established as permanent, and the practices and procedures were merged and implemented within the existing Housing Options Service across all age groups.

Recent increases in homeless applications in Angus appear to correlate with a reduction in the number of housing options approaches, which could point to the effectiveness of housing options in preventing homelessness. Following a recent restructure of the housing options service from a centralised service, work is continuing to ensure housing options is embedded consistently across the teams. The introduction of the housing options guidance has been helpful to ensure we embed these principles into our working practices.

- **How effective is the relationship between all the relevant agencies, including the health sector, and charities working on homelessness prevention?**

We recognise the importance of partnership working across agencies to prevent homelessness and continue to work to embed a golden thread of prevention and housing options across the organisation and relevant agencies. We have a number of effective joint working protocols, including a protocol with Perth Prison; our Housing Options for Care Leavers protocol with our partners in social work services; and an Adaptations Protocol which promotes a tenure neutral housing options approach to adaptations in Angus.
• **What needs to happen to improve the delivery of housing options and homelessness prevention services and the outcomes achieved for service users?**

The introduction of the housing options guidance has been helpful to promote the principles of an effective housing options service. Although we recognise this cannot be overly prescriptive, a review of the guidance, particularly around the relationship between housing options and homelessness would give local authorities more confidence to promote housing options and assist in alleviating concerns or challenges around gatekeeping. Reviewing current homeless legislation to include housing options would also help to ensure consistency in approach across organisations and improve outcomes for service users.

• **What role should private sector housing providers play in preventing and responding to homelessness?**

Early intervention and upstream prevention activities in partnership with private housing providers would help in preventing and responding to homelessness. Working closely with private housing providers to remove barriers to people accessing this sector would be beneficial.

**Temporary Accommodation**

• **What evidence is there of pressure on temporary accommodation in your area? Has this increased in recent years?**

There has been a significant increase in pressure on our temporary accommodation in Angus over the past 2 years, caused by an increase in homeless applications meaning the time spent in temporary accommodation has increased and turnover reduced. We are currently exploring this issue internally and are revising our procedures and service standards however the impact of welfare reform and the pressures on single person accommodation is a contributing factor that is difficult to mitigate against.

• **How can homeless people's experiences of temporary accommodation be improved? For example, how can the use of unsuitable accommodation be reduced or the length of time spent in temporary accommodation reduced?**

Angus is currently exploring shared tenancy models for both temporary and permanent accommodation to increase the options available for young single homeless people. Avoiding the use of temporary accommodation for prison leavers and young people leaving care, exploring a housing first type approach, is also being considered as part of our allocations policy review as well as relaxing rules on house sizes and considering the implementation of a choice based lettings approach.
Do you have concerns about the funding of temporary accommodation? If yes, how should temporary accommodation be funded?

In Angus there are currently around 110 dispersed furnished homeless units provided by the local authority and 13 flats, across 3 homeless person’s units (HPU) provided and managed by Hillcrest Housing Association. Hillcrest also provide supported 15 interim accommodation units. There is no hostel type accommodation in Angus.

In March 2015 only 6% of households in temporary accommodation required 2 bedrooms or more and it is clear that the proportion of temporary accommodation by bedroom size in Angus does not match applicant profile. This is a concern as the roll out of Universal Credit later this year and the introduction of LHA rates for temporary accommodation means there will be a significant shortfall for many households in temporary accommodation in Angus.

Permanent Accommodation

How do social landlord’s allocation policies prioritise applications from homeless households and how does choice based lettings work in practice?

In Angus we operate a Common Housing Register with Blackwood Homes, Caledonia Housing Association and Hillcrest Housing Association. Our housing is currently allocated using a traditional points system where points are awarded based on the applicants circumstances; applicants are matched with available properties that are deemed suitable by the allocating landlord and faced with the choice to accept or reject the offer of housing. There are five categories within our waiting list and our Local Lettings Plans set the quota of allocations to each of the groups. The Duty (homeless) and Medical categories are set at a target of 60% of allocations between each of the groups.

Our allocations policy is currently under review to take account of the changes from the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 when these are enacted and to adopt a choice based lettings approach. We hope this will encourage more choice and be a fairer, more transparent system for applicants. We are proposing to adopt priority bandings for the reasonable preference categories and have set up the bandings in such a way that homeless households with a requirement for 1 or 2 bedrooms will be prioritised for 75% of available properties. We have also set up our bandings in a way to give further priority to care leavers and applicants who are leaving an institution, such as prison or hospital, to prevent the need for temporary accommodation.
Multiple and Complex Needs

- **What more could be done to ensure that the needs of homeless people with multiple and complex needs are adequately supported? Are there examples of good practice?**

  Access to support services and continued support for people with multiple and complex needs is key to preventing repeat homelessness. We have found that where someone has multiple needs, they can face barriers to accessing services; particularly people with a borderline learning disability and people who have mental health problems with added drug and alcohol issues. Engagement difficulties also often result in services withdrawing their support from individuals and it can be difficult to re-engage or refer into these services.

- **What scope is there for improved joint working with all agencies and groups supporting those with multiple and complex needs, which would also include the health sector?**

  Multi-disciplinary teams and single referral routes as well as joint working protocols would assist with this as well as the recognition that homelessness is not just a housing issue would help improve partnerships to prevent and address homelessness.

- **What role could the “housing first” model play in improving outcomes for homeless people with multiple and complex needs?**

  We are considering this as an approach for people leaving prison and care leavers assessed as ready for living independently. A secure tenancy would hopefully reduce the revolving door of homelessness, particularly for short-term prisoners. However, it is essential for support to be available that is flexible and non-time limited.

Rough Sleeping

There is no evidence of rough sleeping in Angus.

Other

- **What are the reasons behind why people become homeless?**

  Trends showing the main reasons for applying as homeless in Angus have remained unchanged from previous years and are mirrored by the nationwide data with relationship breakdown continuing to be one of the main causes of homeless applications. The same trends are seen for applications for those under 35.
• **What data is used to measure homelessness numbers in a particular area?**

   Alongside our internal PMF indicators, the PREVENT1 and HL1 data is used to measure homeless numbers in Angus. It is difficult to establish any trends from PREVENT1 due to the inconsistencies across local authorities in how prevention and housing options work is recorded. Clearer guidance would be welcomed.

• **Can you give examples of best practice of effective strategic coordination of services to ensure there are no gaps or overlaps in homelessness services?**

   Our Local Housing Strategy sets out our strategic response to homelessness and homelessness services in Angus. We have set up an implementation group to monitor agreed actions and progress, involving stakeholders from across different organisations.

   The Housing Options Hub has also been invaluable in developing the housing options approach and sharing good practice.

• **Are there any problems with people accessing their housing and homelessness rights? If yes, how can access be improved?**

   No known problems in Angus. We have completed peer audits in partnership with our housing options hub colleagues to assess access to our services and taken forward any improvements identified.

• **What are the barriers to providing homeless people with sustainable housing solutions and how can these barriers be addressed?**

   The key barriers are:

   - Availability of single person accommodation
   - Affordability and welfare reform, particularly for under 35’s
   - Availability of flexible, non time limited support services
   - Difficulties accessing private rented sector accommodation (no DSS)

   These could be addressed through both national and local led initiatives such as shared tenancy schemes; rent protection schemes for PRS landlords; further commitment to affordable housing development; ensuring resources for supporting preventative and support services. A review of homeless legislation to account for housing options would also be effective to tackle homelessness and encourage better, person centred outcomes.