

Highland's Homelessness Strategy 2008/09 - 2011/12

Ro-innleachd Cion Dachaigh na Gàidhealtachd

Reducing Homelessness and Providing Responsive & Effective Services

A' Lùghdachadh Dìth Dhachaigheachd agus a' Tabhann Seirbheisean Freagairteach & Èifeachdach

Highland's Homelessness Strategy sets out our approach to tackling homelessness over the next few years. It provides a clear direction for improving and developing services and investment. In many cases, homelessness is not just about housing. Tackling all aspects of homelessness requires many different services – statutory and voluntary, to work together in partnership. Highland's

Strategy reflects the involvement and commitment of the range of organisations who wish to prevent homelessness and deliver sustainable solutions. It was developed by the Highland Council in partnership with the representative organisations in Highland's Homeless Strategy Group. They will also review progress with the actions.

Changes since the Last Strategy

Atharrachaidhean bhon Ro-innleachd mu Dheireadh

Since the last Strategy, the number of homeless and housing support services has grown – there are new services such as Highland's Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme which helps people move into private rented housing. There is more joint working between organisations, policies have changed to assist more homeless households and services are believed to be more effective and dealing with homeless issues.

However homelessness has increased – applications from households for help have doubled since 2000. There continues to be a severe lack of affordable housing making it difficult to provide both permanent and temporary housing for people who need it. There also continues

to be a lack of understanding in communities about homelessness – that it can affect many people living in Highland through no fault of their own and that you don't need to be sleeping on the street to be homeless.

The Scottish Government's policy agenda on homelessness is very ambitious. There are new legal duties and expectations. One of their key targets is that by 2012 every unintentionally homeless household will be legally entitled to settled accommodation.

The task of managing and preventing homelessness is now more demanding and complex. Many services in Highland are aware that they need to develop further if households', often wide-ranging, issues are to be tackled successfully.

The Picture of Homelessness in Highland

Dealbh Dìth Dhachaigheachd air Ghàidhealtachd

Many households living in Highland have experience of being homeless. In 2007/08, over 2,000 households applied as homeless as they felt they had nowhere settled that they could continue staying and call home. This number is similar to recent years.

Patterns of who is applying, and why they are applying, are also similar to past years. Nearly two-thirds of people applying as homeless are single person households. Although most of these (around 1 in 4 of all homeless applicants) are between 25 and 65 years old; many

are far younger. Nearly 40% of homeless applicants are under 25.

Homelessness is a traumatic and negative experience for anyone but it can have a particularly damaging effect on children. Over 650 homeless applications involved families with children under 16 in 2007/08. Many of these children spent time living in temporary housing – often for long periods before they were housed.

Most households had previously been living with family or friends (40%); many had previously been private renting (18%); whilst 11% had been social rent tenants. A small number said they had been sleeping rough. Households applying as homeless more than once are a concern in Highland.

Understanding why people become homeless helps to understand what is needed to prevent homelessness happening. Every year, the most common reason for people applying as homeless is that they have been asked to leave by family or friends - 1 in 4 applicants said this in 2007/08. Around 1 in 5 applicants gave their reason as relationship breakdown / dispute. Many (13%) were homeless due to action by their landlord – often because of rent arrears.

When they were asked why they failed to keep their last accommodation, almost half of Highland's homeless applicants, said it was due to 'external' factors not to do with their household. This is a more common reason in Highland compared to elsewhere. A sixth of households 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. Many others who applied as homeless said it was due to mental health reasons, drug / alcohol dependency or unmet support needs. This highlights how important community care services are. It also highlights the importance of support networks such as families.

Two-thirds of the households applying were found, after their application was

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).

assessed, to be homeless by the Council. Three-quarters of them were considered to be in priority need mainly because they were vulnerable. This assessment means that the Council has a duty to house these households permanently. Around 1 in 5 homeless households were assessed as not being in priority need. This means they were entitled to be provided with temporary accommodation (for enough time to help them find other housing to stay in) and assistance from the Council to help them do this.

In 2007/08, 754 households who had been homeless were provided with Council or housing association housing. Many of them had already been on the re-housing lists of these organisations.

Highland's Homelessness Strategy has been shaped by all these different 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 are responsive and effectively deliver what is needed to prevent homelessness happening again.

We will also continue to make the case to the Scottish Government that we need more funding to build more new social rented housing if we are to meet its target to provide housing for all homeless households, as well as meeting the needs of others on Highland's Housing Register.

What We're Planning to Do

Na th' againn san Amharc

Through our Strategy we want 5 things to happen (our 'outcomes'). The actions we will take to refocus and develop services will help us achieve these. These 5 outcomes and some of the main actions are described below. A full list of the

actions we are proposing to take is included in the main Homelessness Strategy document. You can get a copy of this from the Council's website (www.highland.gov.uk) or by getting in touch with us (contact information below).

1 More people will be helped, through early, effective intervention, to prevent the crisis of homelessness or repeated homelessness.

We will look at what we do and make changes to what we do so that our services are more focused on preventing people becoming homeless.

We will introduce an advice first / housing options approach by providing advice on all the different housing opportunities in an area and help people to take advantage of them. We will train staff in the Council and different organisations so that they know what to do to help people avoid homelessness. We will focus helping households who are 'at risk' including young people; households with money problems; households being discharged from institutions and private renters. We will prevent people becoming homeless time and again by: helping them get support; assisting them with getting the things that make a house a home (such as furniture); and supporting them into employment or activities to give them skills and self confidence. Our aim is that wherever possible people access housing solutions through mainstream routes.

2 Homeless households 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.

Despite improving prevention and support, some people will still experience homeless crisis. Our key priority is to provide consistent high quality services wherever people present their needs. We will make sure that people are moved out of crisis quickly into housing which meets their needs. This will include increasing the amount of higher quality temporary accommodation we have and reducing use of B&B accommodation. The Council is very successful at leasing properties from private landlords and managing them on behalf of the landlord. Private landlords in Highland have already leased 240 properties to us. We will continue to encourage more landlords to do this.

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

For some people, their homelessness has been caused by other needs that they have. This can include support needs, needs to overcome personal problems or needs to develop new skills such as learning how to keep a home. By tackling the underlying problems, people have a greater chance of sustaining tenancies. Some people may only need support at the start of their tenancy, others may need support for much longer. We will make sure that the different services are co-ordinated and people are helped to access them. We will improve the way we assess people's needs and make sure that they get the support they need - wherever they live in Highland - by improving access routes, tackling gaps in services and using resources wisely.

We think that housing support should help people to live independently and help give them the skills to avoid becoming homeless again. We will make sure that organisations provide these outcomes by commissioning services to do this and monitoring whether they are successful.

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

People experiencing homelessness need access to good affordable housing. Homelessness can be prevented through access to good affordable housing. We will continue to increase the supply of social rented housing and will increase the housing options we use. This will involve working with the private rented sector so that they have a greater role in assisting us to house people who are homeless.

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

Making sure there is effective joint and partnership working will be central to many of our activities with specific actions, such as offering training and supporting local networking opportunities, supporting these processes.

What Do You Think?

Dè Ur Beachd?

Your views on homeless services and activities are valuable to us. They will help us know whether the approaches being taken are the right ones and whether changes are needed. Please give us any feedback or opinions by contacting us (contact information below).

We'd also like to hear from you if you'd like to take part in consultation, or other homeless related, events in the future.

If you're a landlord and you'd like to find out about leasing your property to us, please get in touch.

At the moment we are consulting people on this Strategy and the proposed actions. We'd like to hear what you think. The full consultative draft strategy and action plan is available from the contact below and the Council's website. Please send your comments on it by **18 December 08**.

Access for All

Ruigsinneachd dha na Uile

If you need this information in another way, such as large print, Braille or audio or if English is not your 1st language and you need help, please contact us to discuss your needs.

Contact Information

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