



**West Lothian
Council**

Housing Emergency Action Plan

2024/25

West Lothian Council Housing Emergency Action Plan 2024/25

1. Executive summary

Following the declaration of a housing emergency by West Lothian Council on 28 May 2024, the council has developed this Housing Emergency Action Plan (HEAP) within the context of existing resources available to the council across both the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) in the absence of additional Scottish Government grant or subsidy funding available to councils as a result of the housing emergency declaration.

The strategic approach for ending homelessness is laid out within the council's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) however following extensive ongoing financial pressures the council has also developed a Housing Need Improvement Programme which has a range of targeted measures aimed at reducing costs and improving income generation that are linked to improving the overall service provision of homeless services. The Housing Need Improvement Programme is set out in Appendix 1.

2. Housing Emergency Action Plan

The Leader of the Council, Executive Councillor for Housing and senior council officers met with the Minister for Housing and Scottish Government officials on 8 July 2024, and asked for the following measures to be taken by Scottish Government to support the council to mitigate the housing emergency and effectively deliver statutory homeless services that meet statutory duties and legal responsibilities to tenants and other housing customers:

The Housing Emergency Action Plan calls on Scottish Government to take measures to support the council to mitigate the housing emergency and effectively deliver statutory homeless services that meet statutory duties and legal responsibilities to tenants and other housing customers. The Leader of the Council, Executive Councillor for Housing and senior council officers met with the Minister for Housing and Scottish Government officials on 8 July 2024, and asked for the measures set out in the Housing Emergency Action Plan to be taken by Scottish Government.

The Council's Housing Emergency Action Plan is seeking that the following measures are taken by Scottish Government:-

- Fully reverse the cut to the Affordable Housing Supply Programme
- Increase funding available to local authorities for Open Market Acquisitions (OMAS)
- Increase funding via the RRTP to fully fund homeless prevention services until the end of the parliamentary session and provide clarity on future funding
- Provide funding for acquisition of empty homes and the necessary repairs required to bring these homes up to lettable standard.
- Target additional revenue funding specifically at Local Authorities, including West Lothian Council, identified as being at risk of systemic failure in their homelessness services
- Suspend the implementation of the Ask and Act provisions in the Housing (Scotland) Bill
- Suspend the removal of local connection for the duration of the national Housing Emergency
- Suspend the provisions of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order for the duration of the national Housing Emergency
- Take action to address lengthy delays by energy suppliers in replacing or updating meters
- Provide details of the funding allocation to the council from the £80 million to be made available over the next 2 years for new acquisitions.

Appendix 1 – Housing Need Improvement Programme

The Housing Need Improvement Programme builds upon the existing actions within the RRTP and aims to mitigate the housing emergency.

The improvement actions have been aligned to the existing 4 high level actions within the RRTP:

1. Increase focus on early intervention, prevention and housing options to stop homelessness happening in the first place;
2. Improving access to affordable housing options and reducing lengths of stay in temporary accommodation by improving the flow through the system diverting away from the use of B&B Accommodation;
3. Ensure where homelessness does occur that housing options are focused on enabling households to navigate through the system as quickly as possible;
4. Implement actions required to ensure people have access to the required levels of support.

The actions are the first step in responding to the housing emergency declaration with separate 36 actions for completion over the next 18 months. It will form the baseline for the next iteration of RRTP which is currently in development.

The imbalance between supply and demand for permanent social rented accommodation continues to be the key challenge in West Lothian and is the key driver of the ongoing breach of statutory duties and budget pressures that are experienced within the council due to the high reliance of unsuitable accommodation.

The need for affordable social housing in West Lothian remains high due to the high number of applications for housing, high sustainability and low turnover of properties.

Low wages, reduced disposable income and increased mortgage rates continue to drive people of West Lothian to regard council and RSL housing as the main affordable housing option.

Table 1 Supply & Demand Summary

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	% change
Homeless Applications	1,469	1,462	1,188	1,252	1,169	-23%
Placements in Temporary Accommodation	1,825	1,749	1,791	1,522	1,806	-1%
Breaches of UAO	26	11	328	516	523	+181%
No of Open Cases (at end of previous year)	853	1,224	1,412	1,608	1,378	+47%
No of Lets to Homeless	961	566	589	629	643	-40%

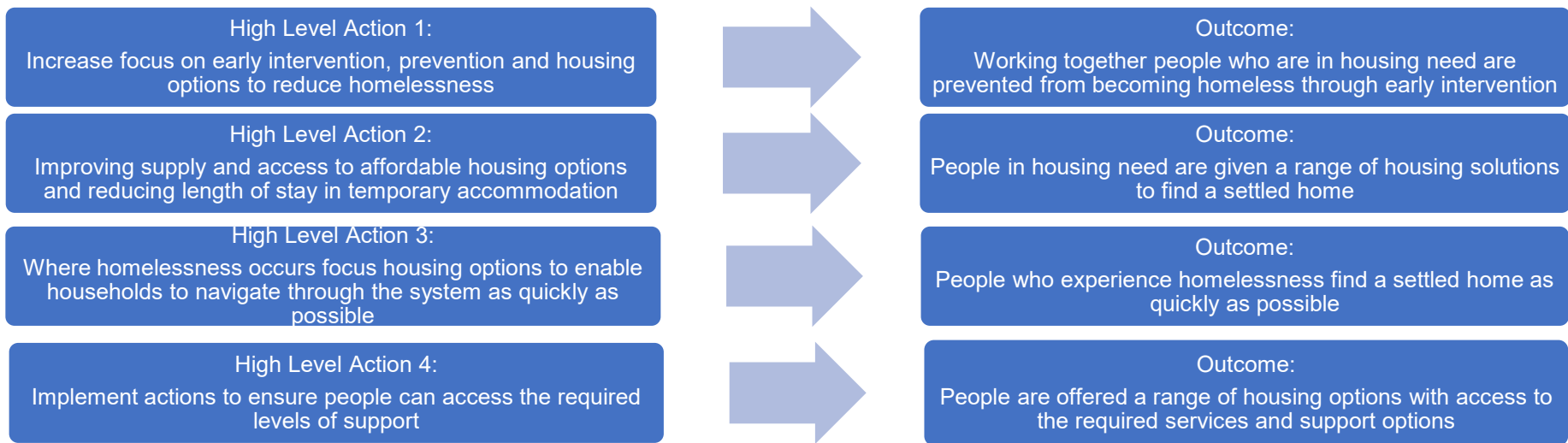
Table 1 shows that despite decreases in homeless demand over a 5-year span, the number of placements in temporary accommodation increased by 18.7% including B&B placements by 9% in 2023/24. The number of breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order (UAO) also increased, although only marginally by 1%, however over the 5 year span the extension of the

UAO order saw this increase by 181%. This is due to the reduced throughput in temporary accommodation, as despite an increase in the number of households exiting temporary accommodation, the number of permanent lets available to homeless households is not increasing at a rate to match demand, despite a modest increase of 2.2% in 2023/24. The number of lets continues to be low and affected by high sustainability and has decreased by 40% over the 5-year period. This means that homeless demand now outstrips supply by over 301%. If lets to homeless households were increased to 100% it would remain insufficient to meet demand.

Good progress has been made on the delivery of the RRTP in 2023/24 against a back drop of pressures in homeless services and in light of limited financial resources from the Scottish Government to deliver RRTPs. Additional council funding has also been utilised to address critical pressures and to enable transition to a prevention-based approach within the Housing Need service. A programme of structural and operational review has also prioritised the highly effective prevention work which has resulted in reduced homeless applications, significant savings and improvements to practice, partnerships and outcomes.

The operating context has now changed significantly and West Lothian is experiencing a housing emergency with supply pressures not predicted to ease over the next 3 years as demand for homeless services in West Lothian is predicted to remain high due to the ongoing costs of living crisis, increased mortgage costs, higher rent in the private sector and changes to homeless legislation.

The Improvement Programme highlights the key areas of work to be undertaken by the council and its partners to mitigate the housing emergency within West Lothian. These actions will be further supported with an updated Homeless Strategy in 2025/26 that will build on the success of the previous RRTP and support the council to continue working towards long-term changes in service provision whilst aligning with the new prevention duties. This will be achieved through a sharper focus on preventative approaches and a stronger partnership approach.



High Level Action 1 - To increase focus on early intervention, prevention and housing options to reduce homelessness		
Outcome - Working together people who are in housing need are prevented from becoming homeless through early intervention		
Activity	Planned Completion Date	Lead Agency
1. Deliver housing options approach to respond and mitigate the risk of homelessness	August 2024	West Lothian Council
2. Increase partnership with Private Rented Sector and raise awareness of the tenant find service.	August 2024	West Lothian Council
3. Deliver specialist Youth Housing Options Services working in partnership with Education	September 2024	West Lothian Council

High Level Action 1 - To increase focus on early intervention, prevention and housing options to reduce homelessness

Outcome - Working together people who are in housing need are prevented from becoming homeless through early intervention

Activity	Planned Completion Date	Lead Agency
4. Mainstream and develop Young Peoples Emergency Prevention Service to minimise the risk of youth homelessness	September 2024	West Lothian Council /Third Sector
5. Develop referrals and supporting secondary schools to minimise homelessness and support young people to stay engaged in schools in partnership with Education	September 2024	West Lothian Council
6. Deliver specialist housing approach for young people, people at risk of homelessness due to domestic abuse and people with addictions.	December 2024	West Lothian Council
7. Conclude development of Housing Options Toolkit and its future modules to improve staffs skills and knowledge	December 2024	West Lothian Council
8. Upscale Housing First services for both adults and youths and develop new Intensive Housing Support Services (IHSS)	December 2024	West Lothian Council
9. Review first year of early intervention model to prevent homelessness in secondary schools	March 2025	West Lothian Council
10. Review Allocations Policy	December 2025	West Lothian Council

High Level Action 2 - Improving supply and access to affordable housing options and reducing length of stay in temporary accommodation

Outcome - People in housing need are given a range of housing solutions to find a settled home

11. Deliver void improvement plan measures to reduce number of void properties & increase throughput of properties	Ongoing	West Lothian Council
12. Temporarily increase percentage of lets to homeless applicants	August 2024	West Lothian Council
13. Use exceptional circumstances to move long standing cases out of unsuitable accommodation	August 2024	West Lothian Council
14. Implement new charging model for temporary accommodation	September 2024	West Lothian Council
15. Implement new charging model for supported accommodation	September 2024	West Lothian Council
16. Instruct tender process for block purchasing of unsuitable accommodation	October 2024	West Lothian Council
17. Review delivery of rapid access provision in hotels and at Blackburn Homeless Unit assessment centre	December 2024	West Lothian Council
18. Crashpad spaces at Blackburn Homeless Unit used to reduce use of unsuitable accommodation out of hours	December 2024	West Lothian Council
19. Develop a blanket SLA and lease framework for all special lets	December 2024	West Lothian Council
20. Deliver new build supported accommodation for young people at Almondvale Crescent	March 2025	West Lothian Council
21. Undertake OMAS to increase portfolio of permanent properties by a further 9 properties	March 2025	West Lothian Council
22. Quantify the residential accommodation requirements for adults where housing in the community would not be suitable including Addictions and mental Health.	March 2025	NHS Lothian
23. Maximise the contribution of the private sector and develop West Lothian Empty Homes Partnership	March 2025	West Lothian Council

High Level Action 2 - Improving supply and access to affordable housing options and reducing length of stay in temporary accommodation

Outcome - People in housing need are given a range of housing solutions to find a settled home

24. Work in partnership with RSLs to deliver high target lets to homeless households	December 2025	West Lothian Council/RSLs
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High Level Action 3 - Where homelessness occurs focus housing options to enable households to navigate through the system as quickly as possible

Outcome - People who experience homelessness find a settled home as quickly as possible

25. Deliver housing options approach to respond and mitigate the risk of homelessness	August 2024	West Lothian Council
26. Increase partnership working with Private Rented Sector and raise awareness of the tenant find service.	August 2024	West Lothian Council
27. Upscale Housing First services for both adults and youths and develop new Intensive Housing Support Services (IHSS)	March 2025	West Lothian Council
28. Implement new approach to supporting homeless households access specialist mental health services in partnership with NHS	December 2024	West Lothian Council
29. Develop options for Choice Based Letting (CBL) approach for new housing management system	December 2025	West Lothian Council
30. Complete the balance of the 383 new affordable council houses targeted over the period 2023/24-2027/28	March 2028	West Lothian Council

High Level Action 4 - Implement actions to ensure people can access the required levels of support

Outcome - People are offered a range of housing options with access to the required services and support options

31. Upscale Housing First services for both adults and youths and develop new Intensive Housing Support Services (IHSS)	March 2024	West Lothian Council
32. Implement new approach to supporting homeless households access specialist mental health services in partnership with NHS	December 2024	NHS Lothian
33. Mainstream Addictions Support services in hotel provision	December 2024	NHS Lothian
34. Review and reconfigure support services to deliver medium to high level support and ensure statutory support duty is met	March 2024	West Lothian Council
35. Co-ordinate and ensure the delivery of Trauma Informed training across Housing Need Service	December 2024	West Lothian Council
36. Quantify the residential accommodation requirements for adults where housing in the community would not be suitable including Addictions and mental Health	March 2025	NHS Lothian