

Homelessness and Gypsy Travellers COVID19 Response

1. Housing Services COVID19 Response

- 1.1. Following lockdown the Housing Service has taken a range of measures to ensure critical services continue to be delivered. This has been aided by national guidance and good practice produced by the Scottish Government, COSLA, ALACHO, Health Protection Scotland, Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and Chartered Institute of Housing. The main service areas involved in the Council's critical service COVID 19 response include homelessness; the support of vulnerable households; support to vulnerable tenants; emergency housing repairs and maintenance; gas servicing; and the repair of void properties. Many non-essential tasks have been put on hold until either ICT equipment is provided to enable homeworking or staff are able to return to offices.
- 1.2. The main risks for the Housing Service is running out of temporary accommodation and loss of Revenue through increased rent arrears.

2. Housing Activity During COVID19

- 2.1. Only a few households have been able to move out of temporary accommodation due to the Government initially requesting house moves to be postponed. Gradually the supply has started to fill and this is a position that has been replicated nationally.
- 2.2. The Scottish Government recognised this problem and has issued guidance setting out the steps that local authorities can take to ensure throughput. The most practical way to address the problem is the use of void housing stock (increasing the supply of temporary accommodation and allocating existing voids).
- 2.3. The Housing Service has just agreed with the Unions a safe procedure for allocating Council houses to those in emergency need and this should help create movement. It is essential that we continue to bring empty properties back into use to ensure that we can continue to provide safe and secure accommodation to those in emergency housing need and attempt to limit the spread of COVID-19.
- 2.4. Those considered to be in emergency housing need are people who are:
 - homeless
 - living in unsuitable accommodation
 - at risk within their current accommodation
- 2.5. Furthermore, the Scottish Government's recent relaxation of house moves and construction sites may also help to ease pressure. The service is currently monitoring the number of available temporary accommodation units on a daily basis.
- 2.6. Since the start of lockdown, Council house rent arrears have increased. The Area Housing Teams continue to maintain contact with council house tenants by telephone, text and e-mail. Tenants continue to contact the Council for a range of urgent housing issues and there is also regular contact made by housing officers with tenants where there appears to be financial difficulties within the household. The main purpose of this contact is to provide

reassurance and to signpost (where necessary) tenants to services/agencies which may be able to offer them financial assistance.

3. Public Protection Intelligence Report COG Questions –Homelessness

- 3.1. Has there been an increase in demand for homelessness assistance? If so, to what extent and has the profile of homelessness changed?** The Council has seen a reduction in the number of homeless presentations since the start of lockdown. There has been a 30% drop in applications between March and June compared to last year. However, the Service is concerned there will be a surge in presentations when lockdown restrictions are eased. The profile of homelessness has not changed during lockdown with the main reason for presentations still being relationship breakdown. The number of homeless presentations for each week since lockdown is detailed below:

Week Ending	27/3	3/4	10/4	17/4	24/4	1/5	8/5	15/5
Presentations	6	5	4	7	7	6	12	11
Week Ending	22/5	29/5	5/6	12/6	19/6	26/6	3/7	10/7
Presentations	7	4	6	11	6	6	N/A	N/A

- 3.2. Are services responding appropriately to meet the support needs of homeless households?** In recognition of COVID 19, contact with homeless households has been maintained by telephone and onward referrals if further action is required. Weekly telephone contact has been maintained with over 100 households who receive a housing support service.
- 3.3. Is there sufficient, suitable accommodation supply, which is available, to meet the current and future needs?** Currently the Council has 10 units of temporary accommodation available for homeless households. Please see above for additional commentary.
- 3.4. Have measures been put in place to support rough sleepers and residents in hostel accommodation to self-isolate?** Fortunately, we don't have people sleeping rough in Moray therefore no additional measures are deemed necessary. Arrangements are in place to enable residents in hostel accommodation to self-isolate. The service has followed the Health Protection Scotland guidance "Core COVID-19 Information and Guidance for General (Non-Healthcare) Settings" in putting these arrangements in place.

4. Public Protection Intelligence Report COG Questions -Gypsy Travellers

- 4.1. What support are you providing and how do you intend to manage any unauthorised encampments? Are there specific considerations for children, older people, pregnant women etc?** Housing Services is currently managing Unauthorised Encampments in the usual way and giving due consideration of the Scottish Government and COSLA framework for supporting Gypsy/Traveller Communities during the COVID19 Pandemic, providing facilities as necessary. During lockdown, more extensive questions are being asked to identify vulnerable groups and we are having in depth discussions about the implications of Covid. Mobile contact details are provided to the encampment so that any issues arising can be dealt with quickly.
- 4.2. What arrangements have you made to deal with the potential requirement to request a holiday caravan site to remain open / to negotiate access to safe stopping places for roadside camps?** There have been no requests to holiday caravan sites to remain open or arrangements to negotiate access to safe stopping places for roadside camps. It is not anticipated that we will see an increase in usual level of seasonal encampments, indeed there have been fewer encampments than normal for this time of year.
- 4.3. Are there any broader issues with providing support or access to services, given the significant challenges the gypsy / traveller community already face in relation to discrimination?** Encampments are being managed in the usual way; residents of the encampment are encouraged to contact the Police. If they are uncomfortable doing so then they can contact our Unauthorised Encampment Officer directly via work mobile.
- 4.4. What support have you provided to your own gypsy traveller sites, e.g. access to financial assistance, emergency food provision, education, addressing VAWG etc?** There are no local authority gypsy traveller sites in Moray.
- 4.5. Are you satisfied that all partner agencies are working together to support the gypsy traveller community who have themselves been identified as a community at increased risk?** Housing Services is satisfied that all partner agencies are working together to support the gypsy traveller community who have themselves been identified as a community at increased risk.

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