



Housing Options Service Policy

What we aim to achieve:

People sustaining independent lives in housing which is right for them.

How we will achieve this (our Objectives)

- a) By providing people with effective advice and assistance about all their available options, empowering them to make informed and realistic decisions so that they resolve their housing issues in a way that is right for them.
- b) By helping people sustain their homes, intervening early to address their immediate and underlying needs to prevent crises, homelessness and its associated problems.
- c) By working in partnership with other services to make sure that people get the right help at the right time.
- d) By providing people with a range of options leading to better and more sustainable housing solutions.
- e) By effective and efficient delivery of services and making best use of Highland's social rented housing stock

Housing Options Service – What we will do:

1. We will provide anyone who has a housing problem or need for housing, with an opportunity to explore their options with a trained Housing Options Officer.
2. All clients and partner services will be treated with courtesy, dignity and respect.
3. Clients will be empowered to make informed choices and decisions.
4. Our service will be person-centred and tailored to the needs of the individual and will provide high quality, personalised, realistic, practical advice and support. Everyone will receive a housing options service appropriate to their needs in which:
 - All their needs - housing, support and other relevant factors which would either prevent them from accessing and sustaining a suitable

housing solution, or from sustaining their current housing - will be identified and their circumstances considered.

- All their options will be identified, explained and discussed;
 - They will receive a personalised Action Plan which sets all options available to them and how they can take these forward.
5. We will provide a comprehensive personalised service by considering and advising people about suitable options in social renting; private renting; home ownership, and about their options for managing wider issues they may be facing.
 6. We will actively signpost and, where appropriate, refer and directly liaise with other services and agencies which can: prevent homelessness; help people with any underlying issues which could result in them becoming homeless and assist them with successfully keeping their homes in the long run.
 7. Our key focus is on identifying opportunities for early intervention and preventing homelessness. People who are at risk of homelessness will get prompt and easy access to help and advice to help prevent them becoming homeless and to remain in their own home. For those who are homeless, we will help them to find somewhere to live
 8. Where we believe someone to be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, they be able to complete a homeless assessment with us. We will continue to work with these clients to prevent issues escalating and provide them with a Housing Options Service so that they can continue to review their choices and secure a satisfactory housing outcome.
 9. Our advice will be as simple and straightforward as possible and provided in accessible formats including through self-service tools for people who want to use them.
 10. We will aim to provide service continuity by giving everyone a dedicated case worker.

Our Underpinning Principles

1. Personal: personalised housing advice will be offered to those in housing need. By building up a picture of each client's situation and suggesting appropriate solutions based on this picture, the advice offered will be realistic with solutions aiming to be successful in the long run ('sustainable'). It will be

tailored to individual needs. We will be responsive to changes in people's circumstances. We treat people sensitively and be skilled in understanding situations.

2. Empowering: We will aim to guide, support and encourage options while leaving the final decision-making firmly in the hands of the person it will affect the most – the client. This is so that people feel they have control over the decisions that affect them and their families. Feeling empowered can motivate people to action and bring a sense of satisfaction.
4. Consistent: we will provide everyone with a high quality service which is consistent with legal duties, national guidance and local policies.
5. Proactive: we will adopt a problem solving & outcome focused approach and our emphasis will be on people's particular needs and the best outcome for them.
6. Resourceful: in some locations it will be harder to find options and some people will find it harder to access housing than others. We will use innovation, creativity and flexibility to find practical options and ways of preventing people experience acute housing need. Sometimes this may involve recommending suitable interim solutions to meet immediate needs whilst the client, with help from ourselves, work towards achieving their housing aspirations.
7. Responsible: Our homelessness duties are an integral part of our Housing Options service. We will support the statutory rights of people who are homeless or potentially homeless by helping them achieve sustainable housing solutions whilst ensuring that public resources are used effectively and efficiently as possible and in a way that ensures statutory rights are maintained. We will support people's right to make a homeless application.
8. Skilled staff : we will support our staff, and provide them with resources, so that they have the skills, knowledge and attitudes to deliver a quality, person-centred, comprehensive service. They will have good 'people skills' and will be able to sensitively understand client's needs and issues. We will work towards embedding an Options and Prevention culture across the organisation and with our partners.
9. Continuous improvement: we will continuously improve our service and will support processes which will help us do this.
10. Proactive engagement: we will take a proactive approach and encourage people, including harder to reach groups, to contact or engage with us before

crises occur. We will work to address low and medium levels of housing need to prevent needs worsening or becoming acute. Examples are ageing or ailing home owners; private renting tenants; and those who are roofless.

11. Holistic service: the causes of housing need are complex and interrelated. We will think and act holistically – thinking long-term towards ways in which people can successfully get and sustain their homes. We will be outward facing by linking with and working together with other services and agencies which can address the root causes of people's housing need, their underlying issues and improve their opportunities. This includes those who can assist with: health issues; advice about jobs, education and training to develop their skills; managing money; transitioning to independent living and developing life skills and, benefits whilst working or not.
12. Partnership & collaborative working: to provide an holistic service we will work in partnership with services with different areas of expertise. We will actively foster successful partnership working and link together resources from a wide range of sources to address shared problems and meet shared outcomes. Effective referral pathways and mechanisms will be used.
13. Prevention and early intervention: we will help people address their immediate and underlying needs and promote and support early intervention in order to prevent problems escalating, later crises and homelessness and support people to continue staying in their homes successfully.
14. Approachable & Respected: we want people to trust and respect us and have confidence in our advice. We also want people to continue to seek our advice at an early stage if they are facing issues again and to recommend our services to others who may be having issues. This is particularly important for people living in private tenancies or homes they own and who may be more remote from services which could help them continue living successfully in their homes.

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