

Housing Emergency

I refer to your letter of 28 June 2024 in relation to The Scottish Parliament's Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee's consideration of the terms of an inquiry into the housing emergency.

South Lanarkshire Council, at its meeting held on 12 June 2024, considered a motion, proposed by Councillor McLachlan and seconded by Councillor Cowie, who are Chair and Depute Chair of the Housing and Technical Resources Committee respectively. Following discussion and a vote, the Council agreed the motion, incorporating an addendum proposed by the Leader of the Council, a copy of which is attached for your information. The motion explains why the Council considered it necessary to declare the emergency.

You will note that in agreeing the motion, as amended, the Council agreed to urge the Scottish and UK Government to immediately consider the following:-

- ◆ “a full or partial restoration of ‘local connection’ within Scotland to help manage out-of-area homelessness presentations.
- ◆ the reversal of cuts to the Affordable Housing Supply Programme budget to ensure South Lanarkshire Council can deliver all 1300 additional council homes set out in the Strategic Housing Investment Plan and that national housing targets can be met.
- ◆ further assistance to manage housing need arising from humanitarian and asylum programmes.
- ◆ fair funding for essential services and infrastructure, in line with the expectations set out by COSLA in their June 2024 Position Statement, to address housing and capital investment needs. “

The/...

The attachment also contains the other information you requested, namely on some of the measures the Council has taken to address the emergency situation, void and unlettable properties, and strategies for acquiring and buying back properties.

Yours sincerely

Paul Manning
Chief Executive

Declaration of a Housing Emergency

Notice of Motion

Motion received in terms of Standing Order No 20 on 28 May, 2024, proposed by Councillor Davie McLachlan, seconded by Councillor Margaret Cowie, as follows:-

“The Council agrees that, further to the report to the Executive Committee on 8 May on ‘Homelessness Pressures – Impact and Mitigation’ and heightened pressures on housing and homelessness services, a housing emergency be declared in South Lanarkshire.

The Council notes that South Lanarkshire remains a top performing local authority in addressing homelessness applications but, nonetheless, is experiencing significant pressures, in common with other local authority areas, including:-

- ◆ a 28% increase in the number of people applying to the council for assistance due to homelessness.
- ◆ a 38% increase in the number of people recorded by the council as homeless.
- ◆ a 101% increase in the backlog of urgent need homeless households awaiting housing.

The Council welcomes the measures reported to the Executive Committee to mitigate the impact of the emergency homelessness situation but, in light of the level of need, urges central governments at Scottish and UK level to immediately consider the following:-

- ◆ a full or partial restoration of ‘local connection’ within Scotland to help manage out-of-area homelessness presentations.
- ◆ the reversal of cuts to the Affordable Housing Supply Programme budget to ensure South Lanarkshire Council can deliver all 1300 additional council homes set out in the Strategic Housing Investment Plan and that national housing targets can be met.
- ◆ further assistance to manage housing need arising from humanitarian and asylum programmes.
- ◆ fair funding for essential services and infrastructure, in line with the expectations set out by COSLA in their June 2024 Position Statement, to address housing and capital investment needs.

Measures to Address the Emergency Situation

A series of actions to mitigate the impact of the continuing surge in demand for statutory homelessness services have been reported to the Council's Housing and Technical Resources and Executive Committees, these include:-

- ◆ Addressing the significant increase in the number of households in temporary accommodation by:-
 - continuing to focus on prevention activities
 - reviewing the basis on which all homelessness applicants are queued for housing to ensure they can be re-housed within a reasonable timescale
 - delivery of housing pathway plans for more vulnerable clients
- ◆ Further increasing the supply of appropriate temporary accommodation – the Council has a long track record of providing good quality temporary accommodation based upon the maintaining an adequate supply of “ordinary homes” in communities and avoiding any significant use of bed and breakfast accommodation. Indeed, maintaining an appropriate supply of temporary accommodation and only reducing the level in line with a reduction in the level of homelessness (and, therefore, demand) was a key point set out in the South Lanarkshire Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan when it was approved in 2019. The significant increase in homelessness within South Lanarkshire over the past two years has however resulted in the need for regular use to use of bed and breakfast accommodation.

A key focus of our action to help address the situation has therefore been to further augment our supply of temporary accommodation. However, despite significant effort in this regard with supply increased by a further 16% during 2023/2024 (from 609 to 704 units), demand has continued to out strip supply, resulting in a continuing need to use bed and breakfast accommodation to address the surge in demand. It should be emphasised that we also focus on ensuring that the period of time people spend in this type of accommodation is minimised.

Currently our attention is very much on exploring opportunities to increase our supply of “First Stop” and supported accommodation to better enable us to respond to the initial aspect of demand from homelessness households in advance of moving to mainstream temporary accommodation. This includes work which we are progressing to enter a partnership with Social Bite, drawing in funding to deliver 15 units of supported accommodation.

- ◆ **Improving access to permanent homes** – as part of annual local letting planning, the Council has for a number of years set targets for the proportion of lets to be directed toward homeless households. Through this process, over the last seven years, more than fifty per cent of available council lets have been directed towards homeless households. Indeed, in the last financial year approaching two out of every three council lets (64%) were directed towards statutorily homeless households. The surge which has occurred in homelessness over the past two years has however taken place despite an unrelenting focus on directing available lets to homeless households and indicates, among other things, that the current supply of affordable housing is not sufficient to meet need. While many personal and wider societal factors can underpin an individual reaching a point of housing crisis, fundamentally homelessness is a function of a lack of supply or access to affordable housing.
- ◆ **Targeting Available Resources** – in the most challenging of circumstances we have worked to ensure the most effective use of the resources available. Despite well-established homelessness business planning processes and partnership arrangements, however this has entailed the de-funding or reduction of projects that would support both the prevention and alleviation of homelessness such as scaling back specialist support projects, including Housing First.
- ◆ **Actively Supporting Asylum and Refugee Programmes** - the Council has a dedicated team of staff who work to support refugee and asylum programmes in South Lanarkshire. In terms of refugees the Council's involvement has expanded significantly from individual programmes to support Syrian and Afghan refugees to a much broader involvement in support of the global UK Resettlement Programme and the urgent need to assist Ukrainian

refugees from May 2022 onward. The combined impact of refugee resettlement has resulted in approximately 100 social housing lets being made to refugees. A direct consequence of the success of this work has however been to reduce the level of lets, that would otherwise have been available to meet the needs of homeless households within South Lanarkshire.

At the same time the Home Office has operated an accommodation project for asylum seekers at a hotel in East Kilbride and on a smaller scale dispersed temporary accommodation within communities. While the Council has engaged at national and local levels to support the process and proposals for the expansion of the dispersal of asylum seekers, the severe pressure on the availability of affordable housing in the area has been emphasised.

Supply of Permanent Homes

As noted above, developing an adequate supply of affordable housing is absolutely key to addressing the emergency circumstances and securing a long term and sustained reduction in homelessness.

To address the shortage in housing the Council have been focused on delivery of a significant Council Affordable Housing Supply Programme and working with Registered Social Landlord partners to deliver their own programmes. Through these, in 2023/2024 the Council and its partners delivered an additional 446 homes for social rent across South Lanarkshire.

This year's reduction in the Scottish Government grant available to support the Council's programme, alongside uncertainty around future years grant availability has however required that the council review its target which was set in November 2022, aiming to deliver an additional 1,300 Council homes by 2027. Despite this target no longer being financially achievable, the Council will continue to maximise the number of new homes across areas identified as priority need.

Information on Void or Unlettable Properties

The Council actively manages all empty properties to ensure they are available for re-letting at the earliest opportunity and has a track record of high-performance in relation to void management.

However, despite comparatively high levels of performance in the turnaround of void properties, in acknowledgement of the need for continuous improvement and incorporation of best practice a 'Void Service Improvement Plan' has been developed with the aim of delivering a more efficient turnaround of void properties for our customers. Measures included with the service improvement plan include procuring a preferred supplier arrangement to assist with utility issues and review of void categories/timescales.

The Council has an extremely small number of properties which are categorised as unlettable (34 properties from a stock of 25,742) in terms of the Scottish Housing Regulator's definition.

Strategies for Acquiring and Buying Back Properties

A key part of the Council's Affordable Housing Supply Programme is its Home Purchase Scheme, enabling the Council to purchase existing homes from the private sector to provide affordable council homes in areas of high demand. This scheme has operated successfully since 2016, with over 450 homes purchased to date.

Recognising the increasing pressures facing housing and homelessness services, the Council expanded its existing scheme in late 2023 to allow for more opportunities to purchase homes directly from owners, including private landlords and those with empty properties. Focus was also given to advertising the areas where the council needed certain types of homes to help meet demand and sharing this information with estate agents and property solicitors.

These changes were a success, with 165 homes across all areas of South Lanarkshire purchased through the scheme during 2023/2024. This significant increase on previous years supported the

Council's approach to meeting housing need, providing more opportunities to find accommodation that meets people's needs in areas they wish to live.

As set out in its approved Strategic Housing Investment Plan 2024 to 2029, the Council had aimed to acquire a further 600 existing properties over the five-year period of the plan, at 120 acquisitions per year. Since the plan was approved however, changes to the Resource Planning Assumption provided to the South Lanarkshire area for 2024/2025, and uncertainty around future years funding, has required this to be reduced. Sixty homes are now currently targeted for this year.

Should the Council receive a proportion of the £80 million additional grant being made available to support the National Acquisition Programme from the Scottish Government for 2024/2025 and 2025/2026, we are well positioned to ensure these resources are utilised effectively to purchase much needed additional affordable homes through the Market Purchase Scheme.