



Prevention of Homelessness Policy

May 2021

This policy can be produced in other formats such as in larger print, Braille or audio-format; it can also be translated into other languages, as appropriate.

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Foreword

This policy aims to incorporate our response to homelessness prevention. This is effectively part of our overall strategy for dealing with homelessness in Orkney.

In seeking to prevent homelessness, we ensure that this aim is mainstreamed through all our policies.

Our other housing policies have been developed to ensure that services for homeless people are both effective and efficient. For instance, our Voids Policy provides for minimum standards to ensure, as far as possible, that tenancies are sustainable.

The Advice and Information Strategy, for example, deals with the broad range of ways in which we inform people of homelessness issues, in particular advice regarding how to prevent homelessness occurring. Indeed the prevention of homelessness, is a major element of our statutory Homelessness Strategy.

This policy document deals specifically with the process of homelessness prevention. This focuses on the need to provide quality services to applicants that endeavour to prevent them becoming homeless as far as practicably possible. In particular, we strive to comply with Scottish Social Housing Charter's (2017) Housing Options outcome and standard in respect of Housing Options:

Social landlords work together to ensure that:

- People looking for housing get information that helps them make informed choices and decisions about the range of housing options available to them.
- Tenants and people on housing lists can review their housing options.

Social landlords ensure that:

- People at risk of losing their homes get advice on preventing homelessness.

These outcomes cover landlords' duties to provide information to people looking for housing and advice for those at risk of becoming homeless. This could include providing housing 'health checks' for tenants and people on housing lists to help them review their options to move within the social housing sector or to another sector."

This document has been produced by Housing Services and is intended to ensure that we:

Act in a manner which encourages equal opportunities and in particular the observance of the requirements of the law for the time being related to equal opportunities" (Housing (Scotland) Act 2010, Section 39).

In reviewing this policy we have taken into account the Counter Terrorism Act 2015 and related guidance and procedures. No specific measures are required in respect of our homelessness prevention policy.

Chair of Education, Leisure and Housing Committee.

Policy Statement

This section outlines the principles that underpin our procedures for dealing with homelessness prevention.

1.1. We ensure that our homelessness procedures and those in respect of homelessness prevention, conform to all relevant legal and good practice guidelines. For example, the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 (as amended) and the Code of Guidance provides a summary of the main legislation and good practice guidance.

1.2. We aim to prevent and alleviate discrimination in homelessness practice. This is based on the protected characteristics outlined in the Equality Act 2010 being age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation or pregnancy or maternity. We aim also to promote equality and to promote good relations between groups, for instance, between different racial groups.

1.3. We ensure that homelessness prevention practice is carried out effectively and efficiently through the following methods:

- By providing applicants with detailed advice regarding their housing options.
- By securing permanent accommodation for qualifying homeless people as quickly as possible.

1.4. We establish close inter-agency links to prevent homelessness, for example, through establishing joint working arrangements with Orkney Housing Association. Inter-agency partnerships are also developed to promote equal opportunities, for instance, the Integration Joint Board's Strategic Commissioning Plan. Finally, inter-agency links will be developed to maximise the supply of lettings from all sources Common Housing Register.

1.5. We will ensure confidentiality and access to information will be in line with our legal requirements, for example, the Data Protection legislation.

1.6. We monitor homelessness prevention practice through an effective performance management system. (Appendix 2 details current issues that are monitored). Indicators to measure performance will be developed in consultation with service users as part of our Tenant Participation Strategy, and information will be publicised in both the Annual Report, Newsletters and any other form agreed with service users.

1.7. We review these procedures formally on a regular basis.

Amendments will be made as required after full consultation with service users and other agencies, for example, Orkney Disability Forum, Orkney Carers Group.

Appendix 3 highlights current consultation procedures.

Introduction

The Scottish Government has key aims in respect of homelessness, including substantial investment through their Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan, a focus on preventing homelessness from happening in the first place and the transformation of temporary accommodation by transitioning to rapid rehousing by default. In addition they seek to reduce the use of temporary accommodation in general. Addressing homelessness is a key part of fighting poverty and inequality.

In addition the Council has a statutory responsibility to prevent and alleviate homelessness, and a duty to ensure that homelessness advice and assistance is available to everybody in their area, including homeless prevention and debt advice, free of charge.

There are various reasons why people lose their home or face the threat of homelessness, such as loss of job or reduction in income, relationship breakdown, family breakdown, family problems, domestic abuse or the onset of mental illness. The reason the majority of people lose their home in Orkney is through family and relationship breakdown. Orkney also appears to have a disproportionate number of young people threatened with homelessness, when compared to other similar local authority areas.

The current downturn in the economic climate, due to COVID-19 and Brexit, is likely to present further challenges, with more people in financial difficulties and at risk of becoming homeless. The already small numbers of affordable private rented housing in Orkney and the current pressure on its availability also reduces the housing options open to people at risk of homelessness.

Good quality housing advice is essential to the prevention of homelessness both in keeping people in their homes and helping them to find alternatives. The Council provides a full range of housing advice to all residents in Orkney. Our aim is to provide housing solutions tailored to meet individual needs.

This policy sets out how the Council intends to prevent homelessness and the recurrence of homelessness. It takes account of the homelessness legislation and the code of Guidance, including the Prevention of Homelessness Guidance issued by the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities in June 2009. It defines prevention activity as the approaches and activities undertaken to secure the most effective, appropriate and sustainable housing outcome for the person concerned, following a competent and person-centred assessment of the risks of homelessness. The Council recognises that effective and sustainable homelessness prevention activity will only take place when partners work in tandem to tackle the causes.

The Council will also continue to work in partnership with other members of the Northern and Islands Housing Options Hub being Shetland Islands, Eilean Siar, Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Moray and Highland Councils as part of the Scottish Government's drive to roll out housing options across Scotland.

In addition we will “act in a manner which encourages equal opportunities in particular the observance of the requirements of the law for the time being related to equal opportunities.” (Housing (Scotland) Act 2010, Section 39).

It underpins our Homelessness Strategy and links to other housing strategies such as the Advice and Information Strategy is very much a partner document to Protocols covering our Young Persons’ Supported Accommodation Projects, Young People Leaving Care, Supported Accommodation for Women and their Children Fleeing Domestic Abuse and the Housing Protocol for Custodial Sentences.

Philosophy and Principles of Homelessness Prevention

Prevention of homelessness is important:

- To minimise the personal trauma associated with homelessness.
- To prevent personal and societal problems caused by homelessness.
- To benefit from the longer term gains derived from creating individual and community resilience; and
- Whilst prevention activities cost money, it will almost always be more cost-effective for local authorities and their partners to pro-actively intervene before crisis occurs, than to respond in an emergency.

From a ‘business case’ perspective, evidence from two studies suggests that a typical example of homelessness can cost £15,000 to the public purse, with a more complex case costing in the region of £83,000. Costs derive from the services delivered to people in the form of advice, accommodation and support as well as costs associated with tenancy failure, void management and uncollected rent arrears. Within the more complex cases, additional costs associated with health and criminal justice services have also been considered and validated on the basis of extensive evidence (**Crisis (2003) How Many, How Much? Single homelessness and the question of numbers and cost, London: Crisis**).

The Council and its partners aim to prevent homelessness occurring or recurring whenever possible through:

- Early intervention – where those potentially at risk are identified and services provided to support the person and their family or other significant relationships before incipient problems or disputes escalate beyond repair;
- Pre-crisis intervention – which can take the form of advice services, mediation services, negotiation with landlords to avoid imminent loss of a home and targeted services at known risk points such as those leaving the through care after care system, prison or the armed forces; and
- Preventing recurring homelessness – tenancy sustainment is seen as key to preventing recurring homelessness where there are problems that cannot be resolved by re-housing alone.

Prevention of homelessness is not an alternative to addressing housing need, and should not be viewed as an opportunity to deny people their rights under homeless legislation.

Homelessness Risk Factors

It is worth considering the main features that increase vulnerability to homelessness to enable a more concerted understanding of what can be done to tackle it and why homelessness prevention is such a cross cutting issue, calling for partnership and multi-disciplinary working.

The factors listed below increase vulnerability to homelessness, particularly when they become interrelated. This means that certain personal factors and/or the absence of protective factors could suggest increased vulnerability to homelessness, particularly where there is also housing instability. These are examples are not a definitive list of indicative risk factors.

Indicators of vulnerability to homelessness - personal factors:

- Relationship breakdowns including between partners and between parents and their children.
- Social isolation/ lack of social networks.
- Lack of self-care, coping or employability skills.
- History of institutional living, e.g. looked after children, care leavers, long term nursing or social care, periods in prison or service in the Armed Forces.
- Domestic or sexual abuse in the household or as a child.
- As a child, missing school, running away from home or residential care, moving house frequently and/or having a drug, solvent or alcohol problem.
- Rape or sexual assault as a child or an adult.
- Learning disabilities, literacy and numeracy difficulties.
- Physical disabilities.
- Substance misuse issues.
- Physical or mental health problems - especially if health deteriorating.
- Death or incapacity of a carer.
- Bereavement.
- History of anti-social or offending behaviour.
- Debt issues.
- Household with no rights to public assistance losing funding or employment.

Indicators of vulnerability to homelessness - housing instability:

- Previous homelessness or part of a homeless family as a child.
- Rent or mortgage arrears.
- Impending eviction or repossession action.
- Insecurity of tenure; being in care/looked after child; tied tenancy with prospect of unemployment, e.g. armed Services accommodation.
- Living in accommodation which is unsuitable for adaptation to meet particular needs.
- History of / and current neighbour complaints.
- Experiencing harassment/feeling unsafe in the area they live.

Indicators of vulnerability to homelessness – resilience / protective factors, which can mitigate against the risks:

- Supportive friends or family.
- Strong social networks.
- Appropriate support services.
- House owned outright or positive equity.
- Savings or access to financial help.
- Competent advice and advocacy.
- In stable employment or with employability skills.
- Personal empowerment.
- Self-esteem and confidence.
- Positive attitudes/good mental health.

Partnership Working

The Council recognises that preventing homelessness is a corporate responsibility rather than just for Housing Services, and is committed to ensuring knowledge of vulnerability to homelessness and prevention activity is embedded across the whole organisation, including through single shared assessments.

Raising awareness of risk factors relating to homelessness and the resilience / protective factors that can make a difference is particularly important in relation to health, education and social work services who are best placed to note and respond to risks before a crisis escalates.

The Council recognises that homeless prevention activity is particularly important in the following policy areas - financial inclusion, housing and council tax benefit administration, education, early years, youth work and child protection, community justice and safety, domestic abuse, health improvement, addictions, employability, community engagement activity and equalities work.

In addition the Council recognises that partners in the Integration Joint Board and also Community Planning Partners, which have an interest in providing housing and / or promoting social equality, such as Orkney Housing Association Ltd, advice agencies, health boards and employability agencies can contribute to prevention activities.

This policy has been developed in consultation with partners who make up the Homelessness Strategic Group. Membership of this group is attached at Appendix 1 Support Services

Signposting Guide

A local directory of services is available in the Orkney Community Directory published by Voluntary Action Orkney. It contains information and contact details of societies, associations, clubs and other organisations throughout Orkney.

Housing Services also produces a Contacts Leaflet which provides a wealth of information. This will be replicated in our online housing options guide which is currently under development.

Housing Support Team

The Housing Support Team is part of Housing Services. Their role is to provide Housing Support services to vulnerable people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and/or who have difficulties maintaining their accommodation.

In relation to this policy, the service provided by the Housing Support Team prevents homelessness through early intervention, pre-crisis support and tenancy sustainment. The Housing Support Team as a service will be essential in assisting the Council meet its prevention of homelessness targets.

Housing support can be:

- Personal support e.g. help with getting into further education, help with getting into employment, help with alcohol or drugs awareness, help to reduce offending or help with parenting and relationships.
- Help to keep accommodation safe and secure.
- Advice on using domestic equipment and appliances.
- Help to arrange minor repairs to equipment.
- Training in maintaining the accommodation and surroundings.
- Assistance to engage with individuals.
- Help with arranging adaptations to cope with disabilities.
- Advice or assistance with personal budgeting and dealing with debts.
- Advice or assistance in dealing with other people and neighbours.
- Assistance with benefit claims.
- Advice or assistance with resettlement into future accommodation.
- Advice or assistance in helping to move.
- Assistance with shopping and running errands.
- Assistance with preparing meals and managing tenancy.

The Housing Support Team is not about doing things for people, but about building skills and confidence so that people can manage for themselves as much as possible. This might mean doing tasks with people for a short period of time, until they feel able to cope without support. It is recognised that whilst many users will benefit from focused, time-limited work, some users of the service may require long-term support.

The service is based in Kirkwall and is available throughout Orkney. It is available across the community, regardless of tenure, location, ethnicity and particular needs.

Early Intervention

The key principles of early intervention are:

- To reduce inequalities.

- To identify those at risk of not achieving their potential and take action to prevent that risk materialising.
- To make sustained and effective interventions in cases where these risks have materialised.
- To build the capacity of individuals, families and communities to maximise their life chances, making use of high quality, accessible public services as required.

Housing Options Approach

A Housing Options approach can make a valuable contribution to prevention of homelessness. In line with the Scottish Government's requirements we will continue to operate a housing options approach to homelessness prevention. Therefore people accessing our service will be encouraged to have a housing options interview and this will include consideration of all options open to them across all tenures.

Housing options interviews are also available on request, through referrals or by invitation following an assessment of risk of homelessness at the point of application or enquiry with the Council or its partner agencies. Housing options interviews will initially be targeted towards higher risk groups identified using the homeless risk factors.

Housing Options Project

We will operate a joint project with Orkney Housing Association Ltd in respect of housing options. At any one time only a proportion of the 700 people on our combined waiting list have an expressed housing need and qualify for a priority pass.

Housing demand is such that applicants without a priority pass may have a considerable wait for housing. The project will look at the information provided to housing applicants when they join our waiting list and will seek to provide more information on the length of time they may expect to wait for a housing based on current statistics.

Gradually contact those people who have no priority pass and invite them in for a housing options interview. This will allow housing staff to determine whether there are more appropriate solutions for them and in turn possibly assist in the prevention of homelessness. Consideration needs to be given to advising applicants within statistics of the likelihood and timescale for rehousing.

Online Housing Options Guide

An online Housing Options Guide is available through our website to assist applicants understand the range of potential options available to them in Orkney.

To encourage early approaches by those at risk of homelessness, when their problems may be less serious and therefore easier to tackle, we endeavour to publicise the availability of advice on housing options in the following ways:

- In letters to applicants.
- Posters displayed in different places throughout Orkney.
- Leaflets freely available in different locations throughout Orkney.

- Piece in Housing News.

Publicity material can be made available in a range of different languages and formats on request.

Personal Housing Plans

We will assist applicants to understand the range of potential options available to them in Orkney, based on their personal circumstances at the earliest opportunity through a housing options interview.

Following the interview, a letter will be drafted to include appropriate advice and assistance based on a realistic assessment of particular needs.

Other care or support needs identified as part of the housing options interview, will trigger a single shared assessment.

Housing Information and Advice

When applicants visit the Housing Service with an enquiry the outcome they wish is not just advice but a home or a resolution to their current housing difficulties. It is important to be able to manage these expectations and to be clear about the broader outcomes from receiving advice, which are a better understanding of housing options, rights and responsibilities and assistance in taking action to resolve a problem.

We will provide advice, which is:

- Person centred and holistic.
- Private and confidential.
- Based on a genuine attempt to diagnose the problem.
- Accurate.
- Provides options.
- Provides for referral.
- Provides follow-up action.
- Provides redress to service users.

Any advice we provide will take account of the Housing Options Guidance (March 2016) from COSLA and the Scottish Government.

Living and Education

In consultation with the Education Service, we will offer, confidential, drop in housing information and advice sessions at Kirkwall Grammar School, Stromness Academy and junior high schools throughout Orkney and Papdale Halls of Residence.

Social Rented Housing

Homelessness and housing crisis can be avoided when people can easily apply for and obtain social rented housing, and understand the rules governing waiting lists.

The Council operates a Common Housing Register with Orkney Housing Association Ltd. A single application form is completed to access either or both waiting lists.

Anyone aged 16 or over can apply for housing. We operate slightly different allocations policies but generally we operate a priority allocation system based on an assessment of housing need. The Council gives reasonable preference to applicants who are homeless, threatened with homelessness, currently living in overcrowded or unsatisfactory conditions, in a house which does not meet the Tolerable Standard or are a large family.

We encourage existing tenants of both landlords to resolve housing need through mutual exchanges. In addition, we operate Removal Grant Schemes to enable households to downsize where relevant. In addition existing tenants may apply for a transfer where their home no longer meets their needs. Again they can be considered by either the Council or Orkney Housing Association Ltd.

Depending on the area there may be significant demand for each property which becomes available. We will investigate the possibility of determining the level of demand for each property type and area and consequently an approximate timescale for rehousing.

House Share Tenancies

A group of friends sharing a private or social rented tenancy can be a good way of securing affordable housing, in particular for young people.

The Council will, in certain circumstances, promote house share tenancies as a housing option. Mediation will be offered at the start of the tenancy or at any change in household, as a means of reducing the risk of disputes or problems during the tenancy.

Some groups of friends will be self selecting, but to assist people interested in sharing as an option but with no one to share with, we will investigate the development of an online 'sharing' notice board to help applicants find suitable people to share with, though the Council will not assume responsibility for the matching process. We also intend to develop an information booklet on the benefits and pitfalls of sharing a home, to help applicants determine if this is an option for them.

Lodging

Lodging in someone else's home is recognised as being a positive and affordable housing option for some people. For home owners and tenants, taking in a lodger, can help to maximise income and reduce housing related outgoings. Mediation may in future be offered at the start of the arrangement or at any point of change to reduce the risk of disputes arising.

We have a policy on Taking in a Lodger for our tenants and will not unreasonably refuse permission for this.

In addition we intend to develop a booklet on lodging as a housing option, and will promote this to applicants and homeowners / tenants. We also intend to consider the

development of an online lodging notice board, where spaces and applicants can be identified. Again however the Council will not assume responsibility for the matching process.

Private Rented Sector

Good quality, affordable, private rented housing can play a vital role in preventing homelessness. We will continue to work with private landlords to raise standards by providing advice and information on their rights and responsibilities, including the private sector landlord registration scheme, mandatory licensing of houses in multiple occupation and the repairing standard. We will also continue to provide a Landlords' forum and produce Lets Update, a newsletter for private sector landlords on an ad-hoc basis. In addition we will continue to offer Orkney Lets an online system which allows private landlords to advertise vacant properties provided they are appropriately registered with us. Also we will be proactive in negotiating with landlords over the terms and conditions of leases.

We will promote the voluntary Landlord Accreditation Scotland scheme, which aims to further improve standards by promoting best practice, ensuring that accredited landlords comply with the Scottish Core Standards for Accredited Landlords and providing access to support, information and landlord training in all aspects of managing residential property in Scotland.

We will offer advice and information sessions for private landlords, to keep them informed of new legislation and to provide tenancy management support where needed.

It is stressed the advice provided does not constitute legal advice and landlords would be encouraged to contact a Solicitor engaged in private practice ahead of taking recovery action etc.

Section 11 Notifications

All landlords and creditors are required to notify the local authority if they intend to take action which may result in the tenant or owner-occupier becoming homeless. A Protocol on Section 11 has been developed in conjunction with Orkney Housing Association Ltd, Orkney Islands Property Developments Ltd and Orkney Citizen's Advice Bureau.

On receipt of a section 11 notification, we will contact the tenant or occupier in line with our protocol on Section 11 and seek to refer to Orkney Citizen's Advice Bureau's money advice service / housing advice service. In addition we will offer a housing options interview and we will consider whether homelessness can be prevented, and provide support or make referrals to other agencies as appropriate. As a minimum, if this offer is refused, we will provide housing advice and assistance to them, provide information on their statutory rights in relation to homelessness and provide information on their housing options.

We will raise awareness about Section 11 with private landlords in Orkney at advice and information sessions, through the online Housing Options Guide, with leaflets available online and in various locations throughout Orkney and through the Landlord Registration Scheme.

Rent Deposit Scheme

This is a scheme where the Council may pay a deposit to participating landlords to help those who are eligible to rent in the private sector. The deposit is held in line with the National Rent Deposit Scheme against any damage caused by the tenant to the flat or furniture or losses such as unpaid bills at the end of the tenancy. The tenant arranges to pay the deposit back to the Council over a period of time. The deposit should be repaid to her/him at the end of the tenancy if there are no outstanding damages or debts.

To qualify for the scheme the applicant has to be homeless or threatened with homelessness – within two months and:

- Have an established local connection with Orkney, and
- Be claiming benefits, for example, income support/job seekers allowance or have no other way of paying a deposit – the applicant will have to complete and sign a financial statement stating this and
- Have, normally, no outstanding debt from when the Council has helped the applicant in the past with housing and / or a deposit and
- Satisfy the housing service that you are able to pay the rent on the proposed tenancy; the homelessness officer makes this decision, though the applicant can appeal if they disagree. Separate information is available on our appeals process.

However we will remain in regular contact with the tenant, and endeavour to provide housing support to sustain the tenancy if required. And if the tenant or landlord requires any housing information or advice this will be provided.

Rent Arrears Policy

The Council has an Arrears Policy which stresses the importance of early intervention in managing rent arrears. We will only ever use eviction as a last resort, as we recognise the devastating consequences, particularly for households with children, the resulting homelessness can have. As well as issuing letters, we aim to resolve debt issues at an early stage through face to face meetings, and will offer support to tenants who need it to manage their tenancy. Any payment plan agreed, will take account of other outgoings and debts. We will also refer tenants to Orkney Citizen's Advice Bureau for independent money advice.

Scheme of Assistance

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 gives powers to local authorities in respect of the production of a "scheme of assistance" for home owners, extending the range of assistance they can provide to home owners to improve or repair their properties.

The Orkney Care and Repair Team, managed by Orkney Housing Association Ltd, is responsible for delivering the Council's Scheme of Assistance which provides advice and assistance to home owners or private tenants requiring information about the repair, improvement or adaptation of their home. The service also manages the Council's Small Repairs Grant utilising its Handyperson Service which provides free labour for essential household repairs subject to eligibility. Referrals will be made accordingly where this service could assist in the prevention of homelessness.

Service User Consultation

We will request information from service users on the interventions, services and assistance which they feel could have prevented them from becoming homeless and use this information to inform policy and practice.

Training Initiatives

We will offer training on awareness raising in respect of homelessness to develop an understanding of homelessness issues.

In addition we will ensure information on the local features of homelessness and other housing issues are available on the internet and in leaflets distributed throughout Orkney to maximise the use of resources.

We will also raise awareness in the community of homelessness risk factors, along with the resilience / protective factors that can mitigate the risks, to highlight that homelessness can happen to anyone and in an effort to dispel common myths and reduce stigma around homelessness. And, we will publicise information about the local features of homelessness in the Housing Options Guide. In addition we will work with Orkney Housing Association Ltd in respect of public awareness raising campaigns on housing and homelessness.

All housing staff are trained under the nationally recognised Professional Development Award currently offered by Shelter. Housing Officers are trained to level 7 and administrative staff to level 6. A training needs analysis undertaken in 2011 indicated that housing staff were well trained in their field and this will continue to be maintained to ensure their knowledge is appropriate for their roles.

Pre-crisis Intervention

Even if we only become aware of potential homelessness at a relatively late stage, pre-crisis intervention can still have an impact and prevent homelessness and in particular, rooflessness from occurring. Pre-crisis intervention can take the form of advice services, mediation/relationship/family support services, negotiation with landlords to avoid imminent loss of a home and targeted services at known risk points such as those leaving the through care after care system, prison or the armed forces.

Money Advice

Orkney Citizen Advice Bureau (OCAB) provides advice and information on how to get help to manage rent arrears, mortgage arrears and other debts. We will refer individuals to OCAB who are in debt or who are struggling to manage their finances, and offer to support them to attend the appointment if they wish. This also applies in respect of Section 11 notices (see early intervention).

Debt Arrangement Scheme (DAS)

The Debt Arrangement Scheme (DAS) is a debt management tool introduced by the Scottish Government. This service is often free, but some money advisers may charge for their services.

DAS can help an individual pay their debts in a managed way, without them having to worry about being pressurised by creditors which could lead to them losing their home.

National Debtline

The National Debtline provides free confidential and independent advice on how to deal with debt problems. They can be contacted on 0808 808 4000. Callers do not have to give their personal details and can remain anonymous if they wish. Their website also provides information and advice on debt and about the service.

Homeowners Support Fund

Homeowners Support Fund is a Government scheme designed to assist homeowners facing difficulties due to the economic downturn. It is a short term solution to assist recovery from a temporary 'income shock' such as reduced working hours or loss of overtime.

Participating lenders are able to defer interest payments and reduce monthly instalments for up to two years. All lenders offering Homeowners Mortgage Support will have the backing of a Government financial guarantee to protect them if the customer ultimately defaults on the mortgage.

We will offer advice regarding eligibility and access to Homeowners Mortgage Support, and will refer to an approved advisor, such as OCAB for further advice.

Support for Mortgage Interest

Homeowners may get help with mortgage interest payments if they are getting income support, income-based jobseeker's allowance, income-related employment and support allowance or pension credit.

This scheme can help pay all or part of the interest on mortgage payments. It won't help pay off capital on the mortgage. Homeowners may also be able to get payments to help pay the interest on loans for essential repairs or improvements, or to buy an ex-partner's share in the home. Support for mortgage interest is normally paid directly to the lender.

We will refer an applicant who may be eligible to Jobcentre Plus or the Pension Service, who will check eligibility.

Mortgage Rights (Scotland) Act 2001

The Mortgage Rights (Scotland) Act 2001 came into force on 3 December 2001. Its purpose is to help households who find themselves in mortgage difficulties. The Act provides, among other things, powers to allow the courts to consider the debtor's circumstances when the lender has applied for a repossession order. It enables the court to decide whether an order should be made delaying the repossession to give the debtor time to find alternative accommodation or, where possible, to get their mortgage back on track.

We will refer applicants, on receipt of a Section 11 notice, or in response to an application for housing because of mortgage difficulties, to OCAB for assistance to negotiate with their lender about the mortgage.

This Act may assist in opening discussions between the lender and the mortgage holder to seek to prevent homelessness. An explanatory booklet on the Act is available from the Scottish Government.

Home Owners' Support Fund

The Scottish Government's Home Owners' Support Fund provides help to home owners in financial difficulties through the Mortgage to Rent and Mortgage to Shared Equity schemes.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme

Under this scheme, the owner's home is bought by either the Council or Orkney Housing Association Ltd, and the household continues to live there as a tenant.

To be eligible under the scheme the owner must have failed to reach agreement with their lender on how to manage the arrears, and must have sought financial advice from an approved advisor, such as OCAB. In addition the value of the home must be no more than the maximum levels set by the Scottish Government. The owner must have been unable to make full payments for at least three months, and must be ineligible for help through other UK Government schemes. The owner must not normally own a home elsewhere, must have lived in their home for the last 12 months, and must not hold capital in excess of limits set by the scheme.

We will contact OCAB where an owner satisfies these and other conditions of the scheme. OCAB will provide money advice and if the household qualifies, will act as an agent for the scheme.

The purchase is partially subsidised from Scottish Government and some additional funding may be available towards the cost of repairs. The scheme is administered by the Mortgage to Rent team at the Scottish Government who can provide further information.

Mortgage to Shared Equity Scheme

This scheme is part of the Scottish Government's Home Owners' Support Fund and involves the Scottish Government taking a financial stake in the home. The owner still owns the home and continues to be responsible for maintaining and insuring it, but they are able to reduce the amount they have to pay their lender every month.

To be eligible under this scheme, the owner must meet the criteria for the Mortgage to Rent scheme. In addition, the owner must hold 25% or more equity in the home, must not have had a trustee appointed to the estate, have a capital and interest repayment mortgage and own a property that is above the Tolerable Standard.

Further information about the Home Owners' Support Scheme and examples of how the schemes can be applied is available in the Scottish Government Leaflet.

Housing Advice

The Council has a duty to ensure that housing advice is available in its area free of charge. The Housing Service will provide information and advice free of charge to anyone who requests it. In addition the Council funds a homelessness and welfare rights post in Orkney Citizen's Advice Bureau who in turn provide independent housing advice free of charge. Independent housing advice is also provided free of charge by Shelter Scotland. Advocacy for homeless applicants is also locally available through Advocacy Orkney. We will signpost and refer applicants to these services on request.

Social Work Advice and Assistance

In addition to a general duty to promote social welfare in making available advice, guidance and assistance, social work departments have an emergency power under section 12 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 to assist persons in need in certain circumstances.

Section 12 enables local authorities to give cash to, or in respect of, any person aged at least 18 years who is in need within the meaning of the Act, and requiring assistance in exceptional circumstances constituting an emergency, and where to do so would be more cost effective than giving assistance in another form. Local authorities should have regard to other means of assistance available to the person in need, and to whether any assistance given should be repaid.

Mediation

One of the most common reasons for homelessness in Orkney is disagreements and disputes between families and friends who are no longer willing to accommodate others. Minor problems in the home can quickly escalate into something more serious, which may result in homelessness. Relationship counselling, information and advice on parenting/step parenting are just some of the interventions which if introduced at an early enough stage may prevent homelessness.

Mediation which may be used at any stage, helps people to consider the nature of the situation and enables them to make realistic choices about their future housing circumstances. Mediation services can be particularly appropriate to a range of situations including:

- Young people who have disagreements / disputes with parents or friends.
- People going through a relationship breakdown.
- People involved in neighbourhood disputes.
- People who need emotional or practical support.

Where it is considered that homelessness can be prevented through mediation, and all parties concerned are willing to undergo such mediation, we will make a referral to Relationships Scotland Orkney as an option to prevent homelessness.

The Council provides a small amount of grant funding to Relationships Scotland Orkney for the provision of these services.

Landlord Action and Eviction Orders

Where an applicant has applied for housing because they are being evicted from their current accommodation, we will make every effort to negotiate with the landlord to try and prevent the eviction taking place.

If the landlord does not have the right to evict, we will advise the tenant of their rights and refer to/make an appointment with OCAB for further support. We will also contact the landlord to advise them of their responsibilities, and advise them to seek their own legal advice.

If the landlord has the right to end the tenancy, but has not followed the correct procedure we will advise the tenant of their rights and refer to/make an appointment with OCAB. We will also contact the landlord, to advise the landlord of their responsibilities. This may not prevent the tenancy being ended but may give the applicant enough time to find alternative housing.

If the landlord has the right to end the tenancy and has followed the correct procedure – we will advise the tenant of this. We will also advise them of their rights in relation to homeless legislation and that we intend to contact the landlord to determine if there are any options to negotiate the continuation of the tenancy. For example, if there are rent arrears – would the reduction of the arrears and the provision of support to ensure ongoing regular payments, mean that the landlord would consider allowing the tenant to remain.

We will refer to The Housing Support team to assess any housing support needs, advocacy or other services to assist the applicant to remain in their current accommodation. We will contact Social Work if there are children under 16 in the household re Children (Scotland) Act 1995 (as amended). And, in cases with anti-social behaviour consult the antisocial behaviour procedures which aim to prevent eviction due to antisocial behaviour, by working with local landlords and providing advice in relation to landlord / tenant rights and responsibilities.

Eviction Orders – Private Rented Sector

Tenants may occupy a property to which they hold a tenancy until such time as an eviction order is obtained to bring that arrangement to an end. Where a tenant holds a short assured tenancy, assured tenancy or new private sector tenancy we will support this right and will not accept that household as homeless until:

- An eviction order has been obtained; and
- They are threatened with homelessness inside two months.

This is intended to ensure parity with structures relating to other tenures. For example, a household is not threatened with homelessness from the social rented sector or owner-occupied sector until such time as an eviction order is held.

It is recognised that in some circumstances obtaining an eviction order may not be appropriate. Therefore the Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing, in consultation with the Solicitor to the Council, will have discretion to waive the requirement for an eviction order in certain circumstances. These may include (but is not limited to):

- Where the tenant is particularly vulnerable due to mental or physical ill-health and a first tier tribunal case may be detrimental to them;
- Where the household is facing eviction due to rent arrears and has substantial other debts therefore obtaining an eviction order would only add to this issue; and
- Where the tenant is at risk of actual harm from the landlord.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBO)

If a tenant or someone in their household has an ASBO, their tenancy can be changed from a Scottish Secure Tenancy (SST) to a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy (SSST). New tenants can also be offered SSSTs if they or members of their household have an ASBO, or if they have been evicted from previous accommodation anywhere in the UK within the past 3 years for antisocial behaviour or illegal activity associated with their home.

The landlord must provide support to enable the tenants to sustain the tenancy and convert to a full SST. This support might include, for example, alcohol / debt / family / relationship counselling, housing or social work support. The support must be linked to the stated objectives in granting an SSST.

The SSST will convert automatically to a full SST after 12 months, if there has been no repetition of antisocial conduct. If there has been antisocial behaviour during the SSST or if the terms of the ASBO have been broken, then the tenancy can be ended, leading to eviction of the tenant and their household.

The Council will use SSSTs to prevent eviction in the first instance and give the tenant time to sort out problems without immediate fear of eviction.

Harassment or Illegal Eviction

We will respond sympathetically to applications from people who are in are in fear of harassment.

Where there is evidence of harassment or illegal eviction we will encourage the tenant to voluntarily report this to the police. Otherwise we may refer cases of harassment or illegal eviction by landlords to the Police. Harassment is a criminal offence under section 22 of the Rent (Scotland) Act 1984. It is widely defined and, besides violence or intimidation, could include cutting off electricity and water supplies or failure to carry out or complete necessary repairs.

When an application is made in terms of harassment, the application will initially be managed under the terms of the Council's Anti Social Behaviour policy. We will provide advice and support to reduce and minimise the impact of harassment. We will also provide advice on legal options to take action against the perpetrator of the harassment for example an interdict.

The Housing Service works closely with Environmental Health and Police Scotland in matters relating to tenants claiming to be fleeing external violence or harassment from their tenancies.

Supporting documentation from colleagues within Environmental Services and the Police will be requested as appropriate. The strong working relationship across these

teams will endeavour to prevent homelessness whenever it is safe and feasible to do so.

In cases of illegal eviction, the Police will take enforcement action against the landlord. If proven we will seek to take action against the landlord in respect of private sector landlord registration.

Tied Accommodation

The loss of tied accommodation can result in homelessness, especially if little notice is given to the employee of the loss of employment. If the employer does not have the right to end the tenancy for whatever reason for example they did not have right to terminate employment, we will advise the tenant of their rights accordingly.

If the employer does have the right to end the tenancy, but has not followed the correct procedure we will advise the tenant of their rights and advise the employer of their responsibilities. This may not prevent the tenancy being ended but may give the applicant sufficient time to find their own alternative housing.

If the employer does have the right to end the tenancy and has followed the correct procedure we will advise the tenant that the correct procedure has been followed. We will also advise of their rights in relation to homeless legislation and that we intend to contact the landlord to ask if there are any options to negotiate the continuation of the tenancy. For example is the accommodation available as a non-tied let.

Drug and Alcohol Counselling Services

Services are available locally in respect of specific counselling for addictions to assist the service user or their family to deal with issues in respect of addiction and consequently to endeavour to prevent homelessness. The Council funds Orkney Alcohol Counselling and Advisory Service in this respect.

Domestic Abuse Services

The Council provides CCTV systems to assist those who have experienced abuse who wish to remain within their own home with support. Women's Aid Orkney provides outreach support services in this capacity and is funded by the Council in this respect. Women's Aid Orkney can also support people while they obtain relevant legal advice or court orders to secure their rights to remain within the family home for instance.

Preventing Recurring Homelessness

In considering resettlement, we will bear in mind the key principles set out by the Homelessness Task Force that:

- Solutions to homelessness should be based on a thorough assessment of the household's needs, including support needs. The specific needs of families with children should not be overlooked.
- The objective should always be to find sustainable solutions, which enable homeless people to be reintegrated back into the community, and which are likely to last in the longer term.
- Joint working is crucial in addressing complex or multiple needs.

We routinely offer short term, low level support to newly housed homeless applicants to assist with resettlement, including a settling in visit.

Where a risk of recurring homelessness is identified, we will carry out routine home visits to assess the individual's ongoing ability to cope, and we will maintain an oversight of how the rent account and related financial affairs are being managed. At the first sign of difficulties, we will immediately undertake a single shared assessment to seek housing support services, where required.

Housing Management

Effective housing management services make a positive and significant contribution to homelessness prevention. Good quality and continuously improving housing management services can have an impact on tenancy sustainment. This is a common thread through our policies.

Estate Management

We will build capacity of all housing staff to identify any tenant at risk of homelessness. For example, a Building Inspector may be concerned that a tenant is not coping with their tenancy because of the condition of their property. If a member of staff is concerned that a tenant may be at risk of homelessness, a referral will be made to the Homelessness and Advice team for follow up action.

Repairs and Adaptations

We will work closely with our Building and Architectural Services and Customer Services to ensure repairs, alterations and adaptations are installed as quickly as possible to assist in preventing avoidable homelessness.

We also work closely with Orkney Health and Care's Occupational Therapy Section and Orkney Care and Repair in cases where a household's mobility or health needs require adaptations to be undertaken so they can remain in the property.

Assistive Technology / Telecare

We work closely with Orkney Health and Care to identify cases where telecare could assist in helping the household remain at home. The options available are wide ranging but generally allow greater independence.

Orkney Health and Care has provided various types of telecare equipment. The majority are community care alarms or community care alarms supplemented by additional telecare sensors and some are stand alone telecare systems. These allow residents to access support and assistance as required which enables them to remain in their own homes for longer.

Independent Living Skills

Some homeless people, particularly young people or those having spent substantial periods sleeping rough or in temporary or institutional accommodation, may need to learn or relearn basic independent living skills, forming and maintaining relationships and budgeting, if they are to sustain their tenancy.

In such cases we will carry out a single shared assessment to access appropriate support then refer to Housing Support services who may draw up a support plan to teach these skills or refer to an appropriate support agency as required. In addition we may consider housing in supported accommodation such as the Young Persons' Supported Accommodation Project.

We will ensure that all new tenants have advice on the running costs of that accommodation, including the full costs of running that property (heating and lighting costs, repairs and maintenance liabilities, service charges, and any initial costs such as rent deposits or rent in advance) and advice on meeting these costs, including advice on any housing or other benefits to which they may be entitled.

Furniture

Restart Orkney provides a unique and invaluable source of low cost, second hand furnishings and electrical goods to people on low income or benefits. The project itself collects, restores, recycles and redistributes furniture and household goods which have been donated by people throughout Orkney. The donated items are given a new lease of life in the fully equipped workshop before being distributed or sold on in the Restart Orkney showroom. Restart Orkney facilitates a range of supported volunteering, training and work placement opportunities for individuals facing social and economic exclusion.

The project also works in partnership with the homelessness service to prevent homelessness and tenancy breakdown by providing a home furnishing service to clients. Through its recycling service, Restart Orkney aims to reduce landfill/export by diverting over 70 tonnes of bulky waste each year and encourages reuse and recycling activities throughout the Orkney Mainland.

Income Maximisation

Orkney Citizen's Advice Bureau offer a service in respect of income maximisation. This includes assessing whether the household is in receipt of all benefits they are entitled to and assisting them to apply where relevant.

Location and Support Networks

In considering re-housing, we recognise that tenancies are unlikely to be sustained if people feel isolated from friends, relatives, and other formal or informal support networks. Problems may also be caused if accommodation is located too far from

their employment, or education or training establishments, or health services which are used frequently.

Conversely in some cases people need to move from a given area in order to break links with a previous lifestyle. This may be true in cases of people seeking to tackle addiction problems.

We will make every effort to take location and support networks into account when allocating temporary and permanent accommodation.

Social Networks

Many people who have experienced homelessness will have lost or be deprived of, their social networks of families, friendships or work. The circumstances and trauma of homelessness frequently leads to feelings of isolation and loneliness before and after resettlement. Ensuing depression and mental health problems are common. There is overwhelming evidence demonstrating that isolation and loneliness are major factors in resettlement breakdown.

We will ensure that the strength of a person's social networks is an integral part of the assessment of their needs and of the support offered them in temporary accommodation and during resettlement.

Where individuals and families (including children) under the age of 25 do not have strong positive social networks, we will consider making a referral to a relevant Befriending Service or Relationship Counselling Service to enable them to build or rebuild social bonds.

Employment

For many people resettling from homelessness, a job will be an important factor in determining whether or not accommodation is sustained. We will therefore consider whether any members of the household require assistance to maintain or find employment. For homeless people who have complex needs, or who have been homeless or roofless for a significant length of time, pre-vocational support will be essential. Referrals will be made to agencies who can assist including Job Centre Plus and / or Careers Scotland.

Home Fire Checks

The Fire Service will carry out home fire checks and provide advice on reducing the risk of fire in the home. We will refer vulnerable tenants to the Fire Service, and will publicise this service for all new tenants.

Housing and Council Tax Benefit

Delays in administering Housing Benefit / Universal Credit can create additional difficulties for households already vulnerable to homelessness for other reasons. We work closely with our Revenues Section / the Job Centre Plus to ensure delays as a result of difficulties in sourcing information etc are minimised.

Housing and Finance Services work closely together and have established good communication links. We have developed an information sharing protocol, which will

assist in ensuring that people entitled to benefit are receiving all available assistance.

The Council's procedures on signing up new tenants, including those provided with temporary housing, provide the opportunity for housing and council tax benefit assessments to be completed on the day of sign up or for direct debits / standing orders to be arranged.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) are stand-alone payments to help recipients of Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Benefit who are in need of further assistance with their housing costs. Payments are made at the discretion of the Council and are subject to a total funding limit of £103k in 2021/22 for all payments.

Payments are strictly limited and will usually only be considered where there may be hardship, special circumstances or health problems that the person claiming, or members of their family, may be suffering; and as a consequence are in need of further financial assistance.

DHPs can cover various types of shortfalls including: Rent Officer restrictions such as Local Reference Rent (LRR), Single Room Rent (SRR), size criteria or when the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) does not meet the full rent cost. Recently they have almost exclusively been used in cases of under occupancy, sometimes called the "bedroom tax."

By utilising the additional financial support to prevent homelessness and sustain tenancies the DHP can add value to the delivery of other support services. It could be helpful, for example, when there are relationship difficulties between parents and their children caused in part by financial difficulties; as well as helping to support young people under the age of 25 who, in the absence of more affordable options, may need assistance to sustain accommodation financially.

We will build capacity of all Housing Benefit staff to recognise any applicant or tenant at risk of homelessness. Finance staff will refer households at risk of homelessness to Housing at the earliest opportunity.

Households at risk of homelessness or households with a history of homelessness will be fast tracked to ensure they can begin paying rent promptly.

Welfare benefit advice is provided by OCAB. We will refer tenants and applicants to this service as appropriate.

Particular Groups

Children and Young People

We aim to work jointly with partners to prevent homelessness for families with children. We recognise that children's local surroundings are likely to have a stronger influence on their quality of life due to their limited mobility in comparison to adults. Maintaining friendships and continuing attendance at local activities are more difficult for children than for adults if they have to move to a different area, so action to prevent homelessness occurring in the first place can have a particularly positive benefit for them. Prevention of homelessness is also potentially beneficial in terms of

remaining in the same school, with the same GP, health care and other local services and contact with supportive family and friends (**Scottish Government Guidance on Meeting the Best Interest of Children Facing Homelessness**).

We will offer a housing options interview as a matter of priority to any family at risk of homelessness, and develop an effective personal housing and prevention of homelessness plan, which will be frequently reviewed. We will also offer housing support as required, and work with the family to assist them in taking any actions identified within the personal housing plan.

Where appropriate, in terms of relationship breakdown between family members, resulting in the potential homelessness of an applicant aged 16 – 21 we will discuss the circumstances with the young person and their parents or carers. We will also discuss the possibility of making a referral to Relationships Scotland Orkney for Mediation or a Family Group Conference (FGC). These are confidential, impartial services, which offer intergenerational mediation between the young person and their family or carers, or, as in the case of FGC, mediation between extended family members, friends and/or significant others, including any professionals involved.

The intention of mediation is to:

- Help young people and their families communicate better with one another.
- Improve the relationship(s) between the young person and the people they live with (e.g. parent, carer, partner, relative or friend).
- Provide the opportunity to explore all the young person's housing options e.g. remaining in or returning to current home / situation, being supported to move into alternative accommodation or presenting as homeless to the local authority.
- Reach a decision that is acceptable to everyone involved about the future, where the young person lives and the relationships that they have with family and friends.

This could include:

- The young person returning home or remaining at home.
- The young person returning home for a short/fixed period before moving elsewhere.
- The young person remaining outside the home, living with other family or friends.
- The young person moving to alternative accommodation, with the family agreeing to support the young person to live independently.

In terms of working with young people services like the Youth Café, Community Learning and Development, Connect Project and the Ytalk Service, can assist in the prevention of homelessness.

Where allegations of abuse are involved, we will not carry out home visits and mediation will not be offered.

The Child Protection Procedures should be referred to, if there are any concerns about the welfare or safety of children - either the young person presenting as homeless, or any children remaining in the household. In addition, consideration

should be given to whether or not a GIRFEC is required, in relation to any children remaining in the household.

Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)

GIRFEC is an approach that aims to improve outcomes for all children. It puts the wellbeing of children and young people at the centre. A common coordinated framework for assessment, planning and action across all agencies is used to address needs.

GIRFEC aims to build a network of support to promote wellbeing. This will help ensure children and young people get the right help at the right time. The network will always include family and/or carers, and the universal services. If this is insufficient then targeted and specialist help can be called upon.

The list of identified homelessness risk factors highlights significant risk factors for children and young people, which can be identified early and certainly before they reach 16 years of age. In particular, evidence of children missing school, running away and experiencing childhood domestic and sexual abuse have been shown to lead directly to homelessness either as a young person or adult. There are opportunities for breaking the cycle of homelessness by intervening much earlier to prevent it from ever occurring. We will raise awareness of the homelessness risk factors with partner agencies and build capacity through training, to ensure young people at risk of homelessness are identified and support provided to reduce the risk.

The value of family mediation in respect of young teenagers is recognised, and our aim would be to work in partnership with Relationships Scotland Orkney to develop the mediation service and other services in respect of homelessness to include mediation and FGC in future to young people under the age of 16, identified as being at risk of homelessness.

Looked After Children, Young People and Care Leavers

Local authorities have particular responsibilities for all looked after children, young people and care leavers as the Corporate Parent. This covers those looked after at home and those looked after away from home. Family Group Conferences have been used in several cases already.

Within an authority it is essential that housing, social work, education, adult and economic development services all work cooperatively, recognising that it is everybody's job to support care leavers into sustainable positive destinations as they move towards adulthood. Two key guidance documents issued in October 2013 provide further detail being "Staying Put Scotland Providing Care Leavers with Connectedness and Belonging" and "Housing Options Protocols for Care Leavers - Guidance for Corporate Parents: Improving Housing and Accommodation Outcomes for Scotland's Care Leavers".

Orkney's Good Parenting Plan highlights the ambition to work in equal partnership with Orkney's care experienced children and young people to make "The Promise" a reality as they grow up. We will refer to **The Promise, Independent Care Review** "We grow up loved, safe and respected so that we realise our full potential".

The transition into independent living is a key milestone and a life-changing event for any young person. For young people leaving care, it is probably the most significant transition and securing accommodation that meets their needs will impact significantly on how successful it is.

We will work jointly with Orkney Health and Care to develop realistic and sustainable pathway plans and to plan a young person's transition from care to avoid unnecessary homelessness. We will help provide advice and information to Looked After children and young people in care, to prepare them for their own tenancy. We will also help raise awareness amongst young people of their responsibilities to the community within which they live, and the potential consequences of actions in that community.

We will ensure that any accommodation offered meets health or disability needs, and any needs in respect of education, training or employment. We will also take into account the need to maintain positive friendships and relationships.

To provide emotional and practical support and to help build life skills and confidence to cope with independent living, we aim to establish, subject to available funding, supported accommodation for young care leavers or young people with multiple and complex need. This accommodation would be available for as long as is needed, before the young person moves onto more independent living or their own tenancy. Suitable support will be available for as long as is needed or requested by the young person.

We will have the same expectations of tenancy success as for all other tenants, but we will be mindful of signals that could indicate a possible tenancy failure, and will review support plans early to meet support needs that emerge during the course of a tenancy.

Armed Forces

Armed Forces personnel can be vulnerable to homelessness at the point of discharge from the Services but also at later points in their housing careers as a consequence of poor health or disability. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) issues a Certificate of Cessation of Entitlement to Occupy.

Service Living Accommodation in the case of all service personnel approaching their date of discharge from the Services. The certificate is usually issued 6 months before discharge.

Where official documentation is provided, we will take advantage of the six-month period of notice of discharge to ensure that service personnel receive timely and comprehensive advice of the housing options available to them when they leave the Armed Forces.

We will refer to the circular 'Housing for People Leaving the Armed Forces' (**Scottish Government Circular HAR1/2018 Housing for People Leaving the Armed Forces**) which provides guidance on meeting the needs of ex-Service personnel and their families and also provides information about other housing options and support.

Hospital Discharge

A hospital discharge protocol has been developed which includes provision for the involvement of all relevant agencies in pre-discharge assessment and the formulation of through-care and after-care plans.

Pre-discharge discussions are vital particularly where individuals may be reluctant to reveal housing difficulties for fear these could delay their discharge.

Where accommodation is already available, checks will be undertaken to make sure that it is still suitable (for example for a person who has become physically disabled) or that support services are in place (for example for a discharged psychiatric patient).

In some cases, checks will be undertaken re the availability of move-on accommodation which the discharged person may need at a later date because of likely changes in his or her condition after discharge; and always where discharge accommodation is only available for a limited period.

Where appropriate we will refer the applicant for a single shared assessment. In addition Family Group Conferences may also be applicable as this allows a shift in the balance of power to the patient and/or family and therefore is empowering, and brings together all relevant partners, including extended family, friends, carers and members of the community as required.

Care plans should provide for the position to be reassessed if a tenancy is in danger of not being sustained (particularly if this is due to difficulties in respect of delivery of the care package).

Leaving Prison

Many prisoners do not have secure accommodation available on their release, making it less easy for them to integrate successfully into the community and increasing the risks of both homelessness and re-offending.

We have worked jointly with Orkney Health and Care's Criminal Justice Service to develop a protocol for those receiving a custodial sentence. This protocol also covers advice for Council and OHAL tenants receiving a custodial sentence regarding taking the most appropriate action in relation to their existing housing.

Multiple and Complex Needs

The term 'multiple and complex needs' has various definitions. For the purposes of this policy, it applies to people who are vulnerable to homelessness for a range of reasons for example:

- Mental ill health.
- Substance misuse issues.
- Challenging behaviours.
- Marginal, high risk and hard to reach; and
- Other combinations of disadvantage e.g. age and transitions – young and older people, or living in poverty, poor housing, poor environments.

As part of the single shared assessment process, the prevention of homelessness will be included as a stated aim for people with multiple and complex needs.

We also offer outreach housing support, from our Housing Support Worker. A report by Ann Rosengard Associates (**Scottish Executive (2007) A Literature Review on Multiple and Complex Needs, Ann Rosengard Associates**) noted that this is a service response valued by people with multiple and complex needs.

Domestic Abuse

The Orkney Domestic Abuse Forum is committed to tackling both the cause and effect of domestic abuse throughout Orkney, and our vision is to identify ways to prevent domestic abuse, and where this is not possible to protect its victims. The strategy aims to protect and provide support to those who experience or are affected by domestic abuse, and to support and develop a range of services for those who have experienced domestic abuse.

We will make every effort to prevent homelessness for applicants suffering domestic abuse, and will seek to make permanent offers of secure housing as quickly as possible, when the applicant's decision is to move home. We have developed a Nominations Agreement and Move on Protocol with Women's Aid Orkney.

In addition, we will refer the applicant to Women's Aid Orkney, and provide the applicant with advice on their rights in relation to the Matrimonial Homes Act and other legal options to take action against the perpetrator of abuse e.g. interdict with powers of arrest, but the applicant will not be forced or coerced into pursuing these options, nor should they be expected to justify a wish not to pursue actions. We will also advise the applicant about the Domestic Abuse scheme. The applicant will be informed that if they wish to pursue any such actions they can be provided with temporary accommodation. When providing temporary accommodation, we will make every effort to provide accommodation close to family support, friends and schools.

We also provide CCTV systems to enable victims to remain in their own homes rather than being forced to move, when they wish to do so, and where this is possible, safe and desired.

The needs of any children in the household will be taken into account, and support offered to help minimise the impact of the relationship breakdown or family homelessness. The Child Protection Procedures should be referred to, if there are any concerns about the welfare or safety of children in the household. Relationships Scotland Orkney plan to introduce working with perpetrators of abuse.

Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)

MARAC is a national approach which was first introduced by CAADA (Coordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse), and is being rolled out as best practice across Scotland. A local group has been formed accordingly.

MARACs are regular local meetings where information about high risk domestic abuse victims (those at risk of murder or serious harm) is shared between local agencies.

By bringing all agencies together at a MARAC, and ensuring that whenever possible the voice of the victim is represented by an independent MARAC Advocate, a risk-focused, co-ordinated safety plan can be drawn up to support the victim.

Addictions

In 2008, the Scottish Government published a report providing evidence from an international review of services for substance misuse and homelessness. The report stated that “over the last 40 years the associations between substance misuse and homelessness have become progressively better understood. Research has moved from a position in which homelessness was seen as a consequence of substance misuse, mental health problems or some combination of the two and towards a position in which substance misuse and homelessness are seen as mutually reinforcing, interrelated, social problems. Those who experience homelessness or substance misuse tend to share characteristics and homelessness can be both an outcome of substance misuse and a catalyst for substance misuse.

“People who become homeless, who have no history of substance misuse, are at an increased risk of developing substance misuse problems. People who become involved in substance misuse are, in turn, at increased risk of experiencing homelessness. These populations are in addition characterised by poor social supports, negative experiences during childhood, poor educational outcomes, and sustained worklessness.

“In addition, there is a strong association between the presence of mental health problems or severe mental illness among homeless people with substance misuse problems in Scotland.

Homeless people with substance misuse problems have a range of needs that can include support with daily living skills, including building and maintaining relationships, a requirement for mental health services and a requirement for support in managing substance misuse. Their needs are often complex and services that focus on any one element of their need, be it substance misuse, mental health or housing related support, meet with less success than services that are designed to support all their needs.” **(Effective Services for Substance Misuse and Homelessness in Scotland: Evidence from an International Review, Nicholas Pleace, Centre for Housing Policy).**

Our aim is to provide safe, secure housing, along with multi-agency support to meet need and reduce the risk of harm to the individual, their family and the community.

Where appropriate, we will refer and / or signpost to an appropriate local service provider. Within the Orkney Alcohol and Drug Partnership there are a variety of services provided for individuals and families affected by substance misuse. These include the Community Mental Health Team who provide a service for individuals who are harmful and / or dependent drinkers. Services such as OACAS or Relationships Scotland Orkney may assist resolve any tensions in the household to prevent crisis.

Mental Health

People with mental health problems ranging from and including people with mild to moderate mental health conditions such as depressive illness to people diagnosed with personality disorder, are at increased risk of homelessness.

We will aim to identify people with mental health problems who are at risk of homelessness, as early as possible and undertake a single shared assessment where required.

Family Break-ups

In terms of relationship breakdown, where appropriate, we will advise the applicant to seek legal advice in relation to their rights under the Matrimonial Homes Act or Family Law (Scotland) Act 2006. In terms of family breakdown, we will advise the applicant if they have any rights to remain in the family home and support action to enforce them.

It may be possible for the Council or another service provider to intervene to prevent non abusive family breakdown and resulting homelessness. We will consider whether it is appropriate to refer to another agency to provide relationship counselling or mediation services. It may also be appropriate to consider other forms of support - such as drug or alcohol counselling - where these may help to resolve underlying tensions.

Even where the family ceases to live together, these measures may help to prevent homelessness or its reoccurrence by enabling family support to continue.

The needs of any children in the household should be taken into account, and support offered to help minimise the impact of the relationship breakdown or family homelessness. The Child Protection Procedures should be referred to, if there are any concerns about the welfare or safety of children in the household.

The provision of support should never be an alternative to re-housing where there is a risk of abuse.

Recording and Measuring Impact of Prevention Activities

An HL1 form should be used to record homeless presentations and those threatened with homelessness if there is reason to believe that the applicant is homeless. A formal assessment is not required for an HL1 form to be completed. The initial assessment form may be used to start an HL1, if a homeless application is subsequently not completed.

We will record outcomes including:

- Households, which might otherwise have presented as homeless achieving a positive outcome and therefore not presenting.
- Households presenting as threatened with homelessness whose cases are resolved before they actually become homeless; and
- Homeless households sustaining their tenancies following the outcome of their homeless presentations.

In addition we will monitor:

- The proportion of tenants placed in council and RSL stock as a result of a homeless application who maintain their tenancy for at least 12 months.
- The number of repeat homeless applications and the reasons for the repeat homelessness.
- The number of households referred for help to specific homelessness prevention services e.g. Women's Aid Orkney, and the proportion of such cases resulting in 'success'.
- The outcomes of Section 11 notifications.
- The outcomes for applicants accessing a Housing Options interview.

Targets

In the first year of this policy we aim to:

- Roll out the housing options programme.
- Reduce the total number of people presenting as homeless by 3%.
- Reduce the number of repeat homeless applications by 10%.
- Increase the number of homeless households sustaining their tenancies by 10%.
- Develop a baseline for cases where homelessness is prevented, and numbers of Housing Options interviews.

This section is subject to change as the Scottish Government are currently developing performance indicators in respect of homelessness prevention / housing options.

Membership of Homelessness Strategic Group

- Orkney Islands Council (Housing, Environmental Health, Education, Planning).
- Orkney Health and Care (Children and Families, Adult Social Work, Criminal Justice Social Work, Health Promotions).
- Orkney Housing Association Ltd.
- Orkney Care and Repair.
- Orkney Islands Property Developments Ltd.
- Job Centre Plus.
- Procurator Fiscal.
- Employability Orkney.
- Orkney Alcohol Counselling and Advisory Service.
- Orkney Blide Trust.
- Orkney Citizen's Advice Bureau.
- Relationships Scotland.
- Voluntary Action Orkney.
- Women's Aid Orkney.
- Ypeople.