



Advice and Information Strategy 2017 to 2021

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Copies of this strategy can be made available in appropriate languages, as required, and in other formats such as in large print, audio format such as compact disc and Braille.

Foreword

The Council devised its first Advice and Information Strategy in 2005 following a detailed process of analysis of the quality and accessibility of advice and information in Orkney, not just relating to Council provision, but that of a range of partner agencies.

Since those early beginnings the wider field of advice and information has grown and developed substantially and significant levels of developmental work have been undertaken.

The provision of high quality housing advice is central to the prevention of homelessness, ensuring people facing the loss of their home have other options available. This is vital in preventing a crisis from occurring.

Over the last 12 years the Council has systematically sought to develop and expand its housing advice services to ensure they are fully reflective of the demands placed on them whilst remaining responsive and person-centred.

In addition to directly assisting those accessing our services, good quality housing advice and information can also fulfil a wider educational role. In Orkney, as in other rural areas, homelessness is often hidden. We seek to raise awareness and understanding that homelessness is a reality locally.

Orkney Islands Council is committed to the Scottish Government's housing options programme and will endeavour to ensure housing options are incorporated throughout our services.

We see this strategy as an opportunity to provide information to our communities whilst helping to build a culture of understanding and informed debate on the true extent of homelessness and associated issues.

With that in mind I am delighted to introduce the Council's third Advice and Information Strategy which now focusses on refining processes already in place, further developing joint working and responding to delivering these services in an era of greatly reduced resources, while endeavouring to maintain challenging accreditations.

The Council, with its partner agencies, is committed to offering the best quality advice and information possible and endeavours to prevent homelessness wherever possible.

Harvey Johnston.

Chair of Education, Leisure and Housing Committee.

1. Introduction

This is Orkney Islands Council's third Advice and Information Strategy covering the period from 2017 to 2021 and follows on from the two preceding strategies (2005 and 2011 respectively).

The context in which Advice and Information is provided has changed considerably since the first Strategy was produced. Local authorities do not now have to produce separate homelessness strategies (since 2007) a duty that was placed on them by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. While the Scottish Government's guidance advises that homelessness strategies should be integrated with the local authority's Local Housing Strategy Orkney Islands Council decided to continue to produce a homelessness strategy along with a separate Advice and Information Strategy at least at this point in time.

The importance of up to date and accessible advice and information of a high quality remains a key objective of the Council and we recognise the role it can play in addressing housing crises, preventing homelessness and assisting people in sustaining their housing.

This strategy will assist the Council in pursuing the main aim of the Homelessness Strategy namely:

"To prevent homelessness from occurring in the first place wherever possible, to deliver a high quality homelessness service that is accessible to all from the first point of contact until their homelessness is resolved and to ensure support is provided to those who require it".

And, in particular, one of the stated objectives:

"To prevent homelessness occurring in Orkney where possible and appropriate by providing accurate advice and information and through our housing options approach".

It assists the Council in meeting some of the Scottish Government's National Outcomes such as:

- "We have tackled the significant inequalities in Scottish society."
- "We have improved the life chances for children, young people and families at risk."
- "We live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need."

The overall aim of this strategy is:

The Council aims to ensure, with our partners, the timely provision of accessible, accurate, relevant, holistic and up to data advice and information of high quality, delivered throughout Orkney and which assists in the prevention of homelessness and resolving housing and related difficulties.

To inform the development of this strategy we undertook a consultation exercise with a range of services and organisations and we would like to thank all those involved for their very helpful input (further details available in Appendix).

1.1. Equality

Orkney Islands Council is committed to promoting equalities, challenging discrimination and fostering good relations, in employment, in carrying out its work and in the delivering of services. Equalities is central to all the Council's strategies and service provision. The Advice and Information Strategy aims to recognise and address the needs of all Orkney's citizens and much work has been carried out to ensure that there is access to a range of quality advice and information on housing services across all tenures. We offer translation services designed to ensure that high quality services are provided to applicants whose first language is not English.

1.2. Links to other strategies

The Advice and Information Strategy links to many of the Council's strategies as well as underpinning the Local Housing Strategy, it directly relates to the Homelessness Strategy. In addition it links to:

- Orkney Health and Care Strategic Commissioning Plan.
- Equality and Diversity Strategy.
- Housing Support Strategy.
- Older Persons Housing Strategy.
- Fuel Poverty Strategy.
- Orkney's Community Plan
- Orkney 2020.

2. Context

There are 70 or so islands and skerries that makes up the Orkney Isles and of those up to 19 may be inhabited, depending on the time of year. Over recent decades, there has been continued movement of people from the isles to the mainland. In 1961, the proportion of the population that lived on the isles stood at 28% by 1981 it had fallen to 24%, by 2001 to 20.4% and by 2011 to 19.6%. The Community Plan identifies access to services as one of the key drivers for this movement and it noted that Orkney's smaller isles ranked "among the most deprived 10% of communities in Scotland in this regard".¹

In 2015, the population of Orkney stood at 21,670, which is an increase of 0.4 per cent from 21,580 in 2014. By 2037, the population of the Orkney Islands is projected to be 22,724, an increase of 5.5% compared to the population in 2012.

From 2012 to 2037 the 75+ age group is the one projected to increase the most in size.

¹ Orkney's Community Plan 2015 to 2018, the Orkney Partnership.

The total number of households in Orkney Islands is projected to increase by 17% from 9,859 in 2012 to 11,534 in 2037.

Between 2012 and 2037² households headed by 60 to 74 year olds are projected to remain statistically stable while those headed by the 75+ age group are projected to increase in number by 118%.

These population changes and the growth in households will undoubtedly have an impact on the demand and delivery of services and will present major challenges in the planning of future services and in maintaining communities.

In recent years there has been an emphasis on public sector reform and the Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services³ identified four key objectives of a reform programme so that:

- Public services are built around people and communities, their needs, aspirations, capacities and skills, and work to build up their autonomy and resilience.
- Public service organisations work together effectively to achieve outcomes.
- Public service organisations prioritise prevention, reducing inequalities and promoting equality.
- All public services constantly seek to improve performance and reduce costs, and are open, transparent and accountable.

2.1. Health and Social Care Integration

Health and Social Care integration is an example of public sector reform resulting in local authorities and Health Boards integrating adult health and social care services. The new boards were to be established by April 2016. In Orkney, the new Integration Joint Board, Orkney Health and Care, also has responsibility for children's services and criminal justice social work services. Housing Services is a member of the Integration Joint Board and plays a key role.

The Integration Authorities are required to produce Strategic Commissioning Plans that must include a Housing Contribution Statement. This sets down "the contribution of housing and related services in Orkney towards helping achieve priority outcomes for health and social care. It serves as a key link between the Strategic Commissioning Plan and the Local Housing Strategy and supports improvements in aligned strategic planning and the shift to prevention".

² Orkney Islands Council Area, Demographic Factsheet Orkney Islands Council Area, National Records of Scotland, Last updated: 29 August 2016.

³ The Christie Commission (2011) Report of The Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services (June 2011).

There are certain housing functions which are delegated to Orkney Health and Care⁴ namely:

- Housing Adaptations – an adaptation is defined in housing legislation as an alteration or addition to the home to support the accommodation, welfare or employment of a disabled person or older person, and their independent living.
- The private sector adaptations are carried out by Orkney Care and Repair and are for owner occupiers and tenants of private landlords. This constitutes the Disabled Grants and Small Repairs Grants in so far as an aid or adaptation applies only.

Further, the Housing Contribution Statement identifies other areas where Housing Services can contribute such as:

- Reviewing the Council's housing lettings policy to ensure that it continues to match people with housing that is suitable for their needs.
- Maintaining our existing housing options approach but extending it to improve longer term planning and anticipating future needs by extending our prevention/early intervention approach to housing need.
- Providing a flexible and adaptable housing support service in all areas.

Advice and Information Services in Orkney can play an important role in meeting the commitments made in the Housing Contribution Statement.

3. Law, Guidance and Good Practice

The field of advice and information is underpinned by significant legislative requirements and those of good practice.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 outlines local authorities' responsibilities in relation to advice and information:

(1) every local authority must secure that advice and information about:

(a) homelessness and the prevention of homelessness, and

(b) any service which may assist a homeless person or assist in the prevention of homelessness, is available free of charge in the authority's area.

Also the Homeless Persons Advice and Assistance (Scotland) Regulations 2002 outlines the type of advice and assistance which must be available to applicants threatened with homelessness and who are intentionally homeless. It includes:

- Advice on accommodation options.

⁴ Bringing Health and Social Care together to improve outcomes for the people of Orkney, Strategic Commissioning Plan 2016 to 2019, Orkney Health and Care 2016.

- Advice on a range of social issues.
- Financial and legal advice.

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).

3.1. Housing Options

For a number of years the Scottish Government's emphasis has been on preventing homelessness and developing housing options as an approach to resolve housing difficulties. The Scottish Government explained housing options as:

“a process which starts with housing advice when someone approaches a local authority with a housing problem. This means looking at an individual's options and choices in the widest sense. This approach features early intervention and explores all possible tenure options.”

Housing options advice should cover also someone's personal circumstances such as debt advice, mediation and mental health issues. Local authority homelessness services are expected to work jointly with a range of other services necessary to assist the person with issues from an early stage in the hope of avoiding a housing crisis.

Guidance on Housing Options was published in March 2016⁵ and it details how landlords should approach the delivery of a Housing Options Service, for example, that minimum standards should be agreed and established. The guidance recognises that there is a range of organisations/services providing advice and information which operate across sectors that are of relevance to housing options; it emphasises the need for partnership working and of having effective referral protocols in place.

The guidance provides an operational checklist which includes that:

- Housing Options should be delivered so that the homeless rights of people are not undermined.
- The service is responsive, flexible, and comprehensive.
- The advice is of high quality and that there are productive working relationships with relevant organisations/services such as local housing providers and health and social care.

The Council's Housing Service has been delivering a Housing Options service for a number of years, in line with our Homelessness Prevention Policy and we have produced an online Housing Options Guide which can be accessed via our website.

⁵ Housing Options Guidance, COSLA and the Scottish Government, March 2016.

3.2. The Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC)

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 introduced the SSHC which came into effect in April 2012. The Charter sets down the standards, outcomes that tenants and other service users should expect from their social landlord. The Scottish Housing Regulator monitors and assesses social landlords' performance against the Charter. Each year social landlords have to submit to the Regulator an Annual Return against the Charter (ARC) which details how the landlord has performed against the standards and outcomes concerned.

Currently there are a number of outcomes which have particular relevance to the delivery of advice and information and include Equalities, Communication, Housing Options, Access to Social Housing, Tenancy Sustainment, Homeless People (further information in Appendix 2).

Also social landlords have to undertake wholesale tenant satisfaction surveys (every three years). This allows landlords to monitor how they are performing and some of the data is provided through the ARC. The most recent Tenant Satisfaction Survey found that 91% of tenants felt that the Council is good at keeping them informed about their services and decisions.⁶

The Scottish Government has been consulting on a review of the SSHC and the aim is for a revised Charter in April 2017.

3.3. Further Developments

Recent pieces of housing legislation namely the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 and the Private Housing (Tenancies) (Scotland) Act 2016 are introducing some substantial changes to tenants in the social and private rented sectors and thus advice and information providers will need to ensure that they are fully up to date with the changes and their implications.

Other legislative changes which impact on the provision of advice and information include those coming from:

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 which extends corporate parenting responsibilities for young care leavers from age 21 to 25 giving care leavers the right to ask their local authority for advice, guidance and assistance.

New duties stemming from the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 where local authorities have to establish and maintain, or ensure the establishment and maintenance of, an advice and information service for relevant carers.

4. National Standards for Advice and Information Providers

The Scottish Government's recommended standard for advice provision is that of the National Standards for Advice and Information Providers (NSAIP). The National

⁶ Orkney Islands Council Tenant Satisfaction Survey 2016, IBP Strategy and Research.

Standards for Advice and Information Providers determines that advice can comprise the following:

- Listening to clients.
- Diagnosing the problem.
- Giving information.
- Advising on the options available.
- Taking action on behalf of clients.
- Negotiating on their behalf.
- Representing the client's case – at tribunals and courts.
- Referrals where appropriate.
- Enabling or empowering individuals to take action on their own behalf.

The Standards are a quality assurance framework for the development of effective and efficient services. They were developed by the Scottish Government, in consultation with the advice sector. Some agencies specialise in advice whereas others provide advice only as part of an overall service. The Standards are supported by a system of accreditation which is awarded to organisations that can demonstrate compliance across all areas of the standards.

In Orkney there are three services which are accredited in the National Standards:

- Orkney Citizen Advice Bureau accredited in Type II and Type III.
- The Council's homelessness and advice services accredited in Type II.
- Orkney Housing Association Ltd. accredited in Type I.

(An explanation of what the different types of advice entails is available in Appendix 3).

We remain committed to ensuring the Council maintains its accreditation, that staff continue to be trained to the required standard and the Council remains committed to supporting the partner agencies in maintaining their accreditation while considering the availability of financial resources.

There is a new model of accreditation that has been developed by the Scottish Legal Aid Board and they will be implementing the delivery of the new model. The new model of accreditation and support for the SNSAIP will:

- Retain a focus on both the organisational and technical quality of advice.
- Separate out the audit of evidence provided by the organisation of achievement across all the Standards, from independent peer review of casework.⁷

The new process is being tested on Type I accreditation from November 2016. Those services that are currently accredited to deliver Type II can, in the interim,

⁷ Accreditation Model for the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers (SNSIAP) Scottish Legal Aid Board, November 2015.

undertake a self-assessment against the existing 2009 Quality Assurance Framework⁸ which we will consider undertaking.

5. Challenges

As ever, there are various challenges in providing advice and information when seeking to ensure it is delivered in an accessible, equitable and up to date manner, many of these challenges were identified during the consultation exercise.

5.1. Rural and Dispersed Communities

Given the geography of Orkney with dispersed rural and islands communities accessing services can be difficult and advice and information services have considered ways to ensure such communities are able to access their services.

One means of widening accessibility is through outreach services as provided by Orkney CAB. Orkney CAB is the main source of independent housing and homelessness advice in Orkney and it also provides a welfare rights service funded by the Council.

Their offices are based in Kirkwall and they deliver an outreach service to some of the isles including in Westray and Sanday. Also they carry out home visits, both of these methods increase the accessibility of advice and information services in Orkney.

As a means of ensuring residents can readily access information, 'Information Points' were established in some of the isles. For this to remain a useful source it is essential that the information provided is regularly reviewed to ensure it is up to date and relevant.

Another way to promote accessibility is through the use of digital technology. In the tenants' survey of 2016 some 61% had access to the internet - an increase from 49% in 2013. While the survey found that the most commonly preferred methods of contact were visiting the Council's offices and by written communication it was evident, when comparing the results of the 2013 and 2016 surveys, that an increasing number of tenants' preferred method of contact was by email. This increasing use of the internet should assist the Council and other services in ensuring that advice and information is accessed by greater numbers across the whole of the Orkney Islands.

Citizens Online (Get IT Together Orkney) promoted digital inclusion amongst disadvantaged communities and Citizens Online in Orkney was part of a national digital inclusion programme. One of the Orkney project's focus was to support the use of technology by harder to reach and disadvantaged groups. The project highlighted the difficulties that can occur in remote and rural areas in accessing internet points and found that in these areas "service can be restricted, public access

⁸ Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers: A Quality Assurance Framework 2009, Scottish Government.

points and limited and public access to wifi is not always available". Get IT Together Orkney, through successful partnership working, increased public access points in three areas and will continue to liaise with partners and groups to increase access.⁹

Further work is required to ensure the broadening out of internet connection and that it is of sufficient speed to allow for example video conferencing which can be used as means of communication for those living in more rural and remote locations.

5.2. Older People

As noted earlier, in Orkney the 75+ age group is projected to increase the most in size (by 118%). This presents particular challenges in planning future services including advice and information. A number of issues have been identified such as unsuitable properties, the lack of availability of care in some areas and the potential for loneliness and social isolation.

We will work with our partners to ensure that there is good quality advice and information including on the range of housing options and care and support available.

It is also important that information is made accessible to those with particular needs and consideration is given to ways of engaging them in the production of such materials.

5.3. Resources

In 2016 to 2017 the Council will have received £67.712m of Scottish Government funding. This is a reduction of £2.762m or 3.9% from the previous year.¹⁰ Further cuts are expected over the three years between 2017 and 2020. It is being predicted that the Council could have £9.5 million less to spend on Council services by 2020.¹¹

Cuts in local authority income increases the pressure on resources including advice and information and this is set against the background of increasing demand resulting from, for example, welfare reform, demographic changes and legislative changes which increase responsibilities in the provision of advice and information.

5.4. Joint Work and Networking

One effect of such resource constraints and increased demand is the difficulties it can create for staff, across services, to find time to attend joint meetings and to network and generally keep up to date. Staff highlighted the importance of being able to share information to ensure that the interests of 'clients' in common were met. Staff and services appreciate the importance of being informed of the latest

⁹ Get IT Together Annual Report for Orkney, January 2015.

¹⁰ From the Joint Report by Chief Executive and Head of Finance to the Policy and Resources Committee, 11 February 2016.

¹¹ <http://www.orkney.gov.uk/OIC-News/budget-simulator-balance-the-books.htm>

developments within each other services and that staff have opportunities to discuss issues and concerns which they have in common.

Staff from a variety of services were keen to identify possible ways of increasing opportunities for joint work and networking such as carrying out joint training, interagency seminars (which has the benefit of getting to know respective roles and responsibilities of staff in other services) and networking lunches (the Blide Trust host such lunches which work well).

5.5. Homelessness and Housing Options

There has been an overall fall in homelessness in Orkney and, at the same time, an increase in Housing Options work recorded by the Council. There remains some difficulties however in providing a range of housing options. The lack of social housing to rent of the appropriate size, the benefit changes restricting access to the private rented sector for some people and generally affordability issues particularly regarding owner occupation can present services with difficulties in meeting the needs and wishes of those approaching us for assistance. We are the main provider of housing options though Orkney Housing Association has indicated they are looking to develop a more structured housing options service.

Homeless application to Orkney Islands Council from 2011/12 to 2015/16.¹²

Change 2014/15 - 2015/16.

	2011 2012.	2012 2013.	2013 2014.	2014 2015.	2015 2016.	Number.	Percentage.
Applications.	153.	107.	106.	81.	97.	16.	20%.
Assessed as homeless.	113.	87.	82.	64.	77.	13.	20%

Over the past five years the number of people presenting as homeless has been falling though there was an increase in 2015/16. The Council's view is that overall the fall in homeless presentations is likely to correlate to the rise in households receiving advice and information and in particular to those receiving a housing options interview.¹³

Youth Homelessness

After a decline in the number of young people presenting as homeless, 2015/16 saw an increase in presentations (this refers to those aged up to and including 24 years). This is proportionately higher when taking all homeless applications into account.

¹² Homelessness in Scotland: Annual Publication 2015 to 2016: National and Local Authority analyses, Scottish Government.

¹³ Homelessness in Orkney: Report to the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee, June 2016.

Youth homeless presentations from 2011/12 to 2015/16.¹⁴

2011/2012.	2012/2013.	2013/2014.	2014/2015.	2015/2016.	Change 2014/15 to 2015/16.
47.	39.	33.	19.	25.	32%.

A number of agencies/services noted that there is currently little in the way of housing education taking place in schools and the importance of this in providing information on what is involved in leaving home. There is general agreement that services should use the most appropriate methods of reaching young people such as social media. When reviewing other areas concerning homelessness and housing options we will ensure that any particular issues affecting young people are explored.

The number of people approaching the Council for housing options advice has increased in the last two years.

Housing Options approaches to Orkney Islands Council by quarter - 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2016.¹⁵

2014 Q2.	2014 Q3.	2014 Q4.	2015 Q1.	Total 2014/15.	2015 Q2.	2015 Q3.	2015 Q4.	2016 Q1.	Total 2015/16.
10.	15.	10.	15.	50.	10.	20.	10.	20.	60.

Housing Options outcomes: 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2016.

LA/RSL Tenancy.	PRS Tenancy.	Other (known).	Lost Contact/ Not Known.	Remained in Current Accommodation.	Made Homeless Application to LA.	All.
5.	15.	5.	35.	15.	15.	95.
5%.	16%.	5%.	37%.	16%.	16%.	100%.

While taking account of the difficulties that can occur in providing a range of housing options the provision of advice and information provided as part of this approach resulted in twenty one percent of people succeeding in renting accommodation in either the private or social rented sectors and where 16% were enabled to remain in their current accommodation.

The numbers of people where lost contact/not known is an outcome over the two years, however, is significant. This is an area that we will look at in greater detail to

¹⁴ Youth Homelessness Analysis 2015-16: Scottish Government.

¹⁵ Housing Options (PREVENT1) Statistics in Scotland: April 2014 to March 2016, Scottish Government.

gain an understanding as to why and what actions may be required to address any identified issues.

5.6. Fuel Poverty

Tackling fuel poverty is particularly challenging in Orkney. The latest figures published by the Scottish Household House Condition Survey has Orkney with the highest levels of fuel poverty in Scotland (63% of households compared to the Scottish average of 35% and also the highest of extreme fuel poverty standing at 30% with the Scottish average at 10%).¹⁶

One of the Local Housing Strategy priorities concerns tackling fuel poverty:

“To provide advice, support and assistance, in partnership with relevant agencies, to eradicate fuel poverty in Orkney”.

We recognise the importance of providing advice and information to Orkney residents on what actions they could take to reduce fuel costs and maximise income. Orkney's households mean income for 2016 was calculated at £31,564, which comes 24 out of the 32 local authority areas in Scotland.¹⁷

In addition to the Council's role, there are some organisations dedicated to tackling fuel poverty such as THAW or where dedicated fuel poverty staff are employed as in the fuel poverty worker employed through Orkney Care and Repair.

We will ensure that issues relating to fuel poverty are fully understood by staff delivering advice and information, that households affected are provided with the appropriate information, that the uptake of available grants is encouraged and people are appropriately signposted.

5.7. Continually Changing Policy and Legislative Environment

There are still changes occurring with welfare reform - universal credit is still being rolled out. Welfare Reform and related issues dominates the work of some advice and information services, for example, most of Orkney CAB's work (two thirds in 2014/15¹⁸) is focused on advice issues concerned debt, benefits, Tax Credits and National Insurance.

The Scotland Act 2016 introduces a new social security agency, which will administer the delivery of some social security benefits in Scotland. This will allow the Scottish Government to be flexible in, for example, how frequently Universal

¹⁶ SHCS Local Authority Analysis Tables 2012-14, SHCS Local Authority Tables 2014, Scottish Government.

Fuel poverty is where households spend more than 10% of their income on fuel costs and extreme fuel poverty where households spend more than 20% of their income on fuel costs.

¹⁷ Household Income (CACI 2016).

¹⁸ Statistics 2014/15, Scottish Association of Citizens Advice Bureau – Citizens Advice Scotland.

Credit payments are made and how the housing element will be paid.¹⁹ It is hoped that the system introduced by the Scottish Government will have positive benefits to claimants.

Recently there have been major developments affecting landlords, tenants and prospective tenants in the social and private rented sectors. These developments are due to be implemented over the next year. This will require the updating of information sources, ensuring the developments are widely publicised, that private sector landlords are fully aware of the changes and that staff involved in delivering advice and information are likewise appropriately informed and trained.

It is important to make sure that advice and information services continue to operate effectively in this complex and changing policy and legislative landscape so that the public are provided with accurate, up to date and relevant advice and information and that high quality and standards of services are maintained.

5.8. Communicating

As well as information materials being kept up to date, methods of communication should also reflect also the differing ways people access information. The use of organisations' websites and Facebook pages have become important ways of informing and engaging with members of the public. It is acknowledged that this may be easier for some organisations than others for instance it would be difficult and resource intensive for the Council to have Facebook given the range of Council services. However there may be a willingness for other arrangements to be made to maximise joint working and therein increase awareness.

Other ways of trying to ensure that information reaches as wide a public as possible were suggested during the consultation exercise. As well as using social media pages other suggestions included staff of other services and / or organisations distributing information materials when visiting public for example social workers. In addition local radio could be used as could the Orcadian and local newsletters.

Some organisations that provide advice and information could improve on accessibility. For instance, there are websites that do not appear to have translation facilities or where information leaflets do not state that they could be provided in different formats, this may limit the access to advice and information for some groups/individuals.

The Council is committed to joint working and to ensure that positive relationships exist with our partners both within the Council and with external agencies. This is crucial to ensure that those who require services receive the best possible and appropriate advice and information which meets their needs.

¹⁹ Welfare Reform (Further Provision) (Scotland) Act 2012: Annual Report – 2016, Scottish Government.

6. Monitoring the Strategy

The Homelessness Strategic Group (a multi agency group) will be responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the Advice and Information Strategy. This will incorporate any user feedback.

Progress will be reported annually to the Council's Education, Leisure and Housing Committee.

Information will be made available to partners and the public through our website.

7. Outcomes and Actions

An action plan will be developed to make the following outcomes SMART.

Advice and Information provision is of a high quality, holistic, accurate, up to date and accessible.

We will ensure that the information that we provide is clear, accurate and comprehensive, take account of any support needs, and signpost where appropriate to other relevant services.

We will, and will encourage our partners, to regularly review their public information including written materials, websites and Facebook (and other social media) pages to ensure that they are kept up to date and relevant and that staff are kept informed and provided with training where appropriate.

We will ensure that the Council encourages its partners to ensure that the information provided is accessible and for example websites have a translation facility and public information leaflets can be produced in different formats. (Our Accessibility Policy and Procedures have already been shared with partner agencies).

We will ensure that private landlords and tenants/potential tenants are fully aware of the substantial changes in the private rented sector and that these changes are widely publicised.

Advice and Information is available throughout the Orkney.

We will explore what further work is required to broaden internet use particularly in rural and remote communities and that it is of sufficient speed to allow for example video conferencing.

We will work with our partners to ensure that materials supplied to 'Information Points' established in some of the isles is regularly reviewed to ensure it is up to date and relevant.

We will consider with our partners if there is a possibility of expanding such outlets and look at ways in which this could be achieved for example shared funding, the use of volunteers etc.

We will work with our partners to ensure that older people across all tenures are informed about the housing and support services available, how they can be accessed and that this information is well publicised.

There are a range of ways in which information can be accessed.

To ensure that residents of Orkney can access information we will, with our partners seek to provide information using different methods and outlets. This could include the use of social media pages, distributing by a using staff from different services to distribute relevant information materials when visiting members of the public, the Orcadian and local newsletters.

The Council delivers a good quality, holistic and accessible Housing Options service.

Our aim is to maintain our accreditation in Type II of the National Standards for Advice and Information Providers and we will consider carrying out a self-assessment against the existing Quality Assurance Framework.

We will ensure that staff are kept up to date with relevant policy and legislative developments, that the Housing Options Guide is regularly reviewed, kept up to date and that it continues to meet accessibility requirements.

We will look at in detail at those people who initially approached the housing options service with whom we 'lost contact' to gain an understanding as to why and what actions may be required to address any identified issues.

The public have increased access to Housing Options services in Orkney.

We will support Orkney Housing Association Ltd. in developing a more structured housing options service.

We will continue to assist and support those partner agencies which are also accredited in the National Standards for Advice and Information Providers to maintain their accreditation.

Young people are informed of possible housing choices.

We will consider what possibilities there may be to engage with young people and introduce some form of information / education in housing and related issues. Also we will explore with young persons' services and young people ways of delivering advice and information that would best engage young people.

We will ensure that in delivering housing options that we take account of and explore ways of addressing any particular issues affecting young people including care leavers.

The Council and partners have improved joint and multiagency work.

We will explore with our partners how best to increase joint and multiagency work including joint training, interagency seminars and linking into networking lunches.

We will consider, and ask our partners likewise, how best to develop systems of notifying the appropriate services of up and coming events, training etc.

There are agreed information sharing protocols to ensure the 'clients' needs are met.

We will consult our partners to ensure that there are appropriate information sharing protocols in place and that staff are trained in their use.

There is a decrease in the number of people living in fuel poverty.

We will ensure that:

- Issues relating to fuel poverty are fully understood by staff delivering advice and information services.
- Households affected are provided with the appropriate information.
- The uptake of available grants is encouraged.
- People are appropriately signposted.

The strategy is monitored and informed by feedback from users of advice and information services.

We will ensure that there are systems in place to monitor the implementation of the advice and information strategy including through the Homelessness Strategy Group.

We will, with our partners explore the best way to record feedback from those who use advice and information services. This information will be used to review this current strategy.

Appendix 1: Organisations / Services Involved in the Consultation Exercise

Orkney Islands Council's Housing Services.

Orkney Islands Council's Environmental Health Services.

Orkney Health and Care.

Orkney Housing Association Ltd.

Orkney Islands Property Developments Ltd.

Advocacy Orkney.

Employability Orkney.

Orkney Citizen's Advice Bureau.

Orkney Blide Trust.

Voluntary Action Orkney.

Appendix 2: Scottish Social Housing Charter

Outcome 1 Equalities.

Social landlords perform all aspects of their housing services so that:

- Every tenant and other customer has their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.

Outcome 2 Communication.

Social landlords manage their businesses so that:

- Tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides.

Outcome 7, 8 and 9 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.

Outcome 10 Access to social housing.

Social landlords ensure that:

- People looking for housing find it easy to apply for the widest choice of social housing available and get the information they need on how the landlord allocates homes and their prospects of being housed.

Outcome 11 Tenancy sustainment.

Social landlords ensure that:

- Tenants get the information they need on how to obtain support to remain in their home; and ensure suitable support is available, including services provided directly by the landlord and by other organisations.

Outcome 12 Homeless people.

Local councils perform their duties on homelessness so that:

- homeless people get prompt and easy access to help and advice; are provided with suitable, good-quality temporary or emergency accommodation when this is needed; and are offered continuing support to help them get and keep the home they are entitled to.

Appendix 3: Advice and Information Activities broken down into 3 types of intervention²⁰

Type I - Active Information, Sign-posting and Explanation

This work refers to activities such as providing information either orally or in writing, sign-posting or referring the user to other available resources or services, and, the explanation of technical terms or clarifying an official document, such as a tenancy agreement or a possession order.

We make a distinction between the passive provision of information through the availability of leaflets, for example, in public places, libraries and so on, and active provision of information through providing assistance to the individual seeking assistance. These Standards are aimed at 'active' providers.

Type II – Casework

This includes:

A diagnostic interview where the problem and all relevant issues are identified and making a judgement as to whether the individual has a case that can be pursued. Once it has been established that the individual has a case that can be pursued, activities may include:

- Setting out an individual's options or courses of action.
- Encouraging the user to take action on their own behalf.
- Providing practical aid with letters or forms.
- Negotiating with third parties on the user's behalf.
- Introducing the enquirer by referral to another source of help.
- Support to users in making their own case.

This is the highest level that a Council can achieve.

Type III - Advocacy, Representation and Mediation at Tribunal or Court Action Level

This work includes a range of further actions arising from the casework undertaken above. This may have been undertaken by the adviser preparing the tertiary work or may have come to the adviser by referral from another organisation or adviser.

The principal activities may include:

- Advocacy and Representation - where the adviser may prepare a case for the user and represent or speak on their behalf at a tribunal or court.

²⁰ Scottish National Standard for Information and Advice Providers: A Quality Assurance Framework 2009, Scottish Government.

- Mediation - where the adviser may act on behalf of the user by seeking to mediate between the user and a third party.

Type III work includes some activities that can only be undertaken by lawyers.