

Visions for young people and housing: Giving young PPL the best start in life

July 2016

Recent economic, social and political change has resulted in greater uncertainty in the housing options of young people in Scotland and across the UK. Young people make up a large proportion of communities. In West Dunbartonshire 12% of the population is made up of people ages 16 to 24.

Many young people come across all sorts of obstacles when trying to access and maintain suitable housing. West Dunbartonshire Council aims to ensure all young people have access to a full range of housing services and affordable housing that is suitable to their needs. The council also aims to ensure that young people have access to appropriate support to help them maintain their tenancy.

All young people face challenges in life as they grow up and develop into adulthood. Some young people have to overcome additional challenges and barriers, and have additional support needs that require to be met. By working in partnership with internal and external partners the council aims to help young people with the transition into adulthood.

West Dunbartonshire Council aims to be more engaged with young people and listen to what is important to them. One way to do this is through education. The council should speak to the schools and work with the employability sector. Allow young people to gain the skills and confidence to maintain a house by understanding life skills.

West Dunbartonshire Council has a Young Persons' and Families' Mediation Service, the main objective of the service is to reduce the number of young people, aged between 16 and 25 years of age, becoming homeless.

Housing Options

Delivery of a comprehensive Housing Options service is a key delivery priority for West Dunbartonshire Council and is outlined in the Local Housing Strategy 2017 – 2022. Housing options is not just about providing good quality advice but about working around the person to help them gain the skills and knowledge to make an informed choice about their own housing.

The affordability of the different housing sectors can make access to housing more difficult for young people than other age groups. Housing options will help young people face the challenges and barriers in a comprehensive approach which can involve multiple and varied actions to achieve sustainable housing outcomes for individual customers

As a council we need to be innovative when looking at the housing options available to young people. The council is exploring options such as shared tenancies and youth champions in helping young people access housing and maintain their tenancies.

Legislative Framework

The following acts govern young people and housing

- Housing (Scotland) Act 2014
- Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003

- Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
- The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 (as amended)
- The Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009
- The Support and Assistance of Young People Leaving Care (Scotland) Regulations 2004

The Scottish Social Housing Charter fulfils an element of the Council's requirements and evidences continued improvements across housing services for the benefit of tenants and other customers. Outcomes and standards are set by the charter that social landlords are trying to achieve for tenants and other customers of housing services.

Whilst they are all relevant to young people it is important that we increase rates of tenancy sustainment and reduce homelessness in young people and increase housing options available. Therefore we will develop a series of actions and apply local targets to ensure this happens

As a local authority we have a duty to accommodate anyone who is assessed as homeless. This includes young people. We have a duty to provide advice and assistance, to assess support needs and ensure the needs are met. West Dunbartonshire Council also has a duty to ensure appropriate permanent accommodation is provided.

Through legislation we work with care leavers who are prepared, encouraged and supported to leave care on a planned basis. By following a Care Leaver housing protocol we hope to ensure that the young person is assisted to live in the most appropriate sustainable housing. This also helps to ensure that the young person does not present as homeless.

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 received Royal Assent on 27 March 2014. The act brings about changes which are all designed to promote, support and safeguard the wellbeing of children and young people in Scotland.

The act places new duties on Scottish ministers and the wider public sector in relation to the rights of children set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) when undertaking strategic planning and service delivery.

The act includes key parts of the 'Getting It Right for Every Child' (GIRFEC) approach, and puts the much of the GIRFEC approach onto a legislative framework which puts the Young Person at the centre. Part 9 of the Act, corporate parenting, requires all agencies involved with a Young person to meet their corporate parenting responsibilities, to plan and provide the best standard of support possible for our Young People.

As a result of the act looked after young people are encouraged to remain in care as long as possible and can stay in their placement beyond the age of 16. In certain circumstances, continuing care may allow a Young Person to remain in a placement until 21. In addition the age, care leavers can request support ('aftercare') from local authorities has been extended from 21 to 26 years old.

Strategic Links

With the introduction of **The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014**, West Dunbartonshire Council launched its corporate parenting strategy in 2015 with the theme of "unconditional care".

The council recognises that under part 9 of the ACT (corporate parenting) All council departments, third sector and voluntary agencies involved with Looked After or Accommodated Young People have a duty to provide for their wellbeing.

The Act encourages us to regard Young People leaving care as “our own” and all agencies involved with Young People should ask themselves, “would this be good enough for my child?”.

In ensuring the wellbeing of care leavers we recognise that the responsibility sits across all of those agencies that may be around a Young person, that does not just mean social care and housing but extends to leisure services and very agency our care leavers may experience.

We know that leaving care is not an event, it is a journey that takes place over time and the agencies involved with a care leaver through that journey can change. Corporate parents must be fully aware of what they can do to assist care leavers on that journey.

West Dunbartonshire supports the Scottish Care Leavers Covenant. The Covenant supports corporate parents to fully and meaningfully implement Staying Put Scotland Guidance³ and Part 11 (Continuing Care) of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, to ensure that young people only move on from care when they are ready to make the transition in a positive and sustained way. West Dunbartonshire Council will be signing up to this later in 2016.

The Local Housing Strategy 2017-2022 (LHS) identifies the housing issues that affect communities of West Dunbartonshire Council and set out an action plan for tackling these over the period of the strategy. Homelessness strategies are now incorporated within the Local Housing Strategy. However some local authorities will still have their own Homelessness Strategy. Some of the key actions to take forward from the LHS are;

The current **Homelessness strategy 2013-2016** is due to be updated this year. The new Homelessness Strategy will include the merging of the current homelessness strategy and the **Temporary Accommodation Strategy 2012 – 2013**.

The planning and delivery of good quality housing and appropriate advice and information services in West Dunbartonshire embraces the principles of equal opportunities. The Councils Equality Scheme sets out how the Council will meet objectives in relation to race, disability, gender, age, religion & belief, sexual orientation and transgender status.

Equal Opportunities

The Equality Act 2010 replaced all previous equality legislation such as the Race Relations Act, Disability Discrimination Act and Sex Discrimination Act. The act came into force on 1 October 2010 and provides a legal framework to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all. It simplifies, strengthens and removes inconsistencies in the current legislation to provide Britain with a new discrimination law which protects individuals from unfair treatment and promotes a fair and more equal society.

The act covers nine protected characteristics, which cannot be used as a reason to treat people unfairly. Every person has at least one of the protected characteristics, so the act protects everyone against unfair treatment. The protected characteristics are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

Working Together

Housing young people and preventing homelessness is not just down to the housing services. Corporate Parenting is defined in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 as: *“the formal and local partnerships between all services responsible for working together to meet the needs of looked after children, young people and care leavers”*

Housing services have robust service level agreements and protocols in place to ensure more joint working. These include

- Leaving Care Housing Protocol
- Common Approach to Tenancy Sustainment between West Dunbartonshire council and the local RSLs
- Health and Homelessness protocol with Addiction Services
- Young Persons Mental Health and housing protocol
- Low Moss Prison Protocol

All of these protocols although may not be directly written for young people do assist young people in dealing with the related issues. These protocols help keep the relevant departments communicating and the young person at the centre.

Young people in West Dunbartonshire

In 2015/2016 in West Dunbartonshire Council 23% of new lets were to young people ages 16 to 25. Of these 23% lets 6% were for young people ages 16 or 17.

Youth Homelessness

Who is homeless?

Over a third of people who presented to West Dunbartonshire as homeless were aged between 16 and 25 years. From the table below it can be seen that the number of young people aged 16 to 17 has decreased from 82 to 55 since 2011/12. The decrease is more significant for young people aged 18 to 25 in the same timescale. Although overall the number of males and females aged 16 – 25 is split evenly, on closure inspection over 70% of 16 and 17 year olds who presented were female.

Table 1: Age of applicants between 2011/12 and 2015/16

Age	2011/2012		2012/2013		2013/2014		2014/2015		2015/2016	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
16 - 17	82	5%	59	4%	57	4%	55	4%	55	5%
18 - 25	500	32%	474	35%	422	31%	372	30%	326	29%
26 - 59	911	59%	790	58%	840	62%	768	61%	702	63%
60+	52	3%	41	3%	46	3%	54	4%	39	3%
All	1545	100%	1364	100%	1365	100%	1249	100%	1122	100%

Source: Scottish Government - West Dunbartonshire HL1 figures

The majority of young people who presented as homeless were single people. 13% of young people presenting had children, most of whom were single parent families where the single parent was female.

Around a fifth of young people who presented as homeless had been in care, half of which had been in care within the last 5 years. Just over half of the young people who had been in care at some point were female. In addition a fifth of those who had been in care at some point were aged 16 to 17 at time of presentation.

Young people and Homeless assessment Decisions

Young people amounted 31% of all homeless assessments carried out, and 24% of households assessed as homeless. The figures for assessments are similar for both males and females, although more females resolved their homelessness and more males lost contact with their caseworker. 12% of young people withdrew their application. More analysis is required on why they withdrew their application.

Why do young people become homeless?

- 51% of young people were made homeless when they were asked to leave
- Over a quarter left due a dispute within the household
- Over half (58%) of these were violent or abusive
- 83% of young people presenting with a reason for homelessness as a violent or abusive dispute within household were female

What are the housing outcomes of young homeless people?

- Three quarters received tenancy from WDC (49%) or an RSL (27%)

- 6% returned to previous accommodation
- 6% moved in with friends or family
- 2% were housed in the private rented sector in a short assured or an assured tenancy
- 1% went to prison
- 1% moved into supported accommodation

Young people and support needs

- 50% were assessed as having a support requirement for basic housing management skills. This is higher than the 29% of everyone assessed.
- 16% had a support requirement for mental health, lower than the overall 25% who had a support requirement for mental health.
- 13% had a support requirement for a medical condition, lower than the overall 19% who had a support requirement for mental

Temporary and Supported Accommodation

West Dunbartonshire have a young person's supported accommodation project that is managed by Action for Children. This project accommodates young people who are homeless who are aged 16 to 21.

For young people leaving care we have dedicated supported lodgings provided and supported by the council's Throughcare services.

Welfare Reform

Welfare reform is creating a huge barrier to young people accessing housing. Not only are they affected by the bedroom tax but they will be detrimentally affected by the introduction of the local housing allowance (LHA) cap. The LHA cap will mean that people accessing social housing will have their housing benefit capped at the level of the local housing allowance. This will be the same as the private rented sector. This also means that single people aged 35 and under will only be able to access a shared room rate as opposed to a one bedroom rate in housing benefit. Young people will be expected to make the rest of the rent up themselves or look at alternatives such as flat sharing. Given the many support needs some young people have sharing a flat is not always an option. This presents a significant challenge to all local authorities going forward.

Key Actions Moving forward

West Dunbartonshire has to move forward on a proactive approach that is person centred. An action plan has been developed that will allow the council to move forwards.

- Ensure that the aims and objectives of West Dunbartonshire's Homelessness Strategy 2013-2016 are completed;

- Develop and Implement a new West Dunbartonshire Homelessness Strategy 2017-2020 that incorporates the temporary accommodation;
- Undertake a review of supported and temporary accommodation in West Dunbartonshire;
- Strengthen partnership with WD CHCP and Employability Services;
- Continue to work in partnership to tackle homelessness in West Dunbartonshire;
- We will introduce a housing options approach to ease access to suitable accommodation for West Dunbartonshire households;
- We will carry out a review of Housing Support in West Dunbartonshire to plan for future service provision
- Continue to mitigate the effects of the changes brought about by welfare reform
- Work with Community Justice Partners to progress the community justice redesign in line with the Community Justice (Scotland) Act 2016
- Continue to develop and roll out the new Low Moss Prison Protocol in partnership with the other agencies involved, with a view to expanding across wider Scottish Prison Service establishments
- Reduce the number of young people presenting as homeless
- Reduce the number of people or repeat homelessness presentations and increase tenancy sustainment levels
- Continue to make use of the private sector as a housing option. For example to increase the number of people who use the rent deposit scheme
- Roll out the new Health, Homelessness and Housing Protocol
- Work in partnership to ensure children are not adversely affected by homelessness
- Develop in partnership an education package that can be rolled out across the local authority