

Edinburgh aims to end use of B&B for homeless families



DISGUSTING: Homes for Everyone protest outside Abbots House in Leith where families are expected to cram into one filthy room



By
[JAN SWANSON](#)

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COUNCIL bosses say they are aiming to end the use of B&Bs for homeless families and 16- and 17-year-olds within six months.

But that will come too late for parents and children already expected to live in “disgusting” conditions in some city guest houses.

Campaigners who protested outside Abbot’s House Hotel at Leith Links on Wednesday took their case to the council’s housing and economy committee yesterday.

And they argued putting families into B&Bs and having to search for a new place for them to go cost more than meeting the rent arrears on their existing home.

Pauline Nicol-Bowie, of Low Income Families Together, highlighted the case of one family – two parents and three children – who had been evicted from their council house on January 8 and were told they would be in Abbot’s House for two months before being able to move to other temporary accommodation.

The Evening News printed pictures showing dirty sheets, mattresses and furniture inside the B&B. The three children found it too upsetting to stay there and are now living with a relative.

Ms Nicol-Bowie said the family had originally been due for eviction three days before Christmas, but the council had agreed to delay the move. But she said: “I’d like to ask what the cost of the family being in Abbot’s House for eight weeks. We were told families would be in B&B no longer than 14 days. This family has been told eight weeks.

“Arrears on the house when they were evicted were £2000. Would it not have been more cost effective to pay the arrears rather than the cost of the arrears, accommodating them in Abbot’s House and then

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finding them temporary accommodation?

“And when the family eventually are rehoused there’s going to be a massive cost to the Scottish Welfare Fund because they’re going to have to give them furniture to furnish their whole house because all their furniture is going to be dumped by the council.”

She also argued the council should start seeking new homes for people as soon as it was known they were to be evicted rather than wait for the two months’ notice to expire.

She said they had known about this family for even longer than the normal 56 days. “Because of the extension, they had 72 days to find them somewhere to stay, but didn’t look until the day they evicted them.”

The committee approved a list of priorities drawn up by the council’s homelessness task force, including no longer having families or 16- and 17-year-olds accommodated in B&Bs by June 2018.

Other priorities were reducing the number of people in B&Bs, cutting the length of stays in B&B and reducing the number of people sleeping rough.

Housing convener Gavin Barrie said: “Our homelessness services are facing unprecedented pressures, with demand for both permanent and temporary accommodation exceeding supply. Ending the use of B&B for families and young people will be a huge step forward for the city. These are bold outcomes and I look forward to working with officers to ensure we deliver on all the task force’s commitments.”