

Highland's
Homelessness
Strategy

Ro-innleachd
Cion Dachaigh
na Gàidhealtachd

2008/09-2011/12

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Introduction

Ro-ràdh

Highland's Homelessness Strategy sets our strategic approach to tackling homelessness. It sets out clearly what we hope to achieve and how we are going to get there. By doing this we hope to establish a shared understanding, and commitment, to tackling homelessness issues across Highland and provide a clear strategic direction for actions, services and investment.

This Strategy:

- Summarises Highland's homeless issues and the policy context.
- Sets out our strategic aim and the outcomes which will help achieve it.
- Identifies the commitments, including resources, which will deliver these outcomes.
- Illustrates that our outcomes and activities are consistent with achieving national objectives.

The term 'homelessness' is used to describe a number of housing situations:

- Being without any accommodation at all - 'rooflessness'.
- Living in unreasonable housing (e.g. overcrowded or a danger to health).
- Being houseless - living in emergency or temporary accommodation
- Staying in institutions as there is nowhere else.
- Living in insecure accommodation (such as people likely to be evicted; no longer able to stay in the family home; or have only short-term permission to stay with friends and families).

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The Strategic Approach

Modh-obrach

The vision behind Highland's Homelessness Strategy is that homelessness is prevented through proactive co-ordinated working; accessible, appropriate housing and high quality help and advice. That, when it occurs, it is alleviated quickly and effectively through providing efficient, high quality accessible services. That support is available for those who require it to help them live independently or through a crisis. That, when temporary accommodation is required, it is of a high standard and, suitable for the household's needs.

This Strategy builds on the progress of the previous Joint Homelessness Strategy 2003-08 and the joint working that has developed through its implementation.

Since the last strategy, there has been an increase in the number of homeless and housing support services across Highland. There is more joint working between organisations. Policies have changed to assist more homeless households. Services are generally considered to have become more effective. This is felt to be because of there is a greater understanding of the causes of homelessness, the nature of problems and successful solutions / what works.

However homelessness has increased in both scale and the extent of issues that households are recognised as having. Since 2000, the number of households applying

for homeless assistance has more than doubled. Over the same period, pressure on housing has grown – there continues to be a severe lack of affordable housing. This limits access to housing solutions – both temporary and permanent. This lack of housing means that one of the biggest challenges facing Highland is the national '2012 target' to provide all unintentionally homeless households with settled accommodation.

Moreover, access to services to manage or prevent homelessness continue to be affected by the physical and resource challenges of delivering accessible services to people living in the rural and remote areas of Highland. Services, particularly to deal with specialised needs, tend to be concentrated in Inverness.

In addition, as knowledge of the complexities of issues around homelessness has increased, there is an awareness that services need to develop further if issues are to be tackled effectively and homelessness prevented. There also continues to be a lack of understanding generally, and in communities, about homelessness.

This Strategy has been shaped by these issues. It places a much greater emphasis on activities which will prevent households becoming homeless in the first place. It also focuses on making sure services effectively deliver what is needed to prevent

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The Strategic Approach

Modh-obrach

homelessness happening again.

This Strategy aims to **reduce homelessness and provide responsive and effective services**. It will do this by refocusing and developing services so that the following 5 high level outcomes are achieved.

Outcomes

1. **Fewer people become homeless** - A higher proportion of those at risk of homelessness will be assisted through early, effective intervention to prevent the crisis of homelessness or repeated homelessness
2. **Duration of homelessness is reduced** - Those households who experience homelessness will receive a quality consistent service; spend a shorter period of time in appropriate temporary accommodation and be helped to access a wider range of housing
3. **Sustainable re-settlement is secured** - More effective support will be provided to those who need it so that they can live independently successfully and not lose their home
4. **Access to settled accommodation is provided** - All unintentionally homeless households will be entitled to settled accommodation by 2012
5. **Effective joint working** - Effective joint working with external and internal partners and corporate responsibility helps achieve the other outcomes.

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Partnership Working

Ann an caidreachas

The strategy reflects the involvement and commitment of the range of organisations who wish to tackle homelessness on a multi-agency level. Many people who are, or who are at risk of being, homeless are facing a range of problems. Tackling all aspects of homelessness requires many different Council Services, statutory and voluntary / third sector organisations, to work together in partnership. In Highland, there are many with important roles in preventing homelessness and delivering services to homeless people. They are crucial to delivering this Strategy.

This Strategy is set within the context of other strategies developed by key partners and is an integral part of the Highland Local Housing Strategy. It also links to, and complements, the objectives of bodies including The Highland Council, NHS Highland, the Scottish Government and Homeless Action Inverness as well as third sector organisations. The Homelessness Strategy Group is the focus for our partnership activity.

The Homelessness Strategy Group has been in existence for a number of years. Members include representatives from: The Highland Council, NHS Highland, RSLs, housing support agencies; Homeless Action Inverness and the Scottish Landlords' Association amongst others. This group meets on a regular basis and its aims are:

- ensuring a shared commitment to preventing and alleviating homelessness;
- establishing a shared understanding of the issues and solutions;
- ensuring the Strategy's aim is translated into practice and;
- reviewing progress with, and continuing to develop, the Strategy.

Work to achieve this Strategy's outcomes will involve –

- a shared commitment to achieving the outcomes;
- joint working;
- effective communication and information sharing;
- co-ordination of services, limiting duplication and resolving gaps;
- commitment to quality and achieving high standards;
- openness and honesty.

Linked Plans And Strategies - Examples

The following are linked through shared and aligned issues, objectives, actions:

- Housing Highland's Communities – Highland Local Housing Strategy (LHS)
- Highland's Single Outcome Agreement
- NHS Highland's Health And Homeless Action Plan
- For Highland's Children - Plan for Services for Children and Families
- Highland Domestic Abuse Strategy
- Strengthening the Highlands - The Programme of The Highland Council 2009-2011
- The Highland Council Service Plans
- Highland's Employability Strategy (currently being developed)
- Highland Community Care Plan (about to be developed)

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Process for Developing the Strategy

Pròiseas Leasachaidh

Developing our strategic approach involved a number of approaches to make sure the wide range of issues and viewpoints were covered –including:

- Analysing information about homelessness from applicants' case histories.
- Reviewing the many responses to a questionnaire which asked a wide range of organisations and individuals about their views on homeless issues in their area and their ideas for ways to tackle the issues.
- Reviewing Elected Members' responses to a survey on homelessness and their feedback following a briefing on issues and possible solutions.
- Via feedback from 'Speakout' sessions in Highland, taking account of the views of people who had experienced homelessness and services.
- Discussing issues and solutions in discussion groups, involving partners and area representatives, which focused on particular topics. This included on-going dialogue at Homelessness Strategy Group meetings.
- Carrying out research into issues including temporary accommodation and issues around people with particular needs.
- Consideration of homelessness guidance and approaches regarded as good practice.

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The National Context

Co-theacsa Nàiseanta

Homelessness operates in an extensive framework of legislation, guidance and good practice. Appendix 2 sets out a summary of the Council's legislative duties. The current policy agenda on homelessness is very ambitious. There have been, and continue to be, major challenges to implement the changes. With the new legal duties, practices and expectations – in addition to Highland's continuing lack of affordable housing - the task of managing and preventing homelessness is now more demanding and complex.

The 2001 Housing (Scotland) Act placed new responsibilities on local authorities to provide temporary accommodation for all those assessed as being homeless. This has significantly increased use of temporary accommodation. In areas of Highland where there are serious housing pressures, this continues to be a challenge.

The 2003 Homelessness Etc. (Scotland) Act made a number of further changes:

- Extension of the priority need categories and abolishing the priority need test (in 2012);
- Provision of accommodation and support to those found as intentionally homeless- at present this legal obligation does not exist. It aims to ensure that people are given support to address the actions that led to the intentionality decision being made;
- Details of what constitutes suitable accommodation for homeless households, particularly where children are involved. This change has been made.

The Scottish Government considers preventing and tackling homeless as a key part of fighting poverty and inequality. It is implementing policies to achieve this and to make sure that every homeless household gets help according to their need. Their legislative target is that by 2012 every unintentionally homeless household will be entitled to settled accommodation.

Proposed changes in regulations may allow local authorities more flexibility in discharging their homelessness duties – this may enable them to house 'priority' homeless households in the private rented sector, where this meets their needs. Changes may also enable greater use of 'transitional accommodation' (i.e. accommodation with associated support) where permanent housing is unlikely to be sustainable.

In line with Government targets, The Highland Council reduced the proportion of their non-priority homeless assessments by amending its Homeless Policy extending the age groups and types of needs of households who can be considered to be in priority need. This has resulted in more households, with homeless points, being allocated Council and housing association (RSL) housing.

The Council works hard to provide suitable temporary accommodation for households with children or who are pregnant and avoid breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order. However, because of housing challenges and pressures, there continue to be breaches.

The removal of the priority need test and

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The National Context

Co-theacsa Nàiseanta

local connection, together with changes to intentionally homeless duties, mean that the Highland Council will have responsibility for securing accommodation for all these households whatever the difficulties and challenges posed, or the circumstances in which they lost their previous accommodation.

This is a key concern for us as, despite increases in affordable housing investment over recent years, there continues to be a massive shortfall in affordable housing which is projected to continue years into the future, even if house prices fall.

Analysis of the impact of the changes in 2012 in Highland found that without a significant decrease in homelessness - through prevention and sustaining tenancies - and a considerable increase in the supply of social rented housing, along with more flexibility in housing homeless households, there is unlikely to be capacity in some areas to enable us to discharge our duties and meet the 2012 target. Pressure on Highland's social rented, and temporary, housing is anticipated to substantially increase as a result of the 2012 changes.

Our strategic direction moving towards and beyond 2012, comprises a multi-faceted approach to improve prevention and increase supply and choices. We will also continue to promote to the Scottish Government, our need for increased investment to build new social rented housing if we are to meet its target.

Nationally there is a continued emphasis on a preventative approach to tackling

homelessness. Along with expected new Government guidance on prevention, new duties on housing associations, private sector landlords and mortgage lenders aim to improve links to assistance and help to prevent actual homelessness occurring in households who may be evicted or have their homes repossessed (Section 11). The Code of Guidance makes clear that landlords are expected to ensure that their policies do not contribute to homelessness.

Prevention is a vital element of the Highland's Homelessness Strategy. As well as recognising the contribution of a range of players within the statutory, voluntary and private sectors in preventing homelessness, we are aiming towards a strengthening of corporate working within the Council and closer ties with partners - particularly those delivering health services.

The Scottish Government has shifted the emphasis towards focusing public services on outcomes requiring a greater than ever need to evidence the outcomes achieved through housing support and homeless services.

There is no longer ring fencing on budgets for housing support provision and homelessness which aims to ensure a focus on best meeting service user needs. The Scottish Government have emphasised their commitment to the importance of housing support in enabling people to live fulfilling independent lives. Under the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 local authorities have a duty to promote social welfare by making available advice, guidance and assistance

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Co-theacsa Nàiseanta

and the 2001 Housing (Scotland) Act reinforces the requirement to assess provision of housing and related services. It also requires local authorities to have homeless strategies. Government expects these, along with housing support strategies, to be fully integrated into the Local Housing Strategy enabling appropriate housing and support solutions and services to be developed. Because of the importance The Highland Council attaches to preventing and alleviating homelessness, this detailed strategy focusing on homelessness is in place to drive forward solutions.

Highland's Homeless Strategy is in line with the outcomes and approaches recommended by the national Homelessness Monitoring Group, formed by the Government, to assess progress against outcomes and the 2012 target; and provide strategic advice on policy. Their five top-level outcomes¹ are:

1. No-one need sleep rough;
2. Existing homelessness is made more visible;
3. Sustainable resettlement is secured for people who become homeless;
4. Fewer people become homeless in the first place; and
5. The duration of homelessness is reduced.

It is also in line with the Government and COSLA's joint priorities that will support local authorities to address homelessness²:

1. Continued leadership at both political and corporate level including promoting and improving joint working between services;
2. Preventing homelessness where possible, via early intervention;
3. Ensuring that all housing providers work together to maximise the access of homeless households to existing stock;
4. Investing in the right areas to meet homelessness and housing need.

The Scottish Housing Regulator regulates and inspects local authorities' services, including homelessness, to assess their effectiveness and make improvement recommendations. The Highland Council's homeless service was inspected in 2006 and an improvement action plan has been implemented. This Strategy, and actions within the Implementation Plan, continues to take forward the themes identified and expected service delivery standards.

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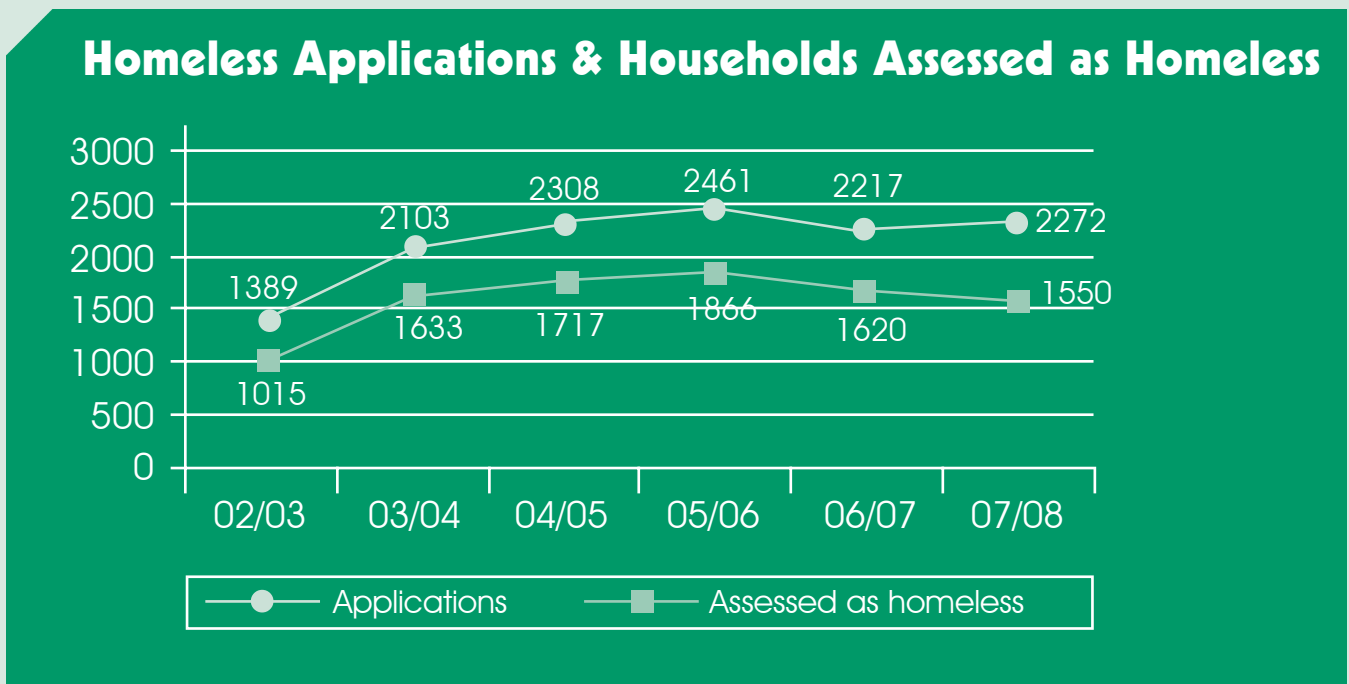
Homelessness in Highland

Cion Dachaigh sa Ghàidhealtachd

This section summarises the nature of homelessness in Highland using information from homeless applications³.

Many households in Highland experience homelessness. This can be for a variety of reasons. In 2007/08, over 2,000 households (2272) applied to The Highland Council as homeless as they felt they had nowhere secure that they could stay. Highland’s homelessness experienced a big increase after 2001 and since then there has been a small but steady increase (Chart 1). Proportionally, in some areas of Highland, homelessness is a greater problem compared to elsewhere in Scotland.

Chart 1 Homeless Trends in Highland



The size and type of households applying as homeless influences the services and housing solutions required. Patterns of who is applying, and why, have, over recent years, been fairly consistent. Nearly two-thirds of people applying as homeless are single person households. Although most of these (around 1 in 4 of all homeless applicants, 820 applicants) are aged between 25 and 65; many are far younger (471 are less than 25 years old). In total, nearly 40% of homeless applicants are less than 25 years old. A significant number had been previously been under the care of a

local authority.

Homelessness is a traumatic and negative experience for anyone but it can have a particularly damaging effect on children. Over 650 homeless applications involved children under 16 in 2007/08. Most of these were single parent families. They consistently make up the second largest group of applicants – almost one in 5 of all homeless approaches. Many of these homeless children spend time in temporary housing—at the end of March '08, 137 households with children were living in temporary housing across Highland.

Footnotes) 3) More information on homelessness in Highland, including the services provided and outcomes for applicants, is available from The Highland Council. See contact on page 23.

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Homelessness in Highland

Cion Dachaigh sa Ghàidhealtachd

Although numbers are very small (5% of applications) there has been an increase in white non-British households applying as homeless.

The lack of affordable housing in many parts of Highland, may partly explain why so many households are experiencing homelessness – particularly around Inverness and other pressured areas. Highland’s Housing Strategy describes, in more detail, Highland’s housing landscape and issues. However the lack of secure housing or loss of housing can be due to a wide range of non-housing issues many related to people’s inability to cope with independent living perhaps because they have community care needs or don’t have the skills to manage. One in 5 applicants in 2007/08 (400) were assessed as having 1 or more support needs. It is believed that, due to under-reporting, there may be more households with unidentified support needs.

Most households had previously been living with family or friends (40%); many had previously been in private rented housing (18%); whilst 11% had been social rent tenants. A considerable proportion (more than the national average) had been long term ‘sofa-surfing’ or roofless. A small but significant number said they had been sleeping rough prior to their application.

Understanding why people apply as homeless helps determine what is needed to prevent homelessness happening. Consistently, the most common reason for people applying as homeless is that they have been asked to leave by family or friends. This accounted for 1 in 4 applicants in 2007/08. Around 1 in 5 gave their reason as relationship breakdown / dispute. Many (13%) were homeless due to action by their landlord – a large proportion due to arrears. Table 1 shows the main reason that applicants gave in 2007/08.

Table 1 Main Reason Given for Applying for Homeless Assistance 2007/08

	Number	%Age
Asked to leave	580	26
Other reason for leaving accommodation / household	318	14
Dispute in household / relationship breakdown: non-violent	285	13
Dispute within household: violent or abusive	207	9
Other reason for loss of accommodation	209	9
Other landlord action resulting in the termination of the tenancy	157	7
Termination of tenancy / mortgage due to rent arrears / default	143	6
Overcrowding	99	4
Discharge from prison / hospital / care / other institution	58	3
Loss of service / tied accommodation	49	2
Forced division and sale of matrimonial home	38	2
Harassment / Fleeing non-domestic violence	67	3
Applicant terminated secure accommodation	33	1
Emergency (fire, flood, storm, closing order, etc)	29	1
All applications in 2007-08	2,272	100

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Homelessness in Highland

Cion Dachaigh sa Ghàidhealtachd

When asked why they failed to keep their last accommodation, 15% said it was due to financial difficulties including debt and unemployment. Many applicants (14%) said it was because of lack of support from their family or friends. A significant number cited mental health reasons, drug / alcohol dependency or unmet support needs. This

highlights the importance of community care related services in preventing homelessness. Nearly half, 44%, cited 'external' factors not to do with the household for their homelessness. This is far higher than the national average. Table 2 shows the reasons applicants gave for failing to maintain their previous accommodation.

Table 2 Reasons for Failing to Maintain Accommodation 2007/08

Reason	Number	%Age
Not to do with applicant household	989	44
Financial difficulties/ debt/ unemployment	348	15
Lack of support from friends/ family	321	14
Mental health reasons	213	9
Drug/ alcohol dependency	198	9
Unmet need for support from housing/ social work/ health services	158	7
Physical health reasons	151	7
Criminal/ antisocial behaviour	126	6
Difficulties managing on own	118	5
Refused to answer	30	1

Multiple responses allowed

Over half of the households applying were already on the Council's allocations list waiting for housing. This is 3rd highest proportion in Scotland highlighting the pressure on Highland's social rented housing.

A small but significant number of households are repeat homeless applications - 96 homeless households (6% of those assessed as homeless) had been re-assessed as homeless / potentially homeless within a year of their previous application. Most

households making multiple applications are single people. This may mean that their housing issue wasn't resolved previously or they had underlying issues causing on-going crises which need to be resolved.

During 2007/8, the Council lost contact with over 1 in 5 homeless applicants which is of concern as we know that many are likely to present as homeless and, in addition, be provided with temporary accommodation again.

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Homelessness in Highland

Cion Dachaigh sa Ghàidhealtachd

Over three-quarters of households assessed as being homeless were considered to be in priority need mainly because they were vulnerable (for example, 123 households were vulnerable due to their mental health) or had children. This amounts to half of all the homeless applicants. This is an increase on previous years and is in line with Government expectations. Most increases are amongst single person households. This assessment means that the Council has a duty to house these households permanently. Table 3 shows trends in homeless assessment decisions.

Table 3 Trends in Assessment Decisions

	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06	06-07	07-08	Change %
Households assessed as homeless	1,015	1,633	1,717	1,866	1,620	1,550	-4
Of these...							
Homeless & Priority Need	673	928	896	1,050	1,146	1,215	+6
<i>Homeless & Priority Need %</i>	66%	57%	52%	56%	71%	78%	
Homeless But No Priority Need	342	705	821	816	474	335	
<i>Homeless But No Priority Need %</i>	34%	43%	48%	44%	29%	22%	
Households assessed 'not homeless'	86	101	123	134	149	156	

Around 1 in 5 homeless households were assessed as not being in priority need. These households were entitled to temporary accommodation, to allow them to seek alternative housing, and advice / assistance to help them do this. Given our current duties and with the target to provide housing for all unintentionally homeless households from 2012, it's important to consider their needs.

Few households (3%) were assessed as being intentionally homeless and so entitled to temporary accommodation and advice /

assistance only. However as some of these had children, the Council continues to have legal duties and will, in about a third of cases, provide social rented housing.

In 8 out of 10 of the priority need cases closed in 2007/08, permanent accommodation was offered. Around 1 in 3 homeless applicants were housed in social rented housing. Far less, around 3% were housed in private rented housing. RSLs are increasingly housing homeless households as Table 4 shows.

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Homelessness in Highland

Cion Dachaigh sa Ghàidhealtachd

Table 4 Homeless Households provided with Scottish Secure Tenancies

	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Highland Council	325	455	427	484	540	500
RSLs	78	113	124	161	215	249
Total Lets	403	568	551	645	755	749

Whilst 428 households were assessed as having support needs it wasn't possible to deliver support to everyone to meet their needs. 137 households, whose homeless case was completed in 2007/08, received housing support.

The most common actions taken to prevent homelessness in households assessed as potentially homeless or not homeless, were assistance to find alternative accommodation and assistance with dealing the landlord or mortgage provider. Compared to elsewhere, households in Highland are receiving less help to prevent them becoming homeless.

Temporary Accommodation

Due to Highland's housing shortage, The Council is under great pressure in relation to providing temporary accommodation both in terms of the quantity and quality. Various types of housing are used including Council owned, leased from private owners, leased from RSLs, Bed & Breakfasts and small scale hostels. Use of temporary accommodation has risen year on year. In 2007/08 over 1100 households were provided with temporary accommodation. At the end of March 08, the average stay in temporary accommodation for households assessed as being in priority need was 5 months. It was over 2 months for those assessed as non-priority homeless.

Table 5 shows the temporary accommodation which is

leased to or owned by the Council or contracted from Bed and Breakfast (B&B) providers. Despite increases, there is a significant shortfall which means there is still a need to 'spot-purchase' B&B's every night. As well as being expensive B&B's are generally considered to be less desirable and for some households, unsuitable. To

Table 5 Temporary Accommodation in Highland

	Room (Hostels & Contracted Rooms)	House / Flat	Total
RSL		70	70
Council	22	83	105
Private Leased		111	111
Contracted B&B Rooms	142		142
Total	164	264	428

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Homelessness in Highland

Cion Dachaigh sa Ghàidhealtachd

provide suitable accommodation, recent research carried out for the Council estimated that, comparing supply to demand (based on 2007 statistics), there is currently a shortfall of 550 temporary accommodation units across Highland. Shortfalls are expected to continue over coming years.

There are a number of housing providers and voluntary organisations which provide supported accommodation or floating / outreach support to people living in temporary housing or who have their own tenancy. More information on who they are, and the areas they operate in, can be found in the Highland Housing Options Manual (www.highland.gov.uk) or at www.streetwise-highland.org

Issues around Homelessness and Service Provision in Highland

Our approach has also been shaped by the issues raised through questionnaires and discussions. This section sets out a summary of these. Given the breadth of Highland's geography, these issues apply to some areas more than others. Moreover, whilst there may be common themes, everyone's homeless situation is unique to them.

- There is a very high demand for homeless services due to a combination of factors including increasing applications; a lack of affordable housing and changing legislation resulting in greater rights for homeless people.
- The continued lack of affordable housing impacts on the ability to provide both temporary and permanent housing – this includes a lack of affordable private rented housing as well as social rented housing.
- The massive shortfall in availability of quality temporary accommodation has led to an over reliance on expensive, often inappropriate and poor quality housing solutions.
- Partnership and joint working around homelessness has improved and there are some excellent examples of good practice.
- By making preventing homeless and early intervention a bigger priority across all partners, and links to services strengthened, expensive crisis responses are avoided. There continue to be some difficulties with discharges from institutions into homelessness.
- Effective prevention and associated support requires a corporate and community partnership approach.
- Whilst homeless experiences point to common themes, everyone's situation and needs are unique therefore responses need to be appropriate and relevant for each individual.
- Many homeless people have or are experiencing other social problems in addition to not having a home. It is vital therefore that services work together - each applying their own expertise to providing a solution.

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Homelessness in Highland

Cion Dachaigh sa Ghàidhealtachd

- There continue to be significant geographical gaps and disparity of access to support. In rural areas in particular, there is a need for innovative solutions to delivering and enabling access to support services.
- There is a need for consistent access to assessments and appropriate support. This includes making sure the wider support, health and social care needs are being assessed and addressed. Greater understanding and better information sharing could help to make sure people access appropriate services. Duplication of support needs to be prevented.
- Greater clarity and focus on the outcomes to be achieved from providing housing support services to individuals will ensure that the Council's strategic outcomes are achieved.
- Although joint working has improved, there can be challenges in accessing community care services. Housing related services can, at times, be left to manage a wide range of clients with community care needs (often complex) without specialist support whilst trying to meet homeless duties.
- By providing links with activities which provide skills, training, confidence etc people have been helped to overcome some of the issues which led to their homelessness.
- People need to move into services and move on when they are ready. Bottlenecks often occur in temporary or transitional supported housing.
- It can be very difficult to get some households to engage with support for their behaviour which presents challenges in discharging legal duties.
- There continues to be a need to help people understand what homelessness is, dispel the myths around homelessness and improve people's attitudes towards vulnerable people.

07

Highland's Strategic Approach to Tackling Homelessness

A' Strì ri Cion Dachaigh

This section explains the broad strategic approach we will take to tackle the issues identified under the key outcomes. The Action Plan at Appendix 1 sets out the actions we are committed to taking forward to achieve these outcomes. The detailed Implementation Plan is available from The Highland Council.

A higher proportion of those at risk of homelessness will be assisted through early, effective intervention to prevent the crisis of homelessness or repeated homelessness

Our Strategic approach has, at its heart, a commitment to preventing homelessness occurring in the first place and for those who have experienced it, preventing it happening again.

We will review our functions and approaches to service delivery so that they have a greater focus on prevention. The skills and knowledge of a wide range of staff will reflect this. Information and advice provision is a key part of our approach.

As homelessness occurs for a wide variety of reasons, avoiding crisis situations requires us to work proactively with other agencies and Council Services. This is particularly important for people who are more vulnerable to homelessness. Our approach specifically targets early preventative intervention with key 'at risk' groups including young people; those with financial difficulties; households being discharged from institutions and private renters. Our aim is that wherever possible households access housing solutions through mainstream routes.

Those households who experience homelessness will receive a quality consistent service; spend a shorter period of time in appropriate temporary accommodation and be helped to access a wider range of housing.

Homelessness occurs in all parts of Highland. Despite improving prevention and support, there will inevitably be people experiencing homeless crisis. Our key priority is to provide consistent high quality services wherever people present their needs. This will include a comprehensive crisis response service so that different needs can be assessed and services accessed. Our activities will also focus on making sure that people are moved out of crisis quickly into housing which meets their needs. This will include increasing access to preferred models of temporary accommodation and reducing use of B&B accommodation.

Crisis response – systems should make sure that:

- everyone can access immediate emergency accommodation;
- everyone can access services to help them access accommodation and services. Assessment, information and referral onto others should be part of this.
- responses are flexible enough to meet people's particular needs;
- there are joint procedures for needs assessment (to make sure people with complex needs can access support) with referral arrangements to make sure they happen; and
- resettlement support is provided.

Scottish Government Guidance

07

Highland's Strategic Approach to Tackling Homelessness

A' Strì ri Cion Dachaigh

More effective support will be provided to those who need it so that they can live independently successfully and not lose their home

A great number of people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness also experience other forms of crisis and often at the same time. For many, their homelessness has been caused by other needs that they have. This can include support needs, needs to overcome problems or needs to develop new skills. By identifying and tackling the underlying problems of those presenting as homeless, people have a greater chance of sustaining tenancies and engaging with support. Without resolving their issues or assisting them to cope, they are likely to become homeless again. Where multiple problems do exist, our approach aims to provide help in a planned, co-ordinated and comprehensive way. To do this we will agree with our partners, and establish, clear 'pathways' and processes to access care and support services.

Providing housing support so that people are able to live independently and avoid becoming homeless again continues to be a key part of our approach. We will have a particular focus on making sure that services provide these outcomes. Some people may only need support at the start of their tenancy, others may need much longer periods of support, a few may need on-going support. Our approach is also concerned with increasing access to services and tackling gaps; making sure that people access the housing support and specialist services that they need and are most appropriate for them, and using resources wisely.

All unintentionally homeless households will be entitled to settled accommodation by 2012

People experiencing homelessness need access to good housing. Homelessness can be prevented through access to good quality housing. Improving access to affordable housing is central to our Strategy. We will continue to increase the supply of affordable and, in particular, social rented housing. Our approach will also increase the range of housing options used to house those who are homeless. This will involve working with the private rented sector so that they have a greater role in assisting us to fulfil our duties.

Effective joint working with external and internal partners and corporate responsibility helps achieve the other outcomes.

Enabling effective joint and partnership working will be a central feature of many of our activities with specific actions, such as training, networking and agreeing routes to accessing services, supporting these processes.

08

Resources

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Significant resources are required to deliver our strategy. Many actions will be funded through existing resources – in other words by making changes to the way we currently work. A number of actions will involve identifying costs and sources of funding. The following section summarises the main financial resources currently involved.

The Council expects to maintain current resources at broadly similar levels over the life of the strategy. The Action Plan has been drawn up based on this resource planning assumption.

Highland Council Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

The Council currently spends around £730,000 a year on managing a range of homelessness accommodation held on the Housing Revenue Account. Around £630,000 of this expenditure is recovered through rent and service charges applied to the properties.

We expect to continue this level of funding throughout the period of the strategy, although there will be variations and increased spend (and as a result, income) depending on area accommodation action plans which may result in changes to the numbers of HRA property being used as temporary accommodation.

Highland Council General Fund (non-HRA)

The Council currently spends around £4.5m a year on homelessness services under this budget. Around £2.6 million is collected from individuals or housing benefit to pay for temporary accommodation. The remaining income comes from the Council's overall budget for services (General Fund). The main activities which are funded are as follows:

	Expenditure £'000
Specialist Homelessness Staff _____	356
Inverness Day Centre _____	344
Temporary Accommodation – Leasing; B&B _____	3,800
Preventing Homeless Projects _____	140
Total Non-HRA Homeless Spend _____	4,640

Specialist homeless staff deliver homelessness assessment, advice and accommodation management services. Expenditure on the Inverness Day Centre includes the staff costs for housing support staff as well as property and management costs of the service.

Highland Council Social Work General Fund (former Supporting People)

The Council also funds a number of housing support services, under the former supporting people grant arrangements, which provide support to households experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. This includes housing support for young people. Annual funding currently is around £2.01 million which funds accommodation based support services and "floating support".

Other Agency / Service Funding

Other agencies continue to provide significant resources to fund homelessness related services. For example in 2007/08 NHS Highland provided funding of at least £126,000 for homeless related health services at Inverness Homeless Day Centre. Substantial funding for non-housing services also helps to prevent homelessness for example, Throughcare /Aftercare Services. Highland's voluntary / third sector organisations, such as the Calman Trust, are also successful at accessing funding from sources such as the Literacy Trust, Youthbank UK; Fairer Scotland fund; charitable trusts and fund raising.

09

Equal Opportunities

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All partners to this Strategy agree to work to ensure equality of treatment, without prejudice or discrimination based on race, ethnic origin, nationality, disability, gender, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, age. We will work in a way that encourages equal opportunities and follows equal opportunity requirements. This includes the way we provide and manage housing and related services. This will make sure that we meet our legal duties set out in Section 106 of the Housing (Scotland) Act.

An Equalities Impact Assessment was carried out whilst developing this Strategy. This resulted in actions to make sure that equal opportunity issues are taken account of - e.g. that anyone who has a particular need is not prevented from accessing services. The majority of these are 'sub-actions' within the detail of the action plan. By taking these forward we will make sure that our services respond to people's different needs. This also includes our commitment to 'equality proofing' policies and functions so that we can assess the impact of these on people with particular needs and in different circumstances.

A copy of the Equalities Impact Assessment is available from the Council.

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Monitoring Sgrùdadh

Progress with actions will be monitored and reviewed by partners within the Homelessness Strategy Group and by The Highland Council annually. As an integral part of Highland's Local Housing Strategy, a progress and update report will be produced annually. Activities will also be monitored more locally including at meetings with partners.

The Strategy will be dynamic and develop further, taking account of evaluations of 'what works' and good practice. This will make sure that it is working as effectively as possible to achieve the outcomes and meet the needs of those who are homeless or are at risk. Commitments may be re-aligned to reflect changes in policy and the availability of resources.

Success and progress will be measured against the headline indicators and targets below. These form part of Highland's Single Outcome Agreement and are reported to the Scottish Government through the Council's arrangements. A monitoring framework, including more detailed activity indicators and methods of including service user views, will be established and reported to the Council and Homeless Strategy Group. As it can take time to understand the impact of activities, we will continue to develop ways to measure outcomes.

Monitoring of contracted services, such as housing support services, is undertaken regularly by the Council as well as by the Care Commission. The Council is establishing a Commissioning Policy which will set out how it will purchase and monitor services. Performance reports are presented annually to the Council.

Measures of Progress

Headline Indicator	Target
1 Reduce the average time taken to complete duties to homeless applicants.	From 18 weeks in 2006/07 to 15 weeks in 2010/11
2 Contribute to the national target on homelessness by increasing the proportion of homeless households treated as priority need.	From 71% of homeless households in 2006/07 to 79% in 2010/11
3 Reduce the %age of homeless cases reassessed as homeless or potentially homeless within 12 months of previous case being closed.	From 9% in 2006/07 to 7% in 2010/11
4 Eliminate the use of unsuitable temporary accommodation	From 2 breaches in 06/07 to 0 breaches in 2010/11
5 Increase the proportion of young THC tenants (16-24 year olds) who sustain a tenancy for more than 6 months.	From 91% in 2006/07 to 95% in 2010/11

What do you think?

Your views and experiences are valuable to us. They will help us know whether the approaches we are taking are successful and whether changes are needed. Please get in touch with us to give us your comments.

More Information

Please contact us if you would like more background information on any of the issues covered in the Strategy or any issues concerning homelessness.

More information on homelessness and dealing with homelessness or potential homelessness is available from the Council and the Council's website:

www.highland.gov.uk/livinghere/housing/homelessness

Contact

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This appendix sets out a summary of the actions which the Strategy is committed to delivering so that the outcomes are achieved. It reflects the key activities which will be taken forward and sits within the wider context of organisations' on-going activities. The Implementation Plan, setting out the detail associated with the actions (such as responsible officers and resources), is available from www.highland.gov.uk or by contacting the Highland Council.

Outcome 1 - A higher proportion of those at risk of homelessness will be assisted through early, effective intervention to prevent the crisis of homelessness or repeated homelessness.

Households will receive a high quality advice first service which aims to prevent actual homelessness occurring

1. Implement a housing options / advice first approach for housing applicants with a view to preventing homelessness and supporting access to housing solutions.
2. Review the homeless management service to improve the way that applications are managed, assessed and people are taken through the homeless system. This will aim to provide a consistent high quality service across Highland.
3. Establish a performance management framework to monitor and review the effectiveness of working practices, performance and training needs.
4. Establish a joint training programme for all housing and housing support agencies focussing on prevention, ensuring a quality and consistent homeless service and tenancy sustainability, and provide training.
5. Re-provision Inverness Day Centre with a view to increasing the range of multi-agency services and activities available from / via there.
6. Gather and use user feedback to influence service improvements.
7. Improve the provision of advice and assistance so that THC officers fulfil their duties under the Homeless Persons Advice and Assistance (Scotland) Regulations and actively assist applicants to find (or retain) accommodation with security of tenure.
8. Provide Highland –wide advice and signposting concerning, complex needs and other challenging issues including rough sleeping.
9. Through local CABx in each area, provide access to consistent, impartial, accurate and quality housing and homelessness information, advice and assistance to Type 1, 2 or 3 levels (i.e. 1 signposting; 2 casework; 3 advocacy etc).
10. THC and CABx to work towards meeting advice standards so that people can access high quality, consistent housing advice no matter whether they live.

Refocus activities to increase the number of people prevented from becoming homeless

11. Review the role of The Highland Council's housing management officers to identify ways in which they can pro-actively prevent homelessness,

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What We Will Do - The Actions

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help to sustain tenancies and work more effectively with those dealing with homeless issues.

12. Establish protocol with Social Work Services to enable support / joint working around prevention activities.
13. Explore ways to provide mediation type services so that people are supported to make informed choices.
14. Improve and develop services by learning from third sector organisations, local partnerships and housing support organisations.

Prevent homelessness arising from high risk circumstances

15. Reduce homelessness arising from private renting by increasing awareness of legal requirements and developing ways to support households retain their tenancies or find alternative housing.
16. Reduce homelessness arising from owner-occupation.
17. Establish ways to use notification of eviction duties to prevent homelessness (Section 11 duties).
18. Make sure that the income of homeless or vulnerable people is maximised by improving access to benefits and money advice services.
19. Explore ways to increase people's skills to manage money / budgeting.
20. Prevent and manage homelessness arising from domestic abuse by ensure women have 24/7 access to safe housing in emergency situations.
21. Prevent homelessness as a result of Violence Against Women by making

their existing housing safe and secure and providing support.

22. Improve access to services to prevent in-migrants becoming homeless or experiencing homeless crises including by making sure there is access to information and advice in a suitable language.
23. All households under 25 leaving home and applying as / indicating homelessness (where appropriate) to get a home visit to inform them and their parents / family about the realities of homelessness, housing options and support them to leave home in a planned way.
24. Support pre-tenancy 'education' and training to encourage and support young people to leave home in a planned way; raise awareness of the realities of homelessness; support attitude changes; increase their independent living skills and through early intervention prevent vulnerable people becoming homeless.
25. Ensure a planned approach to leaving care through corporate parenting.

Prevent repeat homelessness

26. Improve practices to reduce levels of homeless applicant 'lost contacts' – particularly with people placed in temporary accommodation.
27. Improve services responses and services so that the needs of those who are most challenging are met by taking forward recommendations set out in research on people with chronic / severe drinking problems who are homeless.

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What We Will Do - The Actions

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28. Increase use of transitional accommodation (i.e. 'short' tenancies tied to support) with a view to encouraging households to engage with support.
 29. Ensure everyone, regardless of tenure, who needs it, has access to furniture at the start of their tenancy by continuing to provide at least 130 furniture packages each year and access to low / no cost furniture schemes.
 30. Support decoration / furniture projects which provide opportunities to develop the skills of people who have experienced homelessness.
 31. Increase number of fire safety checks for those taking up new tenancies.
- Improving access to meaningful activities, training and employment**
32. Make sure that Highland's Employability Strategy provides access to meaningful activities, training, employment etc for people who have experienced homelessness to improve a wide range of skills and raise self-esteem and confidence.
 33. Make sure that housing and specialist support providers are aware of the wide range of 'employability' and adult learning organisations / opportunities.
 34. Break down the barriers that preventing people taking advantage of 'employability' opportunities.
 35. Encourage and support social enterprise activities which encourage people to access meaningful activities, training etc.

Outcome 2 - Those households who experience homelessness will receive a quality consistent service; spend a shorter period of time in appropriate temporary accommodation and be helped to access a wider range of housing

36. Increase number of properties suitable for use as appropriate temporary housing via private sector leasing; use of social rented housing and new build. This will also reduce use of B&B accommodation.
37. Explore options for providing core and cluster temporary housing for young people.
38. Reduce cost to the Council from use of B&B and temporary accommodation by improving income collection and using less expensive alternatives.
39. Increase standard of temporary accommodation by setting and enforcing management and maintenance standards for all tenures
40. Ensure that there are no breaches of Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) Order 2004.
41. Households in temporary accommodation or with homeless at home points to continue to receive advice and assistance to help them move onto settled housing in a planned way.

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42. Use information collected in application and assessment to place people in suitable temporary accommodation. Where there is potential risk, ensure that this is managed including via information exchange.
43. Reduce average time spent in temporary accommodation to reduce pressures and bottlenecks.

Outcome 3 - More effective support will be provided to those who need it so that they can live independently successfully and not lose their home

Provide access to housing support across Highland and make sure that people receive the housing support / specialist services that they need, and which enable them to live independently and avoid becoming homeless again

44. Develop services so that there is access to homeless and related housing support in areas of Highland where there is no or limited access despite needs. This applies to West Ross, Sutherland, Skye & Lochalsh; Badenoch & Strathspey, East Ross and Mid Ross. Helping young people and those with higher level needs will be the priority.
45. Explore ways to meet the needs identified for homeless and related housing support / support services, where there are significant gaps in services.
46. Develop and implement a strategy for commissioning homeless and related housing support and homeless services. This will aim to ensure that services contribute to the agreed Highland Homeless Strategy outcomes i.e. people are prevented from homelessness; and people who have experienced homelessness are enabled to live, and sustain their tenancies, independently.
47. Develop ways to improve outcome monitoring to inform: how well the strategy and commissioned services are performing; the effectiveness of services for individuals. This will also support joint working through information sharing.
48. Develop and establish multi-agency care and support 'pathways' which reflect homeless households needs and processes to access services and will also ensure that co-ordinated responses can be delivered.
49. Develop an assessment tool and process focused on housing support needs which complements the Single Shared Assessment process (SSA).
50. Improve the Single Shared Assessment (SSA) process for households with community care needs experiencing or vulnerable to homelessness and ensure that it is used. This will involve strategic working between THC SWS, NHS Highland and Housing & Property.

continues overleaf...

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What We Will Do - The Actions

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51. Improve the skills of those triggering or carrying out housing support assessments and Single Shared Assessments (SSAs).
52. Increase housing officers / organisations understanding and awareness of:
 - housing support services and links to accommodation;
 - specialist care and support services (to improve prevention, and signposting and build capacity of housing / support providers to manage the needs of clients with specialist needs).
53. Establish regular partner meetings in each area to discuss homeless and support issues.
54. Explore ways to provide preventative support (e.g. including pre-tenancy) to prepare people and give them the tenancy skills to live independently. This will include exploring ways for households who require low levels of support can access early support to help them manage their issues before crises occur.
55. All households identified as vulnerable will receive a settling in visit.
56. Improve working with mental health related services so that people can receive the support they need as part of a joined up plan.
57. Provide roofless households / rough sleepers with a high quality service which enables them to access services and move out of homelessness.
58. Develop clear remits and procedures for the delivery of homeless support services by THC Officers.
59. Agree practices and protocols to encourage engagement and manage non-engagement and set-backs.
60. Provide accommodation and support to those found as intentionally homeless which aims help them address the actions that led to the intentionality decision being made.
61. Improve the ways that move-on from supported accommodation happens. The aim is that supported accommodation services will avoid institutionalising clients through better use of support plans, 'exit strategies' and linking into other services. Actions will also aim to reduce repeat homelessness.

Outcome 4 - All unintentionally homeless households will be entitled to settled accommodation by 2012

62. Increase access to social rented housing including via the development of new housing (through Highland's Housing Strategy and related housing investment programme) and supporting incentives to people under-occupying social rented houses. This includes reviewing, with a view to increasing, the proportion of social rented houses compared to new low cost homeownership housing being built in Highland.
63. Review operation of Highland Housing Register (HHR) policy to ensure that the

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What We Will Do - The Actions

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- duration of homelessness is reduced; the 2012 target is met whilst ensuring the development of balanced and sustainable communities.
64. Re-assess Highland's capacity to meet 2012 at an area level.
 65. Build on the rent deposit guarantee scheme to provide more settled accommodation opportunities.
 66. Develop— particularly for young people - who are homeless or vulnerable to homelessness - opportunities for house-sharing where appropriate.
 67. If legislation introduced, discharge duty into suitable private rented housing when this best meets needs and suitable housing and support is available.
 68. Improve joint working and liaison with private landlords.
 69. Make sure the benefits system does not discourage landlords or tenants.
 70. Make sure tenants housed in private rented housing can access help (e.g. with benefit applications etc) and support.
 71. Explore potential for tenant referencing scheme so that people have references to help them access private renting.

Outcome 5 - Effective joint working with external and internal partners and corporate responsibility helps achieve the other outcomes.

This is a key element of many of the actions showing under the other outcomes. In particular the following actions will help achieve this:

72. Improve and establish local information sharing and networking covering housing and homeless strategic, operational and service development issues. Networking will aim to support early intervention, prevention and signposting to services as well as improving working relationships and managing local operational issues
73. Raise awareness and increase understanding of homeless issues, prevention and solutions with a view to enhancing the prevention role of a wide range of services.
74. Update discharge protocols and practices with NHS Highland Services; Northern Constabulary; and Scottish Prison Services to make sure people leaving institutions are not discharged into inappropriate accommodation and practices recognise vulnerability and the risks associated with homelessness.

A2

Summary of Homeless Legislation

Geàrr-chunntas de Reachdas Dìth Dachaigh

Homeless legislation requires local authorities to investigate whether the applicant is homeless or potentially homeless. It must also determine whether the applicant has a priority need, whether he/she became homeless intentionally and whether the applicant has a local connection with another authority. The help that the local authority is required to provide depends on this decision. The Scottish Government's Code of Guidance covers the practical implementation of the homelessness legislation including prevention, joint working and assessing applications.

A person is

- **homeless:** if he/she has no housing or has housing they can't occupy;
- **potentially homeless:** if likely to become homeless within 2 months; or
- **intentionally homeless:** if they deliberately did or failed to do anything which led to loss of accommodation.

Under the legislation, "priority need" applicants comprise people who either are:

- pregnant or have children;
- vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness, learning or physical disability, ill health related to pregnancy; after discharge from a hospital, prison or armed forces or other special reason;
- lost accommodation as a result of a fire / flood etc. emergency;
- aged 16 or 17;
- aged between 18 and 20 and either at risk or previously looked after by a local authority;
- at risk of violence or harassment due to religion, sexuality, colour, ethnic origin;
- at risk of domestic abuse.

In addition, The Highland Council regards as being in priority need: those aged 16 – 21; those under 25 who have been formerly been looked after by a local authority; those with several low level needs who are consequently assessed as vulnerable. The "priority/non-priority need" distinction is to be removed by 2012 so that every homeless applicant is, effectively, in "priority need".

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Summary of Homeless Legislation

Geàrr-chunntas de Reachdas Dìth Dachaigh

Decision and legal entitlement to help from the local authority

Local authorities are required to provide a minimum of temporary accommodation, advice and assistance to all applicants assessed as homeless, regardless of whether they have been assessed as being in priority need. They cannot put households with children and pregnant women into temporary accommodation defined as not suitable, unless exceptional circumstances apply.

Decision	Entitlement
Unintentionally homeless in priority need with a local connection	Temporary accommodation until a permanent tenancy becomes available.
Homeless or potentially homeless, not priority need	Entitled to temporary accommodation for a "reasonable" period of time, to allow them to seek alternative housing. Advice and assistance should be given to assist them.
Intentionally homeless in priority need	Entitled to temporary accommodation for a "reasonable" period of time, to allow them to seek alternative housing. Advice and assistance should be given to assist them.
Unintentionally homeless in priority need with no local connection	Can be referred to other local authority for accommodation and are entitled to temporary accommodation until a permanent tenancy becomes available there.



More Information

Please contact us if you would like more background information on any of the issues covered in the Strategy or any issues concerning homelessness.

More information on homelessness and dealing with homelessness or potential homelessness is available from the Council and the Council's website:

www.highland.gov.uk/livinghere/housing/homelessness

Contact

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