

## **Inquiry into Housing**

Thank you for your letter requesting an update on the current Housing Emergency position in West Lothian.

The demand for social housing and in particular homeless services continues to outstrip the supply of permanent accommodation. The lack of sufficient throughput remains a key and critical challenge for West Lothian and the council have failed to ensure compliance with the unsuitable accommodation order for a number of years, with breaches rising significantly since the provisions of the duty have been extended. The council remains reliant on the use of unsuitable emergency accommodation for homeless households, with demand outstripping supply by over 300%. The lack of financial resources to deliver statutory homeless services and further cuts to the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) grant continues to cause significant challenges in delivering and enhancing homeless services.

I attach a link to the draft Homeless Strategy which includes Housing Emergency Action Plan (HEAP) (Appendix 1) The draft Homeless Strategy will replace the previous RRTP. Council Officers have additionally been focused on mainstreaming RRTP over the last 12 months and developing a new strategy with refreshed priorities and further targeted actions which will further support the housing emergency response.

### [West Lothian Council Committee Information - Submission Documents](#)

As part of the HEAP, focused action has continued to reduce the number of void properties and increase access to council homes. Increases in staffing resources including additional overtime have been implemented alongside employing external contractors. These efforts have reduced the number of void properties by over 30% in the last 12 months however due to the high backlog of homeless households and sustained high demand for homeless services this has not been enough to reduce the reliance on unsuitable emergency accommodation. Void turnover remains another key challenge due to the condition in which properties are returned to the council from outgoing tenants and the amount of work that is required to bring them back to a lettable standard and the delays in getting utilities in place.

Approved projects have delivered 277 new houses to date and following a review of the new supply capital budget, the new build programme will deliver a further 150 additional new council houses, including both new build and open market acquisition additions. This will deliver an overall total of 427 new council houses over the course of the investment programme. The council will develop 116 homes over the programme year with sites starts on developments in Livingston, Linlithgow and Winchburgh over the next 12 months. Funding of £2.002 million has been confirmed for 2024/25 by the Scottish Government via the Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP) to be directed towards helping address temporary accommodation pressures, with a focus on acquisitions and bringing void properties back into use. The funding must be spent this financial year with properties being available for let by 31 March 2025. This funding will be used to enable the council to bring 50 long term void properties back into use and deliver 25 homes through a combination of 19 OMAS units and 6 new build units at Deans South, Livingston.

In the absence of any confirmation of AHSP funding for 25/26 the council is also fully funding a development of 16 homes in Winchburgh. In the event that West Lothian secures a similar amount of funding through the next allocation of £40 million for additional acquisitions in 2025/26, the funding shall be used to support this development.

The West Lothian SHIP was approved at Council Executive in December 2024 and identifies opportunities to develop more than 2000 homes, subject to funding being available. There are a large number of opportunities for affordable housing development in West Lothian with the council receiving regular approaches from RSLs and private developers. The issue remains the lack of certainty over funding.

Despite the progress made and some reductions in homeless applications, the backlogs of homeless households and demand for temporary accommodation remains high and significantly outstrips the supply of social rented homes. There remain high numbers of households occupying temporary accommodation with increases in the number of children as part of those households.

There are a range of different indicators which are monitored to track progress of homelessness and the housing emergency. These are monitored quarterly by the council's Housing Services Policy, Development and Scrutiny Panel and RRTP Board, soon to be replaced by the Homeless Strategy Board. There are key indicators which track demand, supply, throughput and costs and these are outlined in Appendix 2. In addition to these there are a number of operational indicators which are used weekly to track progress in daily operations such as void times, lettings times, homeless case management and hotel usage.

## **Appendices 2**

## Appendix 1 HEAP Action Plan

<b>High Level Action 1 - To increase focus on early intervention, prevention and housing options to reduce homelessness</b>			
Outcome - Working together people who are in housing need are prevented from becoming homeless through early intervention			
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Planned Completion Date</b>	<b>Lead Agency</b>	<b>Update</b>
1. Deliver housing options approach to respond and mitigate the risk of homelessness	August 2024	West Lothian Council	Ongoing
2. Increase partnership with Private Rented Sector and raise awareness of the tenant find service.	August 2024	West Lothian Council	Complete
3. Deliver specialist Youth Housing Options Services working in partnership with Education	September 2024	West Lothian Council	Ongoing
4. Mainstream and develop Young Peoples Emergency Prevention Service to minimise the risk of youth homelessness	September 2024	West Lothian Council /Third Sector	Ongoing
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	Complete
6. Deliver specialist housing approach for young people, people at risk of homelessness due to domestic abuse and people with addictions.	October 2024	West Lothian Council	Complete
7. Conclude development of Housing Options Toolkit and its future modules to improve staffs skills and knowledge	December 2024	West Lothian Council	Complete
8. Upscale Housing First services for both adults and youths and develop new Intensive Housing Support Services (IHSS)	December 2024	West Lothian Council	Complete

<b>High Level Action 1 - To increase focus on early intervention, prevention and housing options to reduce homelessness</b>			
Outcome - Working together people who are in housing need are prevented from becoming homeless through early intervention			
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Planned Completion Date</b>	<b>Lead Agency</b>	<b>Update</b>
9. Review first year of early intervention model to prevent homelessness in secondary schools	March 2025	West Lothian Council	To commence
10. Review Allocations Policy	December 2025	West Lothian Council	To commence

<b>High Level Action 2 - Improving supply and access to affordable housing options and reducing length of stay in temporary accommodation</b>			
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	Ongoing
12. Temporarily increase percentage of lets to homeless applicants	August 2024	West Lothian Council	Complete
13. Use exceptional circumstances to move long standing cases out of unsuitable accommodation	August 2024	West Lothian Council	Complete
14. Implement new charging model for temporary accommodation	September 2024	West Lothian Council	Complete
15. Implement new charging model for supported accommodation	September 2024	West Lothian Council	Complete
16. Instruct tender process for block purchasing of unsuitable accommodation	October 2024	West Lothian Council	Ongoing
17. Review delivery of rapid access provision in hotels and at Blackburn Homeless Unit assessment centre	December 2024	West Lothian Council	Ongoing
18. Crashpad spaces at Blackburn Homeless Unit used to reduce use of unsuitable accommodation out of hours	December 2024	West Lothian Council	Complete
19. Develop a blanket SLA and lease framework for all special lets	December 2024	West Lothian Council	Complete
20. Deliver new build supported accommodation for young people at Almondvale Crescent	January 2025	West Lothian Council	Ongoing
21. Undertake OMAS to increase portfolio of permanent properties by a further 9 properties	March 2025	West Lothian Council	Ongoing

<b>High Level Action 2 - Improving supply and access to affordable housing options and reducing length of stay in temporary accommodation</b>			
Outcome - People in housing need are given a range of housing solutions to find a settled home			
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	Ongoing
23. Maximise the contribution of the private sector and develop West Lothian Empty Homes Partnership	March 2025	West Lothian Council	Ongoing
24. Work in partnership with RSLs to delivery high target lets to homeless households	December 2025	West Lothian Council/RSLs	Ongoing

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

<b>High Level Action 4 - Implement actions to ensure people can access the required levels of support</b>			
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)	December 2024	West Lothian Council	Complete
32. Implement new approach to supporting homeless households access specialist mental health services in partnership with NHS	December 2024	NHS Lothian	To be started
33. Mainstream Addictions Support services in hotel provision	December 2024	NHS Lothian	Complete
34. Review and reconfigure support services to deliver medium to high level support and ensure statutory support duty is met	December 2024	West Lothian Council	Complete
35. Co-ordinate and ensure the delivery of Trauma Informed training across Housing Need Service	December 2024	West Lothian Council	Complete
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	Ongoing



## Appendix 2 High Level Performance Indicators

1. Percentage of Tenancy Offers refused
2. Percentage of new tenancies sustained
3. Percentage of lettable houses that have become vacant
4. Average Length of Time in Temporary Accommodation – broken down by types
5. Annual Spend on Hotel Accommodation
6. Quarterly Spend on Hotel Accommodation
7. Quarterly Spend on School Transport
8. Quarterly Spend on Other Homeless Services
9. Number of households initially presenting as homeless or potentially homeless
10. Percentage of Repeat Homeless Applications
11. Percentage of homeless presentations from 16-25 year olds
12. The proportion of homeless households assessed as unintentional who secure a permanent outcome
13. Percentage of homeless households rehoused by RSLs
14. Number of Open Homeless Cases
15. Total number of units of accommodation designated for temporary use