

Agenda Item 4(i)

Schedule 1

1. We are proposing to suspend local connection referrals between Scottish local authorities to remove barriers people face to accessing the support they need. The analysis of the Scottish Government's 2019 consultation on local connection and intentionality demonstrated that there is support for this position, although there are concerns about the potential for increases in homelessness applications and subsequent impact on statutory services.

Please give us your current views about the proposed suspension of referrals.

Angus Council continues to maintain the view that local connection referrals should not be suspended altogether, but modified in a way to allow referrals to continue to be made for applicants, led by their request, to return to an area or move to another area after they seek advice from another local authority. Maximising choice is likely to lead to better outcomes and avoid repeat homelessness. This will also help to avoid situations where someone is rehoused within the area they initially seek advice from but have no support network, and will also prevent people presenting in crisis to go directly to another area or being forced to close an existing homeless application and present elsewhere, in an unplanned way.

As well as the potential increase in homeless applications, there continue to be concerns that applicants will not be able to exercise choice, and will be encouraged to apply as homeless to neighbouring authorities or areas where there are less pressures on the availability of accommodation. Suspending local connection referrals could potentially increase practices of gate keeping.

2. Considering the core content proposed for the Ministerial Statement (see section 2 – paras 31 - 33), please give us any suggested amendments with regard to the:

Section 2 – paras 31 - 33

30. The Scottish Government proposes the following core content for the statement, which is informed by the consultation undertaken to date as well as separate engagement with individual stakeholders and

a further analysis of previous engagement, practice and trends.

31. It is proposed that the **circumstances for modifying local connection referrals** would be: To increase the ability of people who are experiencing or are threatened with homelessness to choose where to apply for assistance; taking account of available evidence on any detrimental effect which may result in terms of the capacity of particular local authorities to meet their homelessness duties, or outcomes for individuals or communities.

32. It is proposed that the general criteria, by reference to which, the power to modify local connection is to be exercised would be:

- To improve outcomes for households experiencing homelessness;
- To increase choice for households experiencing homelessness;
- At the same time, to maintain the capacity for local authorities to fulfil their statutory homelessness duties and their duty to house people in housing need, and to respond to:
 - significant undue pressures related to an increased level of households being assessed as homeless, where this pressure is due in part to the pressure of applications from households with no local connection to the local authority area(s);
 - significant undue pressures resulting from increases to the scale/frequency of homelessness applications from households experiencing homelessness with no local connection to the local authority area(s).

33. This third bullet is in recognition that it is important to balance the desire to reduce burdens and increase choice for people with the need to ensure that these choices are realistic in terms of accommodation and support capacity within local authorities. The Scottish Government plans to monitor this, on an ongoing basis, to determine whether the **capacity of a local authority to meet its homelessness and housing duties** is being adversely affected by any modification to local connection. It is proposed that the factors to be considered would include:

- number of applications/assessments
- number of social lets required to house statutory homeless people and associated impact on waiting lists
- number of households experiencing homelessness in temporary accommodation and time spent there
- sustainability of solutions for households experiencing homelessness
- ability to meet support needs
- ability to prevent homelessness

i. circumstances for modifying local connection referrals (see para 31)

While supportive of the circumstances for modifying local connection referrals, Angus Council is of the view that local authorities should continue to be able to support a person to apply to another local authority for homeless assistance in cases where someone approaches them for assistance but choose to seek housing in another area. This will need to be considered further as part of any guidance developed.

We agree it is important to take account of any detrimental effect which may result in terms of the capacity of particular local authorities to meet their homelessness duties, however further consideration is required as to how local authorities could refuse an application where there are significant concerns around risks for individuals or communities.

There should be consideration of the possible impact on some Councils that may attract a disproportionate number of applicants with no local connection, or on Councils that may have limited capacity to absorb any increase in applications that arise. This is a particular concern in some rural and Island councils where the wider constraints on capacity that they face will make it more difficult, and it may not be appropriate that they should be seen as a destination of choice for any homeless household thinking about a change of location

ii. general criteria, by reference to which, the power to modify local connection is to be exercised (see para 32)

We agree with the general criteria outlined here and are supportive of the consideration of capacity for local authorities to respond to a potential increase in homeless applications.

3. Please let us know about any suggested amendments you have to the factors proposed in para 33 for assessing whether the capacity of a local authority to meet its homelessness and housing duties is being adversely affected by any modification to local connection.

We propose an additional factor: Ability to meet any public protection risks. Further consideration is required as to how local authorities can monitor and report on the ability to meet support needs or public protection risks.

4. As set out in the 2019 consultation, we propose using HL1 data to monitor the impact of this change.

Please let us know of any comments you have on this proposal.

While the existing HL1 data will be able to monitor applications and local connection status, it does not fully capture the support needs of people / any risks and whether these needs can be met.