

Item: 17

Education, Leisure and Housing Committee: 7 June 2023.

Advice and Information Strategy.

Report by Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing.

1. Purpose of Report

To consider Advice and Information Strategy 2023 to 2028, for consultation.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is invited to note:

2.1.

That the Council produced its first Advice and Information Strategy in 2005 and since then has embarked on a sustained programme of ensuring that good quality advice and information is available in appropriate formats to meet the needs of service users.

2.2.

That, since 2005, significant improvements have been made, including achieving a nationally recognised accreditation, the National Standards for Advice and Information Providers.

2.3.

That the wider field of advice and information, and the inter-related policy area of homelessness, has been subject to significant change in recent years, resulting in the Council's Advice and Information Strategy requiring significant review.

2.4.

That an event was held in September 2022 to seek the views of a range of partner agencies across the statutory and voluntary sectors, to consider local strategies around the wider area of homelessness and identify gaps in the provision of advice and information and identify priorities.

2.5.

The draft Advice and Information Strategy 2023 to 2028, attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

It is recommended:

2.6.

That the Advice and Information Strategy 2023 to 2028, referred to at paragraph 2.5 above, be approved for consultation.

2.7.

That the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing should submit a report, to a meeting of the Committee in early 2024, regarding the outcome of the consultation process, referred to at paragraph 2.6 above, together with a revised Advice and Information Strategy for adoption.

3. Background

3.1.

The Council developed its first Advice and Information Strategy in 2005 and this document has since been reviewed three times, in 2009, 2011 and 2016.

3.2.

The Advice and Information Strategy is a key document which focuses on the provision of housing advice generally, crossing all tenures, and linking to the services of a range of partner agencies, including:

- Orkney Housing Association Limited.
- Orkney Citizens Advice Bureau.
- Right There.
- Women's Aid Orkney.

3.4.

The Advice and Information Strategy, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, is comprehensive and is intended to ensure that all agencies concerned consider key aspects of service delivery including the accessibility of written information, the dispersal of Orkney's communities, the standard and availability of written documentation, publicity of services, joint working, provision of legal advice and also service user involvement.

3.5.

An Advice and Information Strategy links to homelessness prevention but is specifically different from homelessness and its prevention. It is important for the Council to retain a separate Advice and Information Strategy in order to underpin its accreditation at the National Standard for Information and Advice Providers.

3.6.

The wider strategic planning context includes the Local Housing Strategy, Homelessness Strategy, Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan interlinking with the Strategic Housing Investment Plan and the Housing Contribution Statement.

4. Development of the Advice and Information Strategy

4.1.

One of the key drivers of the original strategy was to aim for accreditation at the National Standard for Advice and Information Providers. The Council originally achieved this for its homelessness and advice services in 2008 and supported key partner agencies.

4.2.

The Council has since received reaccreditation in 2012, 2018 and 2022. Members were previously advised of the outcome of the reaccreditation in 2022.

4.3.

Since the original strategy was developed the wider field of Advice and Information has changed substantially.

4.4.

Accordingly, the Advice and Information Strategy has been entirely rewritten in order to ensure it remains reflective of the professional era in which it stands.

4.5.

The result is an Advice and Information Strategy which remains fresh and includes an ongoing commitment to continue to work jointly and to endeavour to improve service delivery in partnership with related services.

5. Revisions to the Advice and Information Strategy

5.1.

There have been a number of pieces of legislation, including housing legislation which impact on the provision of advice and information since the development of the previous strategy. These include:

- The Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 and the Private Housing (Tenancies) (Scotland) Act 2016 which introduced some substantial changes to tenants' rights in the social and private rented sectors.
- The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 which extends corporate parenting responsibilities for care experienced young people from age 21 up to and including those aged 25, giving care leavers, for example, the right to ask their local authority for advice, guidance and assistance.

- 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.
- [The Child Poverty \(Scotland\) Act 2017](#) introduced targets which the Scottish Government is to meet by 2030. The Scottish Government has to publish child poverty delivery plans at regular intervals and annual reports that measure progress. Also, local authorities and health boards have to report, jointly and on an annual basis, on the steps they are taking, and will be taking, to reduce child poverty.
- [The Fuel Poverty \(Targets, Definition and Strategy\) \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#) sets down a two part definition of when a household would be in fuel poverty. It takes account also of the higher costs of living in remote, rural and island communities, providing for uplifts to be applied to the Minimum Income Standard for those living in these areas. The Council's Fuel Poverty Strategy (2017 - 2022) sets down a number of objectives to meet the key aim of eradicating fuel poverty in Orkney by 2032.
- The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 introduced measures to support and help meet the particular needs of Scotland's islands. It places new duties on public authorities to consider the effect of their policies, strategies and services on an island community through Island Communities Impact Assessments.
- The Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022 introduced a temporary freeze on tenancy rent increases in the private and social sectors including student accommodation. There is, as well, a temporary moratorium on evictions (with some exemptions). These measures last to the end of September 2023. The provisions can be extended, by regulation, to the end of March 2024.
- The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 introduced a specific offence for "abusive behaviour towards a partner or ex-partner". As well as covering physical abuse, the law extended abusive behaviour to cover also psychological abuse, emotional abuse, coercive and controlling behaviour.
- The Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Act 2021 introduces new forms of protection from domestic abuse. The Police and courts are being given powers to protect those experiencing domestic abuse by issuing Domestic Abuse Protection Notices (DAPNs) and Domestic Abuse Protection Orders (DAPOs) to exclude temporarily the abuser from the home.

5.2.

There have also been a range of changes in the context of homelessness which Members have been apprised of separately. These include:

- The introduction of Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans which are intended to ensure better, swifter outcomes for homeless households and more limited time in temporary accommodation (from 2019).
- The removal of the local connection criteria in the homelessness legislation meaning that homeless households can present as homeless in whichever Local Authority area they wish within Scotland (from November 2022).

5.3.

Anticipated changes include a new housing bill for 2023 which is expected to include:

- The establishment of a regulator for the private rented sector to enforce defined standards.
- Implementing a national system of rent controls in the private rented sector.
- The creation of a new Housing Standard to cover all homes.
- It is expected that there will be a duty on public bodies and landlords to prevent homelessness included in the Housing Bill 2023. This duty will entail asking and acting on a risk of homelessness, as well as responsibilities which relate to strategic and joint planning.

6. Involvement of Partner Agencies

6.1.

A group of partner agencies were invited to attend an event in September 2022 to consider a range of strategic matters across the broader remit of homelessness and housing advice provision.

6.2.

The event included representation from both statutory and third sectors.

6.3.

The event was intended to allow an opportunity for reflection and group discussion.

6.4.

This resulted in participants identifying gaps in the provision of advice and information and key priorities for addressing those gaps. Consequently, the ideas originating from group discussion were used to underpin the revised strategy development.

6.5.

In addition, an independent party was asked to undertake some consultative work with households who had used the homelessness and advice service recently and had moved on from the service accordingly.

6.6.

It is now necessary to consult with a range of partner agencies regarding their views on the draft document. From there a final document will be developed and agreed.

7. Revised Advice and Information Strategy

7.1.

Together the two processes outlined at paragraphs 6.4 and 6.5 above identified certain key challenges and gaps in provision and these have been included in the revised strategy along with the revisions outlined at section 5 above.

7.2.

The overall aim of this strategy remains as:

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

7.3.

In addition, a range of outcomes and actions have been identified which will be developed into an Action Plan with partner agencies in due course.

7.4.

The draft Advice and Information Strategy 2023 to 2028, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, should now undergo a period of consultation to include all relevant and interested stakeholders.

8. Consultation

8.1.

The consultation process will include consulting with a range of agencies from across statutory and voluntary sectors. The draft strategy will be made available on the Council’s website to enable a broad range of stakeholders and service users to contribute if they wish.

8.2.

The process of consultation will be undertaken between July and September 2023.

8.3.

Following a process of consultation, the revised Advice and Information Strategy will be presented to the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee in early 2024 for approval.

9. Equalities Impact

An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and is attached as Appendix 2 to this report.

10. Island Communities Impact

An Island Communities Impact Assessment has been undertaken and is attached as Appendix 3 to this report.

11. Corporate Governance

This report relates to the Council complying with governance and procedural issues and therefore does not directly support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Council Plan and the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan.

12. Financial Implications

There are no significant financial implications associated directly with the recommendations to this report.

13. Legal Aspects

13.1.

In terms of section 2 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001: Every Council must ensure that advice and information about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness, and any services which may assist a homeless person or assist in the prevention of homelessness, is available free of charge to any person in the Council's area.

13.2.

The Council must have regard to the Council's purpose and remit.

13.3.

In addition, the Council requires to consider and address its specific statutory duties in terms of the Equalities legislation.

13.4.

As with all consultations, the Council cannot reach a determinative view until the Council is satisfied that:

13.4.1.

Consultation must be at a time when proposals are still at a formative stage;

13.4.2.

Sufficient reasons must be given for any proposal to enable intelligent consideration and response;

13.4.3

Adequate time must be given for such consideration and response; and

13.4.4

The product of consultation must be conscientiously taken into account in finalising any proposals.

13.5.

With regard to section 13.4.4 above, (taking the product of consultation conscientiously into account in finalising proposals), the decision report must include relevant representations made to the authority. It is essential that the Authority takes representations conscientiously into account and avoid any appearance of bias.

14. Contact Officers

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15. Appendices

Appendix 1: Draft Advice and Information Strategy 2023 to 2028.

Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment.

Appendix 3: Island Communities Impact Assessment.



Advice and Information Strategy

2023 - 2028

Version Control

Document Reference.	Rev.	Issue date.	Reason for issue.	Reviewer.
HDSTRAT142	1	25/04/2023	Revised.	Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing.

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Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Context.....	6
3. Law, Guidance and Good Practice.....	8
4. National Standards for Advice and Information Providers.....	13
5. Challenges	15
6. Monitoring the Strategy	23
7. Outcomes and Actions	24
Appendix 1: Partner Organisations Involved in Consultation.....	28
Appendix 2: Housing Options.....	29
Appendix 3: Scottish Social Housing Charter (2022)	30

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1. Introduction

This is Orkney Islands Council's fourth Advice and Information Strategy covering the period from 2023 – 2028 following on from the three previous strategies (produced in 2005, 2011 and 2017 respectively).

The backdrop to Advice and Information provision is one of ongoing change in the legislative, regulatory and policy environment. This can present challenges in ensuring that we are fully up to date with all relevant changes and their implications.

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 can 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. This is in recognition of the operating context being remote and rural. Existing research and guidance has a tendency to be urban in context. Therefore, it is useful to have Orkney's distinct differences reflected and addressed appropriately through strategic planning.

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.

The importance of housing information and advice is recognised in the Scottish Government's Local Housing Strategy (LHS) Guidance:

The LHS should describe the strategies in place to provide sufficient and appropriate housing information and advice that supports people to access suitable accommodation and helps them to live successfully in that accommodation.¹

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

“To prevent homelessness as far as possible, and where it does occur, that time spent in homelessness is kept to a minimum”.

Many of the objectives of the homelessness strategy have direct relevance to the Council's commitment to ensuring the delivery of good quality and comprehensive Advice and Information Services. And, in particular:

¹ Scottish Government “Local Housing Strategy: Guidance 2019”
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/local-housing-strategy-guidance-2019/documents/>

- Provide accurate advice and information including through our Housing Options service, ensure the service is accessible, that differing needs are met and the service widely publicised.
- Enhance and improve the Housing Options approach including by introducing a housing options 'tool'.
- Provide appropriate advice and support to assist households in sustaining their accommodation including housing support.

It assists the Council in meeting some of the Scottish Government's National Outcomes², for example, we:

- live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe.
- are well educated, skilled and able to contribute to society.
- are healthy and active.
- respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination.
- tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally.

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 date 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 review and further development of this strategy we undertook a consultation exercise with a range of services/organisations and we would like to thank all those involved for their very helpful input (See Appendix 1 for details).

The importance of joint/partnership working is recognised and this is particularly clear in relation to the role we play, along with our partner agencies, in the provision of information and advice. The Council will continue to take opportunities to work jointly wherever possible. This approach will be reinforced by the forthcoming changes to homelessness prevention whereby other public agencies will be expected to assist in the prevention of homelessness.

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 recognises and aims to 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

² Scottish Government National Outcomes
<https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/national-outcomes>

are provided to applicants whose first language is not English and we will ensure that new developments are accessible to all of Orkney's residents.

We also offer advice and information in a range of formats both on request and through our website.

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 a number of other strategies including:

- Equality and Diversity Policy (2021).
- Orkney Partnership's Community Plan (2023-2030).
- Child Poverty Strategy (2022-2026).
- Orkney Health and Care Strategic Commissioning Plan (2022-2025).
- Fuel Poverty Strategy (2017-2022).

2. Context

Orkney comprises 70 or so islands, of which 20 are inhabited (depending on the time of year) with various sizes of populations.

On 30 June 2021, the population of Orkney was estimated to be 22,510 an increase of 0.6% from 2020 where the population was estimated at 22,300.³

Between 2018 and 2028, the population of Orkney is projected to increase from 22,190 to 22,311. This is an increase of 0.5%.

The number of households in Orkney in 2021 was 10,758, compared to 10,635 in 2020, an increase of 1.2%.

Between 2018 and 2028, the number of households in Orkney is projected to increase from 10,506 to 11,010, a 4.8% increase.

By 2028, the household type "one adult" is projected to remain the most common (38.1%) and the household type "one adult, one or more children" is projected to remain the least common (4.5%).

Between 2018 and 2028:

- the population of Orkney is projected to increase from 22,190 to 22,311 (Mid-2020 Population Estimates).
- the 75+ age group is projected to increase by 37.4% (the largest percentage increase).

³ National Records of Scotland Population Estimates Mid 2021
<https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files/statistics/council-area-data-sheets/orkney-islands-council-profile.html>

- the 0 to 15 age group is projected to see the largest percentage decrease by - 11.5%.
- the 75+ age group is projected to increase by 37.4% the largest percentage increase. In terms of actual size, the 45 to 64 is projected to remain the largest age group.

The vast majority of Orkney's residents live on the mainland and linked south isles and estimated at 19,527 (at June 2021) with an estimated 2,743 living on the ferry-linked isles.⁴

The projected population changes, along with the growth of households, are sure to have an impact on the demand for, and delivery of, services in the future, including advice and information.

The emphasis on public sector reform remains as does the key objectives identified by the Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services⁵. The four key principles have developed into what has become known as the '4 Ps'⁶:

- **People:** Reforms must aim to empower individuals and communities by involving them in the design and delivery of the services.
- **Partnership:** Public service providers must work more closely in partnership, integrating service provision to improve their outcomes.
- **Prevention:** Expenditure must be prioritised on public services which prevent negative outcomes.
- **Performance:** The public services system – public, third and private sectors – must reduce duplication and share services to become more efficient.

While progress has been made in incorporating these principles in public services there is still some way to go. The Council recognises the importance of these principles including for the implementation of this Advice and Information Strategy.

2.1. Health and Social Care Integration

The Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014 came into force in 2016 and set the framework for health and social care integration.

⁴ Orkney's Community Plan 2023- 2030, the Orkney Partnership <https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3.spanglefish.com/s/34034/documents/orkney-community-plan-2023-30.pdf>.

⁵ The Christie Commission (2011) Report of The Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services (June 2011) <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/independent-report/2011/06/commission-future-delivery-public-services/documents/0118638-pdf/0118638-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/0118638.pdf>.

⁶ The Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/independent-report/2011/06/commission-future-delivery-public-services/documents/0118638-pdf/0118638-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/0118638.pdf>.

Orkney's Integration Joint Board (Orkney Health and Care), which integrates adult health and social care services was established in 2016. Further, the Board is responsible for children's services and criminal justice social work services.

The Council's Housing Service plays a key role as a member of the Board and there is statutory duty to produce a Housing Contribution Statement which is included in OHAC's Strategic Commissioning Plan.

The Statement highlights the role of housing and related services in assisting in meeting priority outcomes in 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".⁷

There are a range of responsibilities delegated to the Board including aspects of Housing Support and aids and adaptations. Also, there are some functions where there is a cross over with housing services including for Care Experienced/Looked After and Accommodated Children and Through Care Services, Adult Protection and Domestic Abuse, Community Mental Health Services and Substance Misuse Services and Drug and Alcohol Services.⁸

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

- 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 addressing housing need/difficulties.
- Providing a flexible and adaptable housing support service in all areas.

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

3. Law, Guidance and Good Practice

The field of advice and information is underpinned by significant legislative requirements, guidance 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:

- on homelessness and the prevention of homelessness, and
- 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.

⁷ OHAC – Orkney Strategic Plan, 2016-2019.

⁸ OHAC – Orkney Strategic Plan, 2019 - 2022;

https://www.orkney.gov.uk/Files/OHAC/IJB/Strategic_Plan_20192022_OHAC.pdf

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.
- advice on a range of social issues.
- financial and legal advice.

This strategy, produced by the Council's Housing Services, 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

Housing Options is now a well-established approach which plays an important part when seeking to prevent a person becoming homeless and, when seeking to resolve a person's housing difficulties.

The Scottish Government explained housing options as an:

“information and advice process that councils use when someone approaches them with a housing problem. It aims to prevent homelessness wherever possible and its introduction in 2010 was credited with a significant fall in homelessness applications.

The service focuses on people's personal circumstances, helping them explore all options, including council housing, housing association homes and private rented accommodation. It can also provide support for underlying issues that can underpin housing problems such as debt, family breakup and mental health problems.

This means that, rather than just making a homeless application, housing officers can work with other services to help people before they reach crisis point.”⁹

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.

⁹ Scottish Government “Homelessness Prevention”
<https://www.gov.scot/policies/homelessness/homelessness-prevention/>

Guidance on Housing Options was published in March 2016¹⁰ and details how landlords should approach the delivery of their Housing Options Service, for example, minimum standards which should be agreed and established.

The guidance recognises that there is a range of organisations/services providing advice and information which operate across sectors which are of relevance to housing options. The guidance emphasises the need for partnership working and of having effective referral protocols in place. It provides an operational checklist which includes that:

- Housing Options should be delivered so that the rights of homeless 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. We have produced an online Housing Options Guide which can be accessed via our website. We will continue to develop our Housing Options service.

We are members of the North and Islands Housing Options Hub along with six other neighbouring local authority members. We meet and share best practice, try out new ideas and identify area for research and assess training needs.

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 and 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 submit to the Regulator an Annual Return against the Charter (ARC) detailing how the landlord has performed against the standards and outcomes concerned.

There are a number of outcomes which have particular relevance to the delivery of advice and information, and they include under the following headings - Equalities, Communication, Participation, Housing Options, Access to Social Housing, Tenancy Sustainment and Homeless People (for further information see Appendix 2).

The Scottish Government carried out a review of SSHC in 2021. Feedback from the consultation exercises with both tenants and landlords reported overall satisfaction with the Charter as it stood with some relatively minor changes proposed. The revised Charter was introduced in 2022.

¹⁰ Housing Options Guidance, COSLA and the Scottish Government, March 2016.

Also, social landlords are expected to undertake tenant satisfaction surveys (a minimum of every three years). This allows landlords to monitor how they are performing and some of the data is provided through their Annual Return to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

Compared to the 2016 Tenant Satisfaction Survey, quoted in the last Advice and Information Strategy, the proportion of tenants who thought that the Council is good at keeping them informed about their services and decisions fell from 91% to 70% in the Council's recent satisfaction survey, as reported to the Scottish Housing Regulator for 2021/2022.

While we are obviously disappointed in this decline, we are committed to ensuring that our service meets the varying needs of Orkney's residents and we improve on their experience and levels of satisfaction and accordingly an action plan is in place for delivery. The homelessness service's customer satisfaction survey results were more encouraging.

The vast majority of those who participated in the survey during 2021/2022 were very satisfied with the information they were provided with regarding their rights, the response of staff to questions and that they were kept up to date with progress. There was general satisfaction also with regard to written information, being helpful and informative. There was a suggestion that the use of pictures would assist in making the materials more accessible.¹¹

3.3. Further Developments

There have been a number of pieces of legislation, including housing legislation, which impact on the provision of advice and information. Keeping up with all the changes can be challenging and has implications for staff training to ensure they are fully informed and up to date with developments.

These legislative developments include:

- the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 and the Private Housing (Tenancies) (Scotland) Act 2016 which introduced some substantial changes to tenants' rights in the social and private rented sectors.
- the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 which extends corporate parenting responsibilities for care experienced young people from age 21 up to and including those aged 25, giving care leavers, for example, the right to ask their local authority for advice, guidance and assistance.
- 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.
- the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 introduced targets which the Scottish Government is to meet by 2030. The Scottish Government has to publish child poverty delivery plans at regular intervals and annual reports that measure progress. Also, local authorities and health boards have to report,

¹¹ OIC's Homelessness Service Customer Satisfaction Exit Questionnaire 2021/22.

jointly and on an annual basis, on the steps they are taking, and will be taking, to reduce child poverty.¹²

- the Fuel Poverty (Targets, Definition and Strategy) (Scotland) Act 2019 sets down a two part definition of when a household would be in fuel poverty. It takes account also of the higher costs of living in remote, rural and island communities, providing for uplifts to be applied to the Minimum Income Standard for those living in these areas¹³. The Council's Fuel Poverty Strategy (2017 - 2022) sets down a number of objectives to meet the key aim of eradicating fuel poverty in Orkney by 2032.
- The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 introduced measures to support and help meet the particular needs of Scotland's islands. It places new duties on public authorities to consider the effect of their policies, strategies and services on an island community through Island Community Impact Assessments.
- the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022 introduced a temporary freeze on tenancy rent increases in the private and social sectors including student accommodation. There is, as well, a temporary moratorium on evictions (with some exemptions). These measures last to the end of September 2023. There is the potential for some provisions to be extended, by regulation, to the end of March 2024.
- The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 introduced a specific offence for "abusive behaviour towards a partner or ex-partner". As well as covering physical abuse, the law extended abusive behaviour to cover also psychological abuse, emotional abuse, coercive and controlling behaviour.
- The Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Act 2021 introduces new forms of protection from domestic abuse. The Police and courts are being given powers to protect those experiencing domestic abuse by issuing Domestic Abuse Protection Notices (DAPNs) and Domestic Abuse Protection Orders (DAPOs) to exclude temporary the abuser from the home.

There have been a number of developments specifically in relation to homelessness since the last Strategy including:

Rapid Rehousing Transitional Plans (RRTP)

That local authorities are required to produce and implement an RRTP. These are intended to ensure:

- there is a settled, mainstream housing outcome for homeless households as quickly as possible.
- that time spent in any form of temporary accommodation is reduced to a minimum, with the fewer moves the better.

¹² The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017;
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2017/6/contents/enacted>

¹³ Fuel Poverty (Targets, Definition and Strategy) (Scotland) Act 2019;
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2019/10/enacted>

- when temporary accommodation is needed, it should be mainstream, furnished and within a community.

Housing First

This approach is specifically aimed at people with multiple and complex needs. They may have had a history of rough sleeping and of repeat homelessness. This approach ensures those with high and complex support needs are provided with settled accommodation with intensive wrap around support. There is no requirement for the person to prove they are 'tenancy ready'.

Local Connection

The Scottish Government have suspended the power of local authorities to refer a homeless household without a local connection to their authority to another local authority.

Homeless Prevention

It is expected that there will be a duty on public bodies and landlords to prevent homelessness included in the Housing Bill 2023. This duty will entail asking and acting on a risk of homelessness, as well as responsibilities which relate to strategic and joint planning.

Further Changes

Following on from their consultation on 'a new deal for tenants' the Scottish Government is looking to introduce a new Housing Bill in 2023 to include:

- the establishment of a regulator for the private rented sector to enforce defined standards.
- implementing a national system of rent controls in the private rented sector.
- the creation of a new Housing Standard to cover all homes.

4. National Standards for Advice and Information Providers

The Scottish Government's recommended standard for the provision of information and advice provision is the National Standards for Advice and Information Providers. The Scottish Legal Aid Board is responsible for the accreditation process.

Type I - Active Information, Signposting and Explanation.

Activities could include the provision of information either orally or in writing, referring / signposting the person to other available resources or services, providing explanations of technical terms and clarifying official documents, such as tenancy agreements or possession orders.

Type II - Casework.

Activities include diagnostic interviews to judge if the person has a case which could be pursued and if so what activities could be undertaken to pursue the case such as providing practical help with letters or forms, negotiating with third parties on person's behalf.

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

This involves activities arising from casework which may include advocacy and representation – including representing the person at a tribunal or court and mediation. There is some work that can only be undertaken by lawyers.

The Standards are a quality assurance framework with the aim of ensuring effective and efficient services. They were developed by the Scottish Government, in consultation with the advice sector. Some are specialist information and advice services while others provide information and advice as part of an overall service.

The Code of Guidance on Homelessness summarises the principles on which good quality advice and information services should be based on - equal opportunities, accessibility, user-centred services, choice, confidentiality, accountability, best value and effectiveness, and reflective services - (for a fuller description see appendix 2).

The Standards are supported by a system of accreditation which is awarded to organisations which can demonstrate their compliance across all areas of the standards.

In Orkney there are now two services accredited in the National Standards:

- The Council's homelessness and advice services accredited in Type I and II.
- Orkney Citizens Advice Bureau accredited in Type II and Type III.

The Council have remained committed to ensuring we maintain our accreditation, and we have been successfully accredited, for the fourth time, in 2022 to provide Housing Type I and Type II information and advice.

The most common area of Type I information and advice provided by the Council in 2021/2022 was again in the more general area of housing options and homelessness.

In 2021/2022, regarding Type II advice (which is casework), the main area of advice provision was tenants' rights including security of tenure issues.

The Council appreciates the importance of the provision of independent advice and information and has continued to support Orkney CAB in maintaining their accreditation in the National Standards for Advice and Information Providers. They were again successfully accredited in 2022 to provide in Type II and Type III advice and information in Housing, Welfare Benefit and Money Debt.

5. Challenges

Delivering an advice and information service of high quality that meets the needs of Orkney's residents can be challenging. This has been exacerbated by the pandemic and its aftermath and the cost of living crisis impacting the residents of Orkney.

5.1. Rural and Dispersed Communities

The geography of Orkney with its dispersed rural and island communities means that both accessing and delivering services can pose some difficulties. Issues regarding connectivity were highlighted during lockdown "poor digital communication skills – among young people as well as older people" and that the "cost of technology and online access is a big problem, especially for already disadvantaged people."¹⁴ The advice and information service has to continue to assess how best to deliver our services in these communities in ways that encourage their use and meets residents' needs.

The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 introduced a duty on the Scottish Government duty to produce a National Islands Plan. The Plan provides a framework for action, over a five year period, to improve outcomes for island communities. There are 13 strategic objectives which include:

- To address population decline and ensure a healthy, balanced population profile.
- To improve housing.
- To reduce levels of fuel poverty.
- To improve digital connectivity.
- To improve and promote health, social care and wellbeing.

Consultation findings from the National Islands Plan Survey 2020 reported in the Orkney Partnership's Plan for 2021 – 2023 highlighted some of the disparities between residents living on Orkney's mainland compared to those living on the ferry-linked isles with regard to digital technology. This can impact on the accessibility of services.

Of those living on Orkney's mainland who responded, 70% reported that their home internet connection was fast enough to allow them to do what they wanted online, in comparison with 45% of those living on the ferry-linked isles (2020/2021 figures). There were disparities also concerning the performance of mobile phones where 78% of Orkney mainland residents reported having a good signal compared with 27% for those on the ferry-linked isles.

The survey will be repeated in 2023.

The importance of addressing Orkney's need to improve connectivity is stressed in The Council Plan 2023 – 2028 and is one of the key priorities:

¹⁴ The Orkney Partnership's Orkney Community Plan 2021-23.

”We will remove barriers to digital connectivity and vital transport”.

The Council recognises the importance of ensuring that advice and information services are delivered using a range of methods to minimise exclusion. 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.

One way to promote accessibility is through the use of digital technology. The impact of the pandemic brought into sharp focus the need to further expand the reach of digital technology in terms of geography and the issue of cost for some households.

The Council's Digital Strategy has three core strategic priorities namely:

- Digital Communities and Wellbeing.
- A Digital Islands Economy.
- Digital Local Government and Services.

Fulfilling these priorities will enable services including advice and information services to expand their reach while ensuring that there remains other means of access.

5.2. Older People

As noted earlier, in Orkney the 75+ age group is projected to increase the most in percentage terms by 2028 – by 37.4%. The growth in those who are aged 75 and over can bring particular challenges when planning future services including advice and information. Age Scotland undertook a survey of residents in Orkney aged 55 and over (the survey took place in 2018). They found that “accessibility, isolation and high fuel costs were key concerns for older people”.

With regard to housing, a number of views were expressed about current and future housing. Of the 978 respondents 4% thought that their current property was not suitable for their needs and 11% of respondents reported that they had considered moving house because they viewed their current house as unsuitable. Their reasons for not moving included the lack of suitable housing nearby, the cost of moving and being reluctant to leave their current home.¹⁵

One area investigated was housing need. 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.

¹⁵ Age Scotland “Orkney Housing Survey” <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland/our-impact/policy-research-influencing/reports-research/orkney-housing-survey/>

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.

5.3. Joint Work and Networking

Joint and partnership working is well developed in Orkney and though the pandemic had an impact on face to face meetings with other services and organisations the importance of joint / partnership work was highlighted during this time. This was facilitated often by the use of digital technology and it enabled, at times, the inclusion of a wider range of staff who might have found it difficult to be present at face to face meetings. The Council and partners are working jointly in responding to the needs of Orkney residents in relation to the cost of living crisis.

Where there are constraints on resources and or increased demand on services can mean staff, across services / organisations, may have difficulties in attending joint / multi-agency meeting and to network. Staff are always keen, however, to find ways to work jointly with other services / organisations for example through joint / multi-agency training, interagency seminars and other networking events.

Staff stress the importance of being able to share information so the best interests of their 'clients' are met. Staff and services appreciate the importance of being informed of the latest developments within each other's services and that staff have opportunities to discuss issues and concerns they have in common.

The introduction of duties on public bodies in relation to the prevention of homelessness will add further impetus to joint / partnership working.

5.4. Homelessness and Housing Options

There was a small rise in homeless applications in 2022/23, the Council received 142 homeless applications, ten more than in 2021/2022. This compares with 2021/2022 which saw a 2.2% drop in applications from 2020/2021.

Homeless applications to Orkney Islands Council from 2017/2018 to 2021/2022.¹⁶

	2018/ 2019.	2019/ 2020.	2020/ 2021.	2021/ 2022.	2022/23.	Change 2021/2022 to 2022/2023.	
						Number.	Percentage.
Applications.	134.	119.	135.	132.	142.	+10.	+7.5%.
Assessed as homeless.	107.	93.	116.	105.	112.	+7.	+6.7%.

¹⁶ Scottish Government "Homelessness in Scotland: Annual Publication 2021-22: National and Local Authority analyses"
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/homelessness-scotland-2021-22/>.

Homeless Households

Single households remain the predominate group of people presenting as homeless as is the case across Scotland. Of those who applied as homeless in 2022/2023 the majority, 78.9%, continue to be single households this was slightly higher than in 2021/2022 when 72% of applicants were single.

Applications from single parents accounted for 16.2% of all homeless applications, and 95.6% of those applications were from single female applicants.

There was a drop in the total number and the proportion of homeless applications with children in the household. Seventeen point six percent (17.6%) of applicant households contained children, the vast majority of which were in single parent households.

The three most frequent reasons for people applying as homeless in Orkney (similarly for Scotland as a whole) continues to be:

- Non-violent dispute within household/relationship breakdown.
- Being asked to leave the accommodation.
- Violent/abusive dispute within the household.

Homeless presentations remain significant in relation to the size of the population and the number of social housing units becoming available each year.

Youth Homelessness

In 2022/2023 of the 142 homeless applications, 27 (19%) were from people under 25 years of age. This is down from a high, in 2016/2017, of 37 applications from young people out of 127 applications (29%), as a proportion of overall applications. However, this is higher than in 2021/2022 where there were 21 applications from a total of 132 applications, 16% of the total.

Of those who present as homeless from the under 25s age group a significant number present because their parents are no longer willing or able to accommodate them.

Young person's homeless presentations from 2017/2018 to 2021/2022.

Household.	2018/2019.	2019/2020.	2020/2021.	2021/2022.	2022/23.
Young people aged 16-24.	33.	23.	25.	21.	27.

OIC figures.

The provision of the young person's supported accommodation is a crucial resource in addressing homelessness amongst this age group.

In providing and seeking to inform young people about housing and related issues it is important that young people are consulted as to what the most accessible methods might be.

There has been work undertaken to address specific issues relating to young people who are at risk of homelessness, or who have become homeless such as the ‘Youth Homelessness Prevention Pathway’¹⁷ and which is for all young people who are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness. And, for young care leavers, the ‘Improving Care Leavers Housing Pathway’¹⁸. We will with our partners consider how best these approaches could be introduced in Orkney.

When reviewing other areas concerning homelessness and housing options we will ensure that any particular issues affecting young people are explored.

Housing Options

There are 13 areas that local authorities are asked to report on under housing options through the Scottish Government return Prevent1. This relates to the main reasons that households approach for housing options advice. Most commonly approaches to the Council have been in relation to advice regarding homelessness legislation and general housing advice/tenancy rights advice.

The number of people approaching the Council for housing options advice has decreased in the three years from 2019/2020 compared to the previous years. It is unclear as yet why that should be the case and if some of the reasons may relate to the impact of COVID-19.

Number of households receiving housing options/advice and information.

Year.	2018/2019.	2019/2020.	2020/2021.	2021/2022.	2022/23.
Number.	31.	19.	22.	18.	22.

OIC figures.

Also, difficulties arise when considering what options might be available or appropriate. There is insufficient social housing of the right size, type and area available generally. The private rented sector market is also highly pressured.

In 2019 it was estimated that the private rented sector accounted for 10% of the housing stock in Orkney compared to 14% in Scotland as a whole, having declined

¹⁷ Scottish Government, Rock Trust and A Way Home Scotland “Youth Homelessness Prevention Pathway: For All Young People” <https://www.awayhomescotland.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2021/03/YHPP-for-All-Young-People-1.pdf>

¹⁸ Rock Trust “Youth Homelessness Prevention Pathway Improving Care Leavers Housing Pathways” <https://www.rocktrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Youth-Homelessness-Prevention-Pathway-Care-Leavers.pdf>

from 12% in Orkney in 2016. Housing in the social rented sector was estimated at 15% of Orkney's stock compared to 23% of the Scottish housing stock.¹⁹

The generally low level of rented accommodation along with affordability issues, particularly regarding owner occupation, can present services with difficulties in meeting the needs and wishes of those approaching us for assistance. The Council, so far, are the main provider of housing options.

The difficulties in identifying suitable housing is demonstrated by the number of cases which were still open at 31 March 2023, which stood at 13 cases.

We are aware of the need to increase the take up of advice and information to resolve housing difficulties in order to avert homelessness. The prevention of homelessness duty is likely to include requiring action to be taken within a six month period prior to homelessness occurring this gives additional time to try and prevent the household concerned from becoming homeless.

5.6. Fuel Poverty and Child Poverty

Tackling fuel poverty continues to be particularly challenging in Orkney and the cost of living crisis has made the issue even more acute.

Orkney is one of seven local authorities which has significantly higher rates of fuel poverty than the national average. Thirty-one percent of households are fuel poor in Orkney compared to 24% for Scotland as a whole (as estimated in the 2017-2019 Scottish House Condition Survey). Also, Orkney is one of seven authorities with significantly higher rates of extreme fuel poverty rates with 22% of households in this situation compared with the Scottish average of 12%.²⁰

The importance of alleviating fuel poverty is stressed in a number of Council strategies, for instance, one of the Council's priorities in our Local Housing Strategy (2017-2022) addresses fuel poverty:

Priority 6 Reducing Fuel Poverty and Increasing Energy Efficiency: To increase the energy efficiency of Orkney's housing stock, eliminate fuel poverty and achieve a positive impact on the environment.

¹⁹ Scottish Government "Housing Statistics Stock by Tenure"

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-statistics-stock-by-tenure/>

²⁰ Scottish House Condition Survey: 2017-2019 Local Authority Tables

<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/statistics/2021/02/scottish-house-condition-survey-local-authority-analyses-2017-2019/documents/scottish-house-condition-survey-2017-2019-local-authority-tables/scottish-house-condition-survey-2017-2019-local-authority-tables/govscot%3Adocument/scottish-house-condition-survey-2017-2019-local-authority-tables.pdf>.

The Local Housing Strategy will be reviewed later in 2023, but it is almost certain that Fuel Poverty will remain a priority.

It is also included in one of the key priorities in the Council Plan 2023 – 2028 namely:

“We will reduce poverty and disadvantage and minimise the effects of the cost of living crisis²¹”.

This is alongside the Council’s Fuel Poverty Strategy (2017-2022) which sets down a number of objectives to meet the key aim of eradicating fuel poverty in Orkney by 2032.

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 given additional impetus by the cost of living crisis. In addition to the Council’s role, there are other organisations which are dedicated to tackling fuel poverty, in particular THAW Orkney. They, in collaboration with Orkney CAB, have received funding to support combined energy and money advice services throughout Orkney (2022-2024).²²

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

The Scottish Government’s Child Poverty Strategy has three “Ps” which underpin their national delivery plans and they are:

- **Pockets** - aims to maximise the financial resources of families on low incomes.
- **Prospects** - aims to improve the life chances of children and young people.
- **Places** - aims to improve housing and regenerate disadvantaged communities.

The Orkney Partnership²³ has added two more “Ps” to Orkney’s Child Poverty Strategy, namely:

- **Prevention** - aims to prevent the long-term persistence of poverty.
- **Priorities** - aims to focus attention on especially vulnerable children and families.

²¹ Orkney Islands Council; Council Plan 2023 – 2028 www.orkney.gov.uk/Service-Directory/Performance/council-plan.htm

²² THAW Orkney “British Gas Energy Trust Funded Project 2022 – 2024”
<http://www.thaworkney.co.uk/projects.html>

²³ Orkney Child Poverty Strategy 2022-2026; Orkney Partnership <https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3.spanglefish.com/s/34034/documents/orkney-child-poverty-strategy-2022-2026.pdf>.

Advice and information play a central role in seeking to address issues relating to poverty.

A number of initiatives that have taken place to ensure:

- a proper understanding of poverty and its impact.
- a good understanding on what financial advice and support services are available.

These initiatives were delivered through training session with staff from a variety of services.

Also, an example of the steps the Council and their partners are taking to inform and assist Orkney's residents was a 'Navigating the Cost-of-Living Crisis' event organised jointly by the Council and OHAL with Orkney CAB. This was aimed at their tenants and residents so they could hear about what practical support and advice is available regarding financial matters. It is hoped that similar events could be opened out to a broader range of Orkney residents.

Poverty is a risk factor in terms of homelessness and any actions which can be taken/promoted to address poverty should have an impact on a household's risk of becoming homelessness.

5.7. Continually Changing Policy and Legislative Environment

As noted earlier the ever developing legislative and policy environment poses challenges for staff in keeping abreast of all the changes and their implications to ensure that the information and advice provided remains accurate and up to date. The cost of living crisis, coming after COVID-19 and its impact, results in additional pressures for the residents of Orkney and for staff responding to these.

The prevention of homelessness duty which is expected to be introduced in the Housing Bill due later in 2023 will have implications for a range of public sector bodies and landlords to prevent homelessness. The duty is to involve asking about and acting on a risk of homelessness. There will be also responsibilities which relate to strategic and joint planning.

The recent and forthcoming changes will require the updating of information sources, ensuring that developments are widely publicised including private sector landlords and staff in the public and third sectors services are kept up to date and implications of any changes fully considered.

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 the public has confidence that the advice and information service is of high quality, accurate and relevant and that standards of the service are maintained.

5.8. Communicating

It is essential that information materials are accurate and are kept up to date. The methods of public communication should reflect the differing ways people access information. 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 for others.

The possibility of the Council using Facebook as a means of informing residents was raised during our consultations. There was an appreciation that using Facebook could be difficult and resource intensive given the range of Council services. It was suggested, however, that 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 having a 'trusted' person in communities who would be able to access and respond to information needs/requests or similarly a link/key worker who would have a coordinating role.

The need to ensure that information is accessible for all and therefore there cannot be a total reliance on digital technology and that other methods are deployed such as the regular use of local radio and newsprint such as the Orcadian.

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 including pictorial representation, to increase access to advice and information for some groups/individuals.

The Council is committed to joint/partnership 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.

The ongoing changes and responsibilities along with our commitment to further develop the advice and information service including housing options, this is set against a background of resource constraints on local authorities.

6. Monitoring the Strategy

The multi-agency Homelessness Strategic 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 to the Council's Education, Leisure and Housing Committee on a regular basis and Information will also be made available to our partners and the public through the Council's website.

7. Outcomes and Actions

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 refer/signpost where appropriate to other relevant services.

We will, and we will encourage our partners, to regularly review their public information including written materials, websites and Facebook pages (and any other social media) to ensure that they are, accurate, kept up to date and relevant.

We will encourage our partners to make sure that the information they provide is accessible, for example, websites have a translation facility and that public information leaflets can be produced in different formats including pictorial formats where appropriate. (Our Accessibility Policy and Procedures have been shared with partner agencies).

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

Advice and Information is available throughout all of the Orkney's communities and there is a range of ways they can be accessed.

We will work with our partners to ensure that materials supplied at different locations are regularly reviewed to ensure they are up to date and remain relevant.

We will assess our methods of communicating with Orkney's residents including the possible use of social media to ensure our reach is across the whole of Orkney mainland and the Isles, for example, by creating a Facebook page; and we will explore the use of a Web Chat facility.

We will consider with our partners different ways of disseminating information and providing advice particularly in rural remote and on the Isles, (where connectivity may be an issue) for example:

- the possibility of having an identified 'trusted' person in communities or a link worker.
- using staff from different services to distribute relevant information materials.
- explore ways to enhance anonymity/confidentiality when accessing services to encourage uptake.

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.

We will explore what progress is being made to widen access to digital technology particularly in rural and remote communities and that it is of sufficient speed to facilitate different methods of communicating.

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

We will continue to maintain our accreditation in Type I and II of the National Standards for Advice and Information Providers.

We will continue to pursue the establishment of an interactive housing options portal.

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 explore, and consult with our partners, the possibility of piloting Personal Housing Plans.

We will ensure that our housing options/advice and information services are widely publicised to encourage greater uptake to allow for earlier intervention with the aim of preventing homelessness/resolving housing difficulties before they result in homelessness.

We monitor the number of applicants who approached the housing options/advice and information service and where the outcome is 'lost contact'. And, if necessary, look at these cases in detail 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 and advice and information services in Orkney.

We will explore the possibility of introducing a 'chat box' facility on the appropriate pages of the Council's website.

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

We will explore with young persons' services and young people ways of delivering advice and information that would best suit and engage young people.

We will consider introducing:

- through our Housing Options Service, young persons' Personal Housing Plans pilot.
- a Youth Homelessness Prevention Pathway.
- Improving Care Leavers Housing Pathway.

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 those who are care experienced/care leavers.

The Council and partners have improved joint and multiagency work.

In light of the forthcoming changes in duties regarding the prevention of homelessness we will review with relevant partners referral procedures to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

We will explore with our partners how best to increase joint and multiagency work including joint/multiagency training, interagency seminars and events. This will be particularly important in relation to the expanded prevention of homelessness duties.

We will consider, and ask our partners likewise, how best to develop systems to notifying partners of any changes/developments in their service, of any up and coming events, training etc.

Staff across services and organisations are kept up to date with policy and legislative changes.

We will review the training needs of our staff to ensure that they have the key competencies to assess and provide the appropriate level of information, advice and assistance to meet the changing needs of people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness and those facing housing difficulties.

We will encourage our partners to assess the training needs of their staff in light of their new responsibilities regarding homeless prevention including identifying risk factors.

There are agreed protocols in place to ensure the 'clients' needs are met.

We will, with our partners identify circumstances where protocols should be developed with regard to the new prevention duties being introduced.

We will, with our partners, review and update, if necessary, the information sharing protocols in place and ensure staff continue to receive appropriate training.

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

There has been a small decline in the number of people in fuel poverty in Orkney including the numbers in severe fuel poverty, nonetheless this remains a serious issue for many residents and is currently exacerbated by the cost of living crisis.

We will ensure that:

- issues relating to fuel poverty are fully understood by staff delivering advice and information services.
- households are fully informed of what assistance is available to help tackle fuel and extreme fuel poverty.

- the uptake of any available grants is encouraged and
- people are appropriately signposted/referred to appropriate organisations/services.

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 Multiagency Homelessness Strategic 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.

DRAFT

Appendix 1: Partner Organisations Involved in Consultation

Age Scotland Orkney.

Crossroads Orkney.

Employability Orkney.

Greener Orkney.

Home Start Orkney.

Kirkwall Council of Churches (Starter Packs).

NHS Orkney.

Orkney Blide Trust.

Orkney Care and Repair.

Orkney Citizen's Advice Bureau.

Orkney Disability Forum.

Orkney Foodbank.

Orkney Health and Care

Orkney Housing Association Ltd.

Orkney Islands Council Education Services

Orkney Islands Council Planning and Community Protection

Orkney Rape and Sexual Assault Service.

Police Scotland.

Procurator Fiscal Service.

Red Cross Orkney.

Relationships Scotland Orkney.

Right There.

Victim Support Orkney.

Voluntary Action Orkney.

Appendix 2: Housing Options

The principles for good quality provision are:

- Equal opportunities - by meeting the needs of the whole community, regardless of tenure, location, ethnicity and particular needs.
- Accessibility - by being available to all and provided in locations and using methods and forms of dissemination that are appropriate to particular needs.
- User-centred services - by ensuring that advice puts the needs of the service user first and is free of the views, prejudices or vested interest of the adviser or agency.
- Choice - by offering as far as possible a range of providers, including at least one that is independent of the providers of housing services, which can advocate on behalf of service users.
- Confidentiality - through clear policies that guarantee users privacy and confidentiality as well as access to their personal files.
- Accountability - by ensuring clarity and transparency of purpose, activity and accountability to stakeholders, including service users, the general public, commissioners and relevant interest groups (whether community-based or national bodies or professional associations).
- Best value and effectiveness - by optimising:
 - resource use through ensuring management effectiveness.
 - effective and integrated services through joint working and sharing of information, training and expertise.
 - professional competence, by ensuring staff have access to training, information resources, effective and supportive case management and opportunities for networking and liaison.
 - best practice, by adopting and implementing the Standards and other relevant standards of competence.
- Reflective services - through comprehensive monitoring of casework and ensuring opportunities for user feedback to inform service review and development.²⁴

²⁴ Code of Guidance on Homelessness: Scottish Government 2019
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/code-guidance-homelessness-2/>

Appendix 3: Scottish Social Housing Charter (2022)

Charter outcomes²⁵ include:

1: Equalities

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

- they support the right to adequate housing.
- every tenant and other customer has their individual needs and rights recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.

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.

3: Participation

Social landlords manage their businesses so that:

tenants and other customers are offered a range of opportunities that make it easy for them to participate in, and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.

7/8/9: 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 have a role to prevent homelessness and should ensure that:

- people at risk of losing their homes get advice and information on preventing homelessness.

10: Access to Social Housing

Social landlords ensure that:

²⁵ Scottish Government: "Scottish Social Housing Charter" 2022
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-social-housing-charter-november-2022/pages/2/>

- 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 on their prospects of being housed.

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.

12: Homeless People

Councils perform their duties on homelessness so that:

- people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness get prompt and easy access to help, advice and information; 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.

DRAFT



Equality Impact Assessment

The purpose of an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is to improve the work of Orkney Islands Council by making sure it promotes equality and does not discriminate. This assessment records the likely impact of any changes to a function, policy or plan by anticipating the consequences, and making sure that any negative impacts are eliminated or minimised and positive impacts are maximised.

1. Identification of Function, Policy or Plan	
Name of function / policy / plan to be assessed.	Advice and Information Strategy
Service / service area responsible.	Housing Services
Name of person carrying out the assessment and contact details.	Frances Troup, Ext 2450 E-mail frances.troup@orkney.gov.uk
Date of assessment.	25 April 2023
Is the function / policy / plan new or existing? (Please indicate also if the service is to be deleted, reduced or changed significantly).	Existing - revised

2. Initial Screening	
What are the intended outcomes of the function / policy / plan?	To ensure the Council meets its statutory obligation in respect of ensuring housing advice is available in its area free of charge.
Is the function / policy / plan strategically important?	Yes it forms part of our suite of strategic documents around the wider area of homelessness and is intended to ensure the Council meets its statutory requirements in this respect.
State who is, or may be affected by this function / policy / plan, and how.	Anyone regardless of the tenure they occupy

<p>How have stakeholders been involved in the development of this function / policy / plan?</p>	<p>A group of partner agencies were invited to attend an event in September 2022, to consider a range of strategic matters across the broader remit of homelessness and housing advice provision. The event included representation from both the statutory and third sectors.</p> <p>This resulted in participants identifying gaps in the provision of advice and information and key priorities for addressing those gaps. Consequently, the ideas originating from group discussion were used to underpin the revised strategy development.</p> <p>Separately some individual meetings were undertaken with service users who had indicated a willingness to take part.</p>
<p>Is there any existing data and / or research relating to equalities issues in this policy area? Please summarise. E.g. consultations, national surveys, performance data, complaints, service user feedback, academic / consultants' reports, benchmarking (see equalities resources on OIC information portal).</p>	<p>There is significant research in this policy area.</p> <p>Ending homelessness is a priority area of the Scottish Government and accordingly the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG) has published a significant amount of research in recent years. Provision of advice is central to this. The Scottish Government has indicated its intention to introduce a new duty in relation to the prevention of homelessness which will ensure that all statutory agencies will be expected to assist in the prevention of homelessness. Again, advice is key to this.</p> <p>There is national research around housing and homelessness equality and specifically whether housing is a human right.</p>
<p>Is there any existing evidence relating to socio-economic disadvantage and inequalities of outcome in this policy area? Please summarise. E.g. For people living in poverty or for people of low income. See The Fairer Scotland Duty Guidance for Public Bodies for further information.</p>	<p>There is significant research indicating that homeless households suffer socio-economic disadvantage and this is intensified if they are rough sleepers. The provision of housing or lack of it is recognised as being intrinsically linked to a range of indicators related to health, wealth and educational achievement.</p> <p>The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has produced a range of research focussing on poverty and disadvantage and the links between this and</p>

	housing and homelessness. Research such as this relates directly to the introduction of the Fairer Scotland Duty.
Could the function / policy have a differential impact on any of the following equality areas?	(Please provide any evidence – positive impacts / benefits, negative impacts and reasons).
1. Race: this includes ethnic or national groups, colour and nationality.	Potentially if for instance there was a language barrier but our Accessibility Policy is specifically intended to address this. Our homelessness interview records / advice service records etc would include records of any requirements for information in different formats and languages.
2. Sex: a man or a woman.	Impact is unlikely to be significant.
3. Sexual Orientation: whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes.	Impact is unlikely to be significant.
4. Gender Reassignment: the process of transitioning from one gender to another.	Impact is unlikely to be significant.
5. Pregnancy and maternity.	Impact is unlikely to be significant.
6. Age: people of different ages.	Impact is unlikely to be significant.
7. Religion or beliefs or none (atheists).	Impact is unlikely to be significant.
8. Caring responsibilities.	Impact is unlikely to be significant.
9. Care experienced.	Impact is unlikely to be significant.
10. Marriage and Civil Partnerships.	Impact is unlikely to be significant.
11. Disability: people with disabilities (whether registered or not).	Potentially if for instance there was a language barrier but our Accessibility Policy is specifically intended to address this. Our homelessness interview records / advice service records etc would include records of any requirements for information in different formats and languages.
12. Socio-economic disadvantage.	Impact is unlikely to be significant.

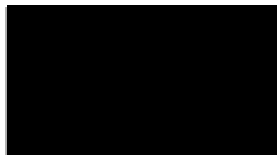
3. Impact Assessment

Does the analysis above identify any differential impacts which need to be addressed?	Language barriers are a possibility in relation to different ethnic groups.
How could you minimise or remove any potential negative impacts?	Potential language barriers can be addressed through normal working arrangements and our Accessibility Policy.
Do you have enough information to make a judgement? If no, what information do you require?	Yes

4. Conclusions and Planned Action

Is further work required?	No
What action is to be taken?	N/A
Who will undertake it?	N/A
When will it be done?	N/A
How will it be monitored? (e.g. through service plans).	Monitoring will be five yearly as part of Housing Services' rolling review programme.

Signature:



Name: FRANCES TROUP

Date: 25.4.23

(BLOCK CAPITALS).

Please sign and date this form, keep one copy and send a copy to HR and Performance. A Word version should also be emailed to HR and Performance at hrsupport@orkney.gov.uk

Island Communities Impact Assessment

[Advice and Information Strategy, Housing Services]

Preliminary Considerations	Response
Please provide a brief description or summary of the policy, strategy or service under review for the purposes of this assessment.	Advice and Information Strategy.
Step 1 – Develop a clear understanding of your objectives	Response
What are the objectives of the policy, strategy or service?	To ensure the Council meets its statutory obligation in respect of ensuring housing advice is available in its area free of charge.
Do you need to consult?	Yes. The Advice and Information Strategy has been produced as a consultative draft and a process of consultation will follow.
How are islands identified for the purpose of the policy, strategy or service?	The strategy covers the whole local authority area which includes all the inhabited islands.
What are the intended impacts/outcomes and how do these potentially differ in the islands?	<p>To ensure the Housing Service has in place an appropriate strategy to deliver our statutory requirements in respect of the provision of advice and information under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.</p> <p>The legislative provision is the same in the islands. We also have in place an Accessibility Strategy to ensure that delivery of our advice and information provision is accessible and delivered through various different methods including through our website and in paper form. This is to ensure everyone can access information irrespective of their location.</p>
Is the policy, strategy or service new?	No it is a revised strategy.
Step 2 – Gather your data and identify your stakeholders	Response
What data is available about the current situation in the islands?	Data around advice and information provision. Data over the last two years shows numbers which are so small they are potentially

	identifiable and therefore will not be published. In each case the numbers are below five cases.
Do you need to consult?	Yes.
How does any existing data differ between islands?	The numbers are tiny so there will not be advice cases from each island in any year. A small number of cases will exist from an isles location and the precise location will vary year to year. Where data held is below 5, specific numbers will not be published due to the risk of identification.
Are there any existing design features or mitigations in place?	<p>The Housing Service would make arrangements with any household which needed assistance in the isles. This may include assistance to hold the relevant discussion by phone or Microsoft Teams. We provide information through our website and will also provide it in paper format on request.</p> <p>In some circumstances such as provision of advice as a result of a domestic abuse situation, the Service will be very aware of the need to ensure anonymity for the household concerned and makes appropriate arrangements accordingly. This may be in partnership with other agencies as appropriate.</p>
Step 3 – Consultation	Response
Who do you need to consult with?	The consultation process will include consulting with a range of agencies from across statutory and voluntary sectors. The draft strategy will be made available on the Council's website to enable a broad range of stakeholders and service users to contribute if they wish. Paper copies will also be made available on request.

How will you carry out your consultation and in what timescales?	By email, by strategy being made available on our website and offered in paper copy on request. Article in Housing News in next edition.
What questions will you ask when considering how to address island realities?	We will seek confirmation that the way in which we offer our services allows them to be accessible to all.
What information has already been gathered through consultations and what concerns have been raised previously by island communities?	Information has been collected in relation to housing advice provision more generally. This includes collecting customer satisfaction information relating to individual experience of the housing advice service and experience. This is looked at on an individual basis and any issues arising are addressed through a performance related process interlinked with the Service Delivery Plan for Homelessness and Advice Services.
Is your consultation robust and meaningful and sufficient to comply with the Section 7 duty?	Our consultation will seek confirmation that the way in which we offer our services allows them to be accessible to all. Our consultation will build on the consultation already undertaken at the pre-development stage.
Step 4 – Assessment	Response
Does your assessment identify any unique impacts on island communities?	No.
Does your assessment identify any potential barriers or wider impacts?	No.
How will you address these?	N/A.
<p>You must now determine whether in your opinion your policy, strategy or service is likely to have an effect on an island community, which is significantly different from its effect on other communities (including other island communities).</p> <p>If your answer is No to the above question, a full ICIA will NOT be required and you can process to Step 6.</p>	

If the answer is **Yes**, an ICIA must be prepared and **you should proceed to Step 5**.

To form your opinion, the following questions should be considered:

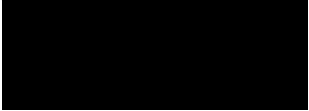
- Does the evidence show different circumstances or different expectations or needs, or different experiences or outcomes (such as different levels of satisfaction, or different rates of participation)?
- Are these different effects likely?
- Are these effects significantly different?
- Could the effect amount to a disadvantage for an island community compared to the Scottish mainland or between island groups?

Step 5 – Preparing your ICIA	Response
In Step 5, you should describe the likely significantly different effect of the policy, strategy or service:	
Assess the extent to which you consider that the policy, strategy or service can be developed or delivered in such a manner as to improve or mitigate, for island communities, the outcomes resulting from it.	
Consider alternative delivery mechanisms and whether further consultation is required.	
Describe how these alternative delivery mechanisms will improve or mitigate outcomes for island communities.	
Identify resources required to improve or mitigate outcomes for island communities.	
Stage 6 – Making adjustments to your work	Response
Should delivery mechanisms/mitigations vary in different communities?	Advice and Information provision is designed to be as wide as possible. In tandem with our Accessibility Policy, advice can be provided in a broad range of formats and languages and therefore should be accessible to all irrespective of location.

Do you need to consult with island communities in respect of mechanisms or mitigations?	No.
Have island circumstances been factored into the evaluation process?	Yes, island circumstances are always factored into our strategies and policies relating to Housing as we deliver Housing Services across a broad range of island communities.
Have any island-specific indicators/targets been identified that require monitoring?	No.
How will outcomes be measured on the islands?	The outcomes will be measured through an action plan which looks at outcomes across the island group.
How has the policy, strategy or service affected island communities?	Advice and Information must be available free of charge to all residents of the Local Authority's area.
How will lessons learned in this ICIA inform future policy making and service delivery?	N/A.
Step 7 – Publishing your ICIA	Response
Have you presented your ICIA in an Easy Read format?	Yes.
Does it need to be presented in Gaelic or any other language?	No.
Where will you publish your ICIA and will relevant stakeholders be able to easily access it?	Orkney Islands Council's Website with Committee Report and Minute on Advice and Information Strategy.
Who will signoff your final ICIA and why?	James Wylie, Corporate Director of Education, Leisure and Housing – line manager of Frances Troup.

ICIA completed by:	Frances Troup
Position:	Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing

Signature:	
Date complete:	25 April 2023

ICIA approved by:	James Wylie
Position:	Corporate Director of Education, Leisure and Housing
Signature:	
Date complete:	18 May 2023