

**Renfrewshire Council  
Scrutiny Board**

**Services to Homeless**

**APPROVED**

by Renfrewshire Council  
2 December 2004

**Report 1: 2004/2005**

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**Renfrewshire Council  
Scrutiny Board**

**Services to Homeless**

**Approved by Renfrewshire Council: 2 December 2004**

Convener: Councillor Terry Kelly (Labour)

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Department of Social Work

## **Scrutiny Board**

### **Review of Services to the Homeless**

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## Scrutiny Board

### Report on the Review of Services to the Homeless

#### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 At its meeting on 21 June 2004 the Scrutiny Board agreed that a review of services to the homeless be included in the annual programme of reviews for 2004/05. The council has a statutory duty to provide services to homeless people in Renfrewshire. In considering the context within which this review has been undertaken it is noted that over 1400 applications were received by Renfrewshire Council Housing and Property Department from individuals and households during 2003/04. Recent legislation has changed the obligations of the Council towards homeless applicants particularly around the provision of temporary accommodation. In addition recommendations from the Scottish Executive Task Force on Homelessness will have a further impact on services in the future.
- 1.2 The focus of the review was initially to consider trends in homeless presentations and then go on to review the Council's duties in relation to legislative changes and wider policy developments and the likely impact on the council's duties from the improving actions set out in the council's Homelessness Strategy. Consideration was also given to the type and quality of temporary accommodation required to meet our obligations and the range and quality of advice provided by our current services. It looked at the effectiveness of working relationships between council departments and the responsibilities of key partners, such as the Voluntary Sector and Health Services, and the relationship the council has with these organisations. The needs of specific groups of homeless people, for example young people who are care leavers, those with addiction issues and rough sleepers were also focused on.
- 1.3 In undertaking the review the board initially heard evidence from Housing and Property Services who provided an overview of the trends in homeless presentations to the department, current strategic and policy developments as they relate to homelessness and then a picture of the operational issues arising from these demands. In recognition of the wider context of homelessness, evidence was also taken from a variety of witnesses, including a national overview and inputs on matters relating to the responsibilities of the Council and Community Planning Partners, the role of registered social landlords and voluntary sector providers for specific groups including young people, addiction and mental health. Views were also sought from the independent sector and service users, however evidence was not made available.
- 1.4 The Board itself has met on 4 occasions to hear and review evidence and consider the issues raised. Organisations who made an input to the Board's deliberations are given in annex 1 of this report.

## **2 Recommendations**

2.1 Having considered the evidence presented and reviewed the current provision, it is noted that Housing and Property Services have an existing Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan 2003-08 which identifies actions with timescales in relation to a number of the areas highlighted by the Scrutiny Board enquiry. As such it is recommended that service improvements are made in the following two ways, firstly that actions already approved by the Housing, Environment and Community Safety Policy Board relating to the existing Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2003-08, which has been submitted to the Scottish Executive, are progressed and monitored and secondly that the Director of Housing and Property Services develops an action plan to address the additional areas for action highlighted by the Scrutiny Board enquiry in relation to services to the homeless.

2.2 It is therefore recommended that progress should be monitored in relation to the following points from the existing Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan 2003-08:

- The increase in the number and quality of temporary accommodation to reduce the need to use Bed and Breakfast accommodation for families as recommended by the Task Force on Homelessness.
- The analysis of the findings from the research commissioned from the Scottish Council on Single Homeless within Renfrewshire should inform the implementation plan for meeting legislative changes and Task Force Recommendations in relation to services to the homeless, such changes to priority need and local connection, yet to come into force.
- The impact of the provision of independent advice and information through the post created at Paisley Citizens Advice Bureau due to start in November/ December 2004 .
- The implementation of the Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme due to commence in November 2004 .
- Improvement in the range of advice and assistance services including written information to homeless people and raising general awareness of homelessness issues.
- The review and introduction of protocols to enhance partnership working with other council departments and external agencies.
- To ensure effective links between Renfrewshire Council's existing Homelessness Strategy and other corporate strategies.

2.3 In addition to the above action points which are already part of the Homelessness Strategy 2003-08, the Scrutiny Board has identified, through this enquiry into services to the homeless, a number of areas that require to be progressed. It is therefore recommended that an action plan is developed to address the following points:

- Ensure high priority is given to reducing and eliminating the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation particularly for families with children.
- Continue to involve service users in monitoring service quality and informing future service developments.
- Provide additional training for staff to ensure expertise in meeting the statutory obligations of the council and awareness of service developments.
- Ensure continued improvement and seek further opportunities for joint working between other council departments and partner agencies, focusing particularly on vulnerable groups including young care leavers, those with addiction issues, those with mental health difficulties and offenders returning to the community.
- Investigate with relevant council departments options for addressing difficulties experienced in relation to securing state and housing benefits for homeless people both within the council and from external agencies.
- Investigate the need for crisis services with our Community Planning Partners for people with health and substance issues.

2.4 It is the view of the Scrutiny Board that the Action Plan should be reported to the Housing, Environment and Community Safety Policy Board and progress on the implementation reported to that Board.

### **3 Background to Review**

3.1 Since the late 1980s the number of homeless applications to local authorities across Scotland has increased significantly. The recent increase in applications in Renfrewshire has come primarily from single person households while applications from other household types has remained steady, mirroring the national picture. In 2000/01 Renfrewshire received 886 applications rising to 1422 in 2003/04. Legislative changes detailed below which take a more inclusive approach to homelessness mean that it is likely we shall see a continued rise in these numbers.

3.2 Local authorities have a statutory responsibility in relation to homelessness enshrined in the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987. Rising levels of homelessness during the 1990's led the government to establish the Homelessness Task Force. After two years of research they made 59 recommendations in the form of a ten-year action programme. Legislative changes have been contained, firstly in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and then the Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003. A fundamental aim of the 2003 Act is that every homeless person in Scotland will be offered permanent accommodation by 2012. Key changes being introduced on a phased basis include the regulation against the inappropriate use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for families with children, the suspension of the test of 'local connection', a new regime to investigate and tackle intentional homelessness and the phasing out of the distinction of priority. This act also places greater emphasis on support services to prevent recurring homelessness.

3.3 Arising from the work of the Task Force all local authorities have been required to produce a Homelessness Strategy to take account of the enhanced duties placed on them. In preparation for the development of the strategy Renfrewshire Council commissioned consultants to carry out a strategic assessment.

Alongside this, local authorities have also been required to produce a Local Housing Strategy that covers all tenures. These plans have informed the development of services locally in recent years. The provision of new funding from the Scottish Executive to implement the legislative changes and Task Force recommendations has enabled the creation of additional measures to enhance the advice and assistance made available to the homeless.

- 3.4 Renfrewshire Council is committed to developing services in line with the long term vision and making Scotland's unique Homelessness Legislation a success. To this end there have already been considerable developments locally.
- 3.5 Renfrewshire Council's Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2003-08 identifies a number of key objectives and specific actions which arise from these. The objectives relate to preventing homelessness, improving the range of advice and assistance available to homeless people or those threatened with homelessness, to ensure that homeless people are given an effective response to alleviate their situation, to develop appropriate and high quality temporary accommodation, to provide homeless people with an appropriate package of support and to work with our partners to provide an effective service to homeless people.

#### 4 Service Developments

Renfrewshire Council has developed a number of services to meet the needs of homeless people. These developments have been informed by legislation and Task Force recommendations. Major service developments are as follows:

- 4.1 Renfrewshire has a well established **Housing Advice Centre** (HAC) where advice on a wide range of housing matters is provided and the council's statutory responsibilities in terms of the homeless legislation are met, by providing reception, investigation and assessment of homelessness. This service is provided on a 24 hour basis. The council also provides mediation, advice surgeries for people with mental health difficulties, a Community Care Panel for people with complex needs and the Homeless Prevention Officer who takes a proactive role in cases where tenants are threatened with the loss of their tenancy due to rent arrears. It is noted the Task Force has also recommended that the Department of Work and Pensions review the operation of certain benefits, and to improve the system in Scotland as it is related to homelessness.
- 4.2 In line with the provision of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and recommendations of the Task Force, in June 2004 the Council agreed that a temporary Housing Advice Development Officer post would be created at Paisley CAB (Citizens Advice Bureau) to offer **independent advice** and assistance to homeless clients or those threatened with homelessness. The Development Officer would also be responsible for the development of a Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme.

Paisley CAB is an independent advice giving agency, with charitable status and run by highly trained volunteers offering free impartial, confidential advice and information. It is a generalist service dealing with a wide range of issues such as housing, benefits, employment and debt. Free legal advice is available from local solicitors.

- 4.3 The key objective of the **Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme** is to develop a mechanism for enabling access to privately rented properties for those on low incomes and aims to provide a guarantee for landlords against loss of rent or damage to property.

It is intended that the scheme will meet the needs of particularly vulnerable homeless people who may not necessarily be classed as in 'priority need', those who do not present as homeless and those applicants to whom the Council has no obligation to provide permanent accommodation.

Research recommended the scheme should be managed independently from the council, as not all homeless or those threatened with homelessness, access traditional services. It is also viewed as an opportunity to deliver this service within a wider support network and may also provide an opportunity to engage with the Private Rented Sector. The Development Officer will also provide a surgery at the Housing Advice Centre.

- 4.4 The **Health and Homelessness** Project, a joint initiative involving the Council, Argyll & Clyde Health Board and Renfrewshire Association for Mental Health (RAMH), was set up in August 2001. The project has a multi-agency approach involving the provision of housing advice and information as well as health services and aims to address the complex needs of rough sleepers and other homeless people. Due to the success of this project the premises are to be expanded in 2004/05.
- 4.5 A temporary post of **Youth Homelessness Development Co-ordinator** was created in June 2004 to co-ordinate youth services, addressing the existing gaps in services in relation to employment, training and education, and identify any other gaps relevant to the issues that young homeless people face. The post will link, network and develop a database of the services that are available for young people, and establish the protocols and procedures with relevant agencies. This post will initially be managed by Barnardo's Paisley Threads Project. A temporary **Prevention/Outreach Worker** post has also been created to work with families and young homeless people or those threatened with homelessness in a preventative role and act as a mediator between the young person and their family
- 4.6 An **Information Pack** offering advice and information on a wide range of matters in relation to homelessness is being further developed.

## 5 Temporary Accommodation

- 5.1 The Scottish Executive have accepted the Homelessness Task Force's recommendation that local authorities should seek to reduce the level of bed and breakfast usage for homeless applicants, particularly in cases where households include children. The approach adopted in Renfrewshire is consistent with these recommendations.
- 5.2 Renfrewshire currently uses a variety of temporary accommodation including 77 dispersed scatter flats which is hoped to increase to 110 in the next twelve months, 45 supported flats, 9 supported places at YMCA managed accommodation, 12 supported places at Blue Triangle Housing Association accommodation project, and approximately 17 bed and breakfast establishments throughout Renfrewshire and Glasgow.

Most recently the council has opened a new accommodation complex of 17 fully furnished family sized flats. These premises were visited by members of the Scrutiny Board during the review.

5.3 **Measures to reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation** are being implemented. The availability of furnished family accommodation and the increase in scatter flats will contribute to this. The Council has agreed to develop a further 20 units of supported accommodation in Renfrew, with phase I to be developed for single homeless. Negotiations are also underway with local housing associations to use a number of their properties as furnished accommodation for homeless applicants on a pilot basis. Five properties will be used initially. Suitable sites for the reprovision of the two supported accommodation projects for young homeless people based in Paisley and managed by YMCA Glasgow and Blue Triangle Housing Association are also being sought. The Council's difficulties in being able to identify suitable housing stock in appropriate locations is reflected in a COSLA consultation across Scotland.

5.4 As well as increasing the units of temporary accommodation available other measures have been introduced to **assist homeless people in temporary accommodation**.

- The provision of fresh fruit without cost has been established in a number of the homeless complexes and the rough sleepers project in an effort to cater to their health needs. It is anticipated that this provision will be extended to all temporary accommodation facilities.
- Appliances in temporary accommodation have been improved in particular with the provision of microwave ovens to allow access to cheaper food packs and encourage healthier eating within a limited budget.
- The council have agreed to provide starter packs in temporary and bed and breakfast accommodation including bed linen and towels and provides initial supplies when moving to permanent accommodation.
- The role of the Accommodation Officers has been expanded to include a resettlement function. The number of posts has also been increased from 6 to 10 with the addition of four posts. Support will be offered by the officers for up to six months after someone has moved into a new tenancy. The aim is assist individuals and families to successfully establish and sustain their tenancy. Support is offered with practical tasks such as furniture, grants, power. This support compliments the support offered by the existing Housing Support Team who provide support to existing tenants as well as those new tenants who have not been in homeless temporary accommodation.
- The pilot of a Health and Homeless Liaison Officer will be established in 2005/06. It is recognised that often families living in temporary accommodation lose contact with various services because of the disruption in their lives and that health, learning and social issues are often not addressed.

The worker will work across health, housing, social work and child care sectors and develop interagency mechanisms to allow services to be tailored to meet the needs of this highly vulnerable group.

## **6. Areas for Further Development**

6.1 Full implementation of the Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 will change the duty to carry out an investigation into the intentionality, of a households circumstances as they relate to homelessness, to a power, the local connection test and in the abolition of the test of priority need for all homeless households by 2012. It is envisaged that this could lead to more homeless applications. In view of this the Council has agreed to undertake research to consider how the implications of the 2003 Act and other factors will affect the demand for social rented housing in Renfrewshire in the longer term, to forecast the temporary accommodation provision requirements and to project levels of new build required in the social rented sector to maintain or improve current waiting times. It is noted that this is also in the context of other demands on the social rented sector such as the continuation of the Right to Buy. The Scottish Council for Single Homeless have been commissioned to carry out this research.

### **6.2 User Involvement**

The Scottish Executive Task Force on Homelessness put those people directly effected by homelessness at the centre of their proposals. The Board recognised the importance of this approach in informing the development of services and attempted to do so within the review itself. It is noted that in the preparation of the Homelessness Strategy individuals were interviewed and focus groups established. Significant user consultation also took place as part of the process of Chartermark accreditation for Housing Advice & Homeless Services. It is important that this principal is maintained in local practice and that service user should regularly have their views sought.

### **6.3 Future Demand**

Despite the work that is already underway to prevent homelessness and sustain households in their tenancies the Board recognises that there is every likelihood that the demand for homeless accommodation will increase as the phased introduction of the Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 continues. Clearly it will be important to quantify these demands and the implication for future housing requirements and service delivery. The Board welcomes the research that will be carried out by the Scottish Council for Single Homeless and the contribution this will make to the local Homelessness Strategy.

### **6.4 Elimination of the Use of Bed and Breakfast**

One of the key recommendations of the Task Force on Homelessness is the elimination of the use of Bed and Breakfast temporary accommodation for families with children by October 2004.

Bed and Breakfast accommodation is unsuitable for families in many ways not least in that it is cramped and lacks the facilities to meet the needs of families and children. While the creation of the Health and Homeless Liaison Officer post will attempted to ensure families remain engaged with key services such as health, education and social care it is the Boards view that it would wish to see families having access to fully furnished accommodation such as that which is available at the newly opened accommodation complex in Paisley.

The Council currently provides almost 90% of families with children temporary accommodation other than Bed and Breakfast within 5 working days. This issue remains a high priority for continued improvement.

The Task Forces recommendation to increase the availability of furnished accommodation is shared as is the benefits of creating links with furniture recycling schemes.

#### 6.5 Access to Key Services through a Joint Approach

From evidence given by witnesses to the Board it became increasingly evident that individuals and families become homeless under a wide range of circumstances and experience a diverse range of difficulties that may result in quite specific needs. As such no single response from one department or agency will be able to adequately meet the needs of those experiencing homelessness or to support households in maintaining their tenancy in Renfrewshire.

In becoming homeless people often find themselves disadvantaged in accessing key services such as health and employment opportunities. Issues related to health become particularly acute for those who are roofless. The model of bringing health services to users, as available at the Health and Homelessness project, is applauded. The strengthening of working relationships between departments and agencies is recognised as key to creating this type of approach and improving the quality of life of those experiencing homeless or difficulty in sustaining a tenancy in Renfrewshire.

#### 6.6 Independent Advice and Information

The Board also noted that homeless people may not wish to access services through traditional routes such as the Housing Advice Centre. To this end it is important that independent advice and assistance is available. Within Renfrewshire this will be achieved through the creation of a Housing Advice Development Officer post at Paisley Citizen's Advice Bureau which is a well established and experienced independent advice agency. This worker will also be responsible for the development of the Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme.

An improved information pack is also being developed taking on board comments from service users about the quality of the written information they had been provided with.

#### 6.7 Provision for Young People

It is recognised that young people embarking on independent living face a number of challenges and that this can be particularly acute for those young people who are care leavers and may not have the emotional and financial support of a family to draw upon. As a consequence new duties have been placed on local authorities to provide appropriate accommodation for care leavers.

Within Renfrewshire there is specialist supported accommodation for young people provided by partner agencies Blue Triangle Housing Association and YMCA. Unfortunately sites have yet to be found for the relocation of these supported accommodation projects.

However it is not only appropriate accommodation that is important for young people. Practical and emotional support is required by many to assist them in successfully sustaining their tenancy. Barnardo's Paisley Threads provides support to young people living in their own tenancy and the Social Work Department has a Throughcare Team dedicated to supporting young care leavers. Housing and Social Work have been working together to create a protocol for young care leavers.

It is anticipated that the employment of a Youth Homelessness Development Co-ordinator will address existing gaps in services in relation to employment, training and education, identify other gaps that exist, network with existing services and develop protocols and procedures with relevant agencies to ensure that all young people have appropriate support plans.

#### 6.8 Support Services

The challenge of preventing homelessness and supporting households in maintaining a tenancy has to be seen within the context of a rise in households with increasingly complex support needs arising from learning difficulties, mental ill health, substance misuse and behavioural difficulties. Such groups can in some instances require considerable packages of care. Within Renfrewshire the Supporting People Grant has made a significant contribution to enabling these services to be provided in recent years. Given recent Scottish Executive announcements about the level of grant available the Board noted the possible impact on the extent of support available arising from this.

#### 6.9 Action to Prevent Homelessness for other Groups

Research indicates that other groups that are particularly vulnerable to homelessness include ex-prisoners and people leaving the Armed Forces.

The New Start project aims to address the housing and rough sleeping issues of prisoners from Renfrewshire who are on remand or nearing release from Greenock Prison. Referrals are made to the Rough Sleeping Team and contact is established prior to release with the purpose of resettlement. This project has recently been shortlisted for a Good Practice and Housing Management award by the Chartered Institute of Housing.

There is also a very close working relationship between criminal justice social work and the housing advice services in relation to offenders returning to the community from prisons across Scotland. A protocol to formalise these working relationships will be progressed.

In relation to individuals leaving the Armed Forces, it is practice for the Welfare Officer from the relevant regiment to liaise directly with the Housing Advice Centre.

### **7. Review of Evidence**

In undertaking the review of services to the homeless the scrutiny board arranged for evidence to be submitted from 11 individuals/ organisations. Evidence was received in the form of a written statement, verbal presentation and then discussion with board members.

Unfortunately while arrangements had been made for evidence to be given by both the independent sector and service users they did not find themselves able to contribute on the day. Each contribution is summarised below through a brief commentary.

## 7.1 Housing and Property Services

Housing and Property Services made two contributions to the board.

The first of these inputs provided an overview of the current context within which services to the homeless are being developed and offered an analysis of the key issues facing Renfrewshire.

A review of the recent national trends in homelessness and the policy and legislative recommendations developed to address concerns over the rising numbers of homeless provided the background to this review. An analysis of the local trends in relation to homelessness echoed the national research. An overview was then provided of the planned developments in services, as detailed in the council's Homelessness Strategy, including initiatives to prevent homelessness, improve advice and information including making independent advice available, increase and improve the facilities in temporary accommodation and plans to continue to improve the quality of support provided to households. In this way a picture of the work currently being developed by Housing and Property Services in collaboration with other partners was presented. The challenges to achieving the objectives highlighted were explored.

The second presentation by Housing and Property Services provided an overview of the operational issues experienced by the service. The breadth of service provided including the range of temporary accommodation services and the out of hours responsibilities were detailed, highlighting the complexity of cases often dealt with and the regular liaison and joint working with other statutory agencies including Health, Police and social Work and voluntary organisations such as Women's Aid, RCA Trust, Renfrewshire Association for Mental Health, Paisley Threads and YMCA.

The Housing and Property spokesperson stated that the department welcomed the review by the Scrutiny Board as this reflected their own approach to continuous improvement and the developments being made in relation to services to the homeless and those at risk of homelessness.

## 7.2 Chief Executives Department - Community Planning

The spokesperson for community planning identified the link between homelessness and the wider policies and strategies being developed through the community planning process with the council's partners. This presentation to the Board reviewed the council's plans as they related to homelessness including the Vision for Renfrewshire in 2010; the Social Inclusion Action Plan; Housing, Neighbourhood and Community Safety Action Plan and Renfrewshire's Local Housing Strategy.

Attention was also drawn to the Scottish Executive's Social Justice Milestones and Target as they relate to this issue including Every Child Matters - reducing the number of households, particularly families and children, living in temporary accommodation- and Every Young Person Matters - no one has to sleep rough.

A theme that was to be returned to by several of the subsequent witnesses, that homelessness is not simply a housing problem, was explored.

The complexity of factors influencing homeless were recognised as including major social and economic factors such as availability of housing and employment, poverty and changing social trends within relationships, and individual factors including low income, the breakdown of relationships, poor mental health, substance misuse and experience of leaving institutions. Those who are vulnerable can find an event in their life triggering homelessness such as bereavement or deteriorating mental health.

This contribution highlighted the need for the council and its community planning partners to develop services which prevent homelessness where possible, provide a safety net for those who become homeless and reduce or minimise the potential for homelessness. To be successful in this it is vital that partner agencies ensure that policy making is not contradictory and that homelessness is considered alongside other policy areas. Some examples were explored. The implementation of the Antisocial Behaviour etc. (Scotland) Act 2004 was flagged up as an areas of potential conflict, highlighting the need for a balanced package of measures to be available from prevention, early intervention, enforcement and rehabilitation. As part of the council's decision to ballot tenants on the transfer to a new housing organisation, services to the homeless will be assured.

### 7.3 Social Work Department

The submission from the representative from social work identified the responsibilities of this department in relation to specific groups including children and vulnerable adults. While some individuals may come to the Social Work Department specifically for advice in relation to housing matters there are particular groups where homelessness is more frequently represented as a difficulty, including young people previously looked after by the local authority, offenders returning to the community and people with mental health problems. The issues faced by social work service users varies depending on the main reasons for social work intervention. Some of the key issues highlighted in this presentation included homelessness being identified as one of the principal reasons for young people becoming detached from services, the disruption and relocation that are an inevitable consequence of temporary accommodation can make the continuation of services for anyone more challenging. The need to provide suitable accommodation for young people leaving care that adequately addresses the complex support needs has been recognised and joint action is being undertaken to address this. Where temporary accommodations requires the sharing of facilities the bringing together of vulnerable people can increase the risk to some service users. It was also noted that difficulties in securing benefits can contribute to rent arrears and immediately starts to jeopardise a tenancy. The spokesperson indicated the need for further work to be done to ensure the provision of the range of services required to meet individual households needs with the necessary protocols developed between departments and agencies.

#### 7.4 Shelter - Spokesperson

The contribution from this spokesperson focused on the key statutory responsibilities on local authorities arising from the 2001 and 2003 Acts. Essentially the council is required to accept a homeless application from every household who they have reason to believe are homeless or threatened with homelessness, that they provide temporary accommodation when necessary, pending investigation, noting that the burden of proof is on the local authority when investigating circumstances, after which a written decision must be issued detailing the decision and if unsuccessful providing details of the right of appeal. The council is also charged with providing adequate advice and assistance to unsuccessful applicant to secure alternative accommodation. It was noted that many local authorities have chosen to fund independent Advice and Information services as has been progressed in Renfrewshire. The use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for families was raised as were issues around the supply and demand of temporary and permanent housing. Developments in service delivery elsewhere in Scotland were presented. Within this submission the challenge of providing adequate levels of temporary furnished units was highlighted.

#### 7.5 Federation of Local Associations in Renfrewshire (FLAIR) - Representative

In making this submission, the representative of the Federation of Local Housing Associations acknowledged its role as a key partner in compiling the Homelessness Strategy and the Local Housing Strategy. The commitment of the members of the Federation in preventing homelessness was reaffirmed and the part that housing associations have played in providing permanent accommodation for homeless households was noted. The increasing role of registered social landlords in the provision of temporary accommodation has been established and was welcomed. Constraints do however exist; like the local authority, housing associations are experiencing a reduction in their stock due to the right to buy; while they are increasingly accessing housing support to sustain vulnerable tenants in their tenancies restrictions are in place over the availability of funding. An area for improvement in the prevention of homelessness identified in this presentation related to the liaison in relation to benefits and improved communication between departments and the registered social landlords. It was noted that the federation currently has management agreements and protocols in place with a range of agencies to provide accommodation for vulnerable client groups. The spokesperson identified a number of challenges and opportunities for housing associations in dealing with homelessness but recognised a multiagency approach on a case by case basis to prevent homelessness or repeat homelessness with quality information available to all as key to addressing the issues.

#### 7.6 RCA Trust, Supported Accommodation - Representative

The spokesperson presenting this submission was able to assist the Board in considering the particular issues that arise for individuals or households where substance misuse is an issue. The input provided an overview of the accommodation service they provide including the supported accommodation project for people leaving rehabilitation centres and preparing them to take on a permanent tenancy and the floating support which supports people in their own tenancy and assists them in sustaining the tenancy. This service takes positive action on behalf of women who have traditionally experienced a lack of services.

RCA Trust works closely with the housing services, housing associations and other departments and agencies in addressing the sometimes very complex needs of individual clients. It was noted that many of the clients experience chronic low level physical and sometimes coexisting mental health issues.

Barriers to routinely accessing health services were reported. The spokesperson noted that a feature of this client group is that they often seek assistance when they are in crisis. While a 24 hour out of hour service is funded by Housing and Property Service, the complex needs presented may relate to medical, psychiatric or substance difficulties. It was suggested that a crisis service which does not currently exist in Renfrewshire may more appropriately meet these needs.

#### 7.7 Blue Triangle Housing Association - Two Representatives

The submission by representatives from a service for the young homeless provided the Board with an overview of the causes of homelessness for this group, the difficulties they face and the needs that arise from these. This service works with all referrals made by Renfrewshire Council's Housing Advice Team as part of a non-rejection policy to prepare young people for an appropriate level of independent living. The complex needs of this group were considered and again highlighted the need for a joint approach to service delivery, including access to employment/ training opportunities. Current thinking, on the way ahead for developing the services to this group, suggests that small residential projects with intensive support would be welcomed as is the notion of shared independent tenancies with flexible floating support. The representatives reminded the Board that service users are invaluable in identifying how their needs can best be met. Benefit issues were raised by the representatives as a barrier to maintaining supported accommodation and to young people establishing themselves in a tenancy and employment.

#### 7.8 Renfrewshire Association for Mental Health (RAMH) - Spokesperson

The service offered by this organisation is based at George Street and provides a comprehensive range of practical and specialist interventions and support for those who are homeless. Staff in this project have experience of dealing with clients with complex needs, who often present themselves to the team. The spokesperson indicated that some of the clients they deal with feel alienated from mainstream services due to previous experiences such as child care issues or eviction. Partnership working with relevant agencies is vital to good service delivery. A strength of this service for clients is access to practical services such as sustenance, clothing, washing facilities and also a comprehensive medical service.

The representative was able to inform of service users perception of their unmet needs which related to a lack of locally based crisis services and the limitations of being offered temporary accommodation in Glasgow based hotels.

The impact of the new Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 was considered. The spokesperson noted that the introduction of Community Treatment Orders, which may result in individuals who do not wish to co-operate with treatment plans, avoid this by abandoning tenancies.

## 8. Conclusion

Throughout this review by the Scrutiny Board of services to the homeless a number of key issues were recurring.

The need to continue closely monitoring the requirement for temporary and permanent accommodation for homeless people within a context of changing legislative obligations. The requirement for joint working between departments, agencies and the voluntary sector to make available the range of services required by families and households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness was acknowledged. The increase in the complex needs experienced by those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness resulting in more costly packages of support to sustain them in tenancies was raised. Negative attitudes experienced by individuals and households who are homeless, particularly when they have other difficulties can make it difficult for them to access services and resettle within new communities.

The Board were of the view that the review was productive in raising issues and directing action in response to these. Housing and Property Services were aware of the issues, but found the opportunity make these explicit, review possible actions and hear the reviews of partners in the context of the Scrutiny Board very helpful. Elected Members on the Board raised the issue of tensions between meeting the statutory responsibilities and policy recommendations in relation to homelessness and having access to the available resources to do so. The review elicited much about the provision of services to the homeless and those threatened with homelessness, but recognised that specific operational decisions are the responsibility of the Director of Housing and Property Services in agreement with the Housing, Environment and Community Safety Policy Board. It is noted that a number of the areas highlighted by the Scrutiny Board are actions that have been previously approved by the Housing, Environment and Community Safety Policy Board and submitted to the Scottish Executive in the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2003-08.

In addition to the actions already being progressed by Housing and Property Services arising from the Homelessness Strategy, the Scrutiny Board enquiry has identified a further 6 points for action. These are detailed in section 2.3 of this report. It is proposed that these actions are reported to the Housing, Environment and Community Safety Policy Board and that progress on implementation is monitored by that Board.

**Evidence Submitted on behalf of:**

Housing and Property Services

Chief Executives Department

Social Work Department

Shelter Scotland

FLAIR - Federation of Local Associations in Renfrewshire

RCA Trust - Supported Accommodation

Blue Triangle

RAMH - Renfrewshire Association for Mental Health