

PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCIL**Housing and Health Committee****27 August 2014****Neighbourhood Services and Homelessness Strategy****Report by Executive Director (Housing and Community Care)****PURPOSE OF REPORT**

This purpose of this report is to seek approval for an integrated Neighbourhood Services and Homelessness strategy. This new strategy is the first step to fulfilling our ambition to integrate housing services. It assesses progress on achieving the outcomes of the two existing separate strategies and identifies areas for continued work.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In March 2012 Housing and Health Committee approved a report on Improving Local Neighbourhoods – A Strategy for Neighbourhood Management (Report 12/119). In March 2013, (Report 13/116) was presented to Housing and Health Committee and the Executive Director was remitted to continue to develop the strategy actions during 2013-14. A new strategy was therefore required from 2014.
- 1.2 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 required all local authorities to produce Homelessness Strategies to prevent and alleviate homelessness in their areas. In compliance with this, Perth and Kinross Council produced a three year Homelessness Strategy in 2009, with progress reports submitted in October 2009 (Report 09/494a), May 2010 (Report 10/257) and August 2011 (Report 11/436).
- 1.3 In March 2013 a further report on homelessness (Report 13/119) provided updated details and introduced an interim one-year strategy to allow longer term strategic plans to be progressed once the effect of welfare reform was more fully understood.

2 PROPOSALS

- 2.1 It is proposed that Housing and Health Committee approve the new combined Perth and Kinross Neighbourhood Services and Homelessness Strategy which:
 - Provides the strategic framework for the future focus of housing and homelessness services.
 - Identifies how the strategy will help related local and national housing priorities, as well as the wider corporate and community planning objectives.

- Emphasises the interdependencies within the housing service in order to meet the needs of individuals and communities.
- Conveys a shift in focus and activity towards prevention and early intervention across all areas of housing.
- Enhances the joint work already undertaken with tenants and residents by introducing a new initiative designed to involve and empower communities.
- Sets the vision, themes and outcomes for the delivery of services to individuals and neighbourhoods, and shows how progress will be monitored.

2.2 The strategy is structured around five main themes namely:

- Housing options and access/homeless prevention
- Providing temporary, resettled and permanent accommodation for homeless people
- Managing and sustaining tenancies
- Safe and secure communities
- Involving and empowering our communities

2.3 Within each theme a number of related outcomes have been identified, each of which corresponds to the relevant Scottish Social Housing Charter outcomes.

2.4 Progress, performance, key challenges and future actions are also identified across each of the five themes and are detailed in the strategy.

3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Over the past year the Council and its partners have made significant improvements in the delivery of services to homeless people, tenants and other customers. However, housing services continue to face many challenges, such as the lack of affordable housing, the economic climate and the affects of Welfare Reform on vulnerable households.

3.2 Through the actions in this strategy the service will continue to work with tenants and residents and other partners to achieve our vision 'for people to have access to suitable, good quality, affordable accommodation with the necessary support to prevent them from becoming homeless and to sustain them in their own homes. We want our neighbourhoods to be vibrant, successful places where people can enjoy a safe, secure and healthy environment.'

3.3 It is recommended that Housing and Health Committee:

- i. Notes the progress made by the Housing Service over the last year.
- ii. Approves the Neighbourhood Services and Homelessness Strategy for implementation.

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Approved

Name	Designation	Date
John Walker	Executive Director, Housing and Community Care	18th August 2014

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1. IMPLICATIONS, ASSESSMENTS, CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

Strategic Implications	Yes / None
Community Plan / Single Outcome Agreement	Yes
Corporate Plan	Yes
Resource Implications	
Financial	No
Workforce	No
Asset Management (land, property, IST)	No
Assessments	
Equality Impact Assessment	Yes
Strategic Environmental Assessment	No
Sustainability (community, economic, environmental)	No
Legal and Governance	Yes
Risk	Yes
Consultation	
Internal	Yes
External	Yes
Communication	
Communications Plan	Yes

1. Strategic Implications

Community Plan / Single Outcome Agreement

1.1 The Community Plan and Single Outcome objectives are all relevant to this report:

- Giving every child the best start in life
- Developing educated, responsible and informed citizens
- Promoting a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy
- Supporting people to lead independent, healthy and active lives
- Creating a safe and sustainable place for future generations

Corporate Plan

1.2 As above. The five Corporate Plan objectives are all relevant to this report.

2. Resource Implications

2.1 Any resource implications arising from this report will be contained within existing Housing and Community Care resources.

3. Assessments

3.1 Equality Impact Assessment

The Council's Corporate Equalities Assessment Framework requires an assessment of functions, policies, procedures or strategies in relation to race, gender and disability and other relevant equality categories. This supports the Council's legal requirement to comply with the duty to assess and consult on relevant new policies to ensure there is no adverse impact on any community group or employees.

The function, policy, procedure or strategy presented in this report was considered under the Corporate Equalities Assessment Framework and the determination was made that the items summarised in this report do not require further assessment as they will all have a positive impact on people's wellbeing.

3.2 Strategic Environmental Assessment

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a legal requirement under the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 that applies to all qualifying plans, programmes and strategies, including policies (PPS).

The details presented in this report were considered under the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 and no further action is required as it does not qualify as a PPS as defined by the Act and is therefore exempt.

3.3 Legal and Governance

The Head of Legal Services has been consulted on this strategy.

Risk

- 3.4 The implementation of this strategy and action will mitigate against the risks of not achieving the vision.

4. Consultation

4.1 Internal

The Heads of Legal and Finance have been consulted on this strategy.

4.2 External

The Tenant Committee Report Panel were consulted on this strategy. They considered it to be a very well laid out document. They suggested a condensed version be made available to let people know what is happening and show how services are being delivered.

5. Communication

- 5.1 A communication plan will be drafted as part of the implementation of this strategy.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 6.1 None.

7 APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Neighbourhood Services and Homelessness Strategy

Neighbourhood Services and Homelessness Strategy 2014-2015



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Neighbourhood Services and Homelessness Strategy 2014-2015

Foreword – John Walker, Executive Director

I am pleased to introduce our first Neighbourhood Services and Homelessness Strategy. This is the first time we have combined these strategies into one document supporting our ambition for a more integrated housing and homelessness service and reaffirming our commitment to support the wider corporate outcomes.

The strategy sets out our themes, priorities and actions and describes how the Council, in partnership with a range of stakeholders, will deliver housing and homelessness services, building on existing improvements and identifying new and innovative ways of preventing homelessness, managing our neighbourhoods and tenancies and supporting people to find and sustain affordable housing.

The Housing Service plays a central role within the Council and has a major contribution to achieving the wider corporate outcomes. Providing safe and secure housing fulfils a basic human need that must be fulfilled to achieve personal and community aspirations. Well planned, good quality housing contributes to strong, resilient communities and makes a positive contribution to many government priorities including, economic growth, community empowerment and improved health.

Importantly, the strategy is based on what tenants and customers have told us that they want. It is a further step towards our ambition to deliver a fully integrated, locally based housing service that place the customer at the centre and focuses on prevention, sustainability and early intervention.

Our tenants and customers will continue to be the major influence in how we deliver housing and homeless services. They provide clear guidance through Registered Tenants' Organisations, The Homeless Voice Association and a range of thematic forums on the kind of services they need and want us to deliver, now and in the future. This strategy confirms our commitment to deliver on our tenants and customers desire for more locally-based services with a greater level of support for our tenants and to enhance the areas within which they live.

By increasing our focus on customer and community empowerment, supporting learning and employability opportunities and creating safer, attractive well managed

neighbourhoods, we will ensure the housing service makes a distinctive contribution to improving the outcomes for individuals and communities.

Introduction

A new approach....

Until now the Council has approached homelessness through a separate strategy and plan. This new strategy combines our Neighbourhood Services and Homelessness strategies into a single document. It paves the way for our ambition for a fully integrated housing and homelessness service and reflects the service wide interdependencies that exist to achieve the wider corporate outcomes.

The strategy sets out our vision, priorities and actions and describes how the Council, in partnership with a range of stakeholders, will deliver housing management and homelessness services over the next few years, building on existing improvements and identifying new and innovative ways of preventing homelessness, managing our neighbourhoods and tenancies and supporting people to find and sustain affordable housing.

Significant and lasting improvements have been achieved across many areas of the housing service in recent years. We have radically transformed our homeless services, making them more responsive to individual needs and providing homeless people with the types and level of support they need to prevent homelessness. Through our programme of capital investment and modernisation we have improved the quality and appearance of our housing stock and significantly increased the number of homes meeting the energy efficiency standard. We have excellent levels of tenancy sustainability and continue to perform well nationally in this area. Tenant satisfaction levels with the condition of neighbourhoods are high and we continue to strengthen our partnership arrangements with our tenants and residents through a wide variety of forums and engagement activities. We have achieved these outcomes whilst maintaining our rent levels at the 9th lowest in Scotland and at an average of £62.58 below the Scottish average of £63.91.

We are acutely aware of the national and local context within which this strategy will operate and our vision, themes and outcomes reflect the wider agenda. Housing in Scotland continues to face significant challenges: the supply of housing does not meet current levels of need and Welfare Reform continues to put pressures on household incomes, increasing the impact on vulnerable households.

As a Council we are required to evidence to our tenants, key stakeholders and the Scottish Housing Regulator how we are meeting the Scottish Social Housing Charter outcomes, so the strategy and its themes are clearly aligned to these outcomes enabling transparent reporting on our performance and progress.

Underpinning the strategy is our shift to delivering services in line with the 4 Pillars of Public Sector reform delivering services locally, in partnership, with a far greater emphasis on prevention, sustainability and early intervention promoting positive outcomes for people and communities. Combining our neighbourhood services and homeless services strategies reflects our need to work together, intervening early to prevent crises and later problems, supporting people in their tenancies and to remain in their communities.

We recognise the impact that damp, overcrowded and unsuitable accommodation has on children's developmental and educational outcomes and we will continue to work in partnership with colleagues from Education and Children's Services to improve the outcomes for children and young people through our involvement in the Early Years' Collaborative and Evidence to Success.

Within Perth and Kinross the housing service is a key partner in the Health and Social Care partnership and has a critical role to supporting the 9 National Health and Social Care Outcomes ensuring the delivery of a range of prevention / early intervention and housing services to support residents to secure suitable and sustainable housing and remain safe within their homes. As the Health and Social Care Partnership Strategic Plan is developed in the forthcoming months the Housing Service will identify and support relevant actions and outcomes to ensure a valuable housing contribution.

Importantly this Neighbourhood Services and Homelessness Strategy will be delivered in tandem with the Tenant Participation and Local Housing Strategy, complementing and reflecting their priorities and outcomes to ensure a seamless approach to the delivery of housing services within Perth and Kinross.

Our commitment is to design and deliver services through the eyes of our customers, maximising capacity and reinforcing neighbourhood services through the use of technology and based on real and meaningful engagement with our customers.

Our vision

.... Is for people to have access to suitable, good quality, affordable accommodation with the necessary support to prevent them from being homeless and to sustain them in their own homes. We want our neighbourhoods to be vibrant, successful places where people can enjoy a safe, secure and healthy environment.

This vision, along with our themes and desired outcomes, clearly and concisely conveys the focus for the delivery of housing and homelessness services within Perth and Kinross, linked to the 2020 vision for health and social care integration: supporting people to live at home or in a homely setting. It serves a number of important purposes:

- It focuses on integrated service delivery, change and improvement.
- It simplifies a range of service wide outcomes, targets and objectives.
- It crystallises and emphasises the interdependencies within the housing service.
- It motivates the service teams to work together to take action in the right direction.

Our commitment to deliver our vision will continue to be based on:

- **Place** - Being responsive to our customers, our tenants and our communities and enhancing strong partnership relationships to reduce inequalities and deliver improvements in outcomes. This will be achieved through greater integration of our housing services and locality based working.
- **Prevention**- Our priority is to continue to shift our focus and activity towards early intervention across all areas of the housing service.
- **People** - Empowering and supporting our staff to be passionate and innovative about delivering excellent customer focussed services. We will continue to support employees to develop professionally to meet the changing and future aspirations of our service.
- **Performance** – We will continue to develop and embed a strong performance culture throughout the housing service to evidence the impact of the work that we do and inform effective improvement.

Themes and Outcomes

The strategy is centred around 5 main themes and related outcomes. Each outcome corresponds to and reflects the Scottish Social Housing Charter outcomes, helping us to achieve the outcomes and demonstrating all areas of the service are aligned with these outcomes.

Theme 1: Housing Options and Access / Homeless Prevention

Outcomes:

- People looking for housing find it easy to apply for the widest choice of social housing available and get information they need on how the landlord allocates homes and their prospects of being housed. (Charter 10)
- People looking for housing receive information to inform their choices and decisions about the range of housing options available to them. (Charter 7)
- Tenants and people on housing lists can review their housing options. (Charter 8)
- People at risk of losing their homes receive advice on preventing homelessness
- Homeless people receive prompt and easy access to help and advice (Charter 9)

Theme 2: Providing temporary, resettled and permanent accommodation for homeless people

Outcomes:

- Homeless people are provided with suitable, good quality temporary or emergency accommodation, when this is needed, and are offered support to help them get and keep the home they are entitled to. (Charter 12)

Theme 3: Managing and sustaining tenancies

Outcomes:

- Tenants and customers receive the information they need on how to access accommodation, when this is needed, and are offered continuing support to help them find and sustain a home.
- Tenants, owners and other customers receive services that provide continually improving value for the rent and other charges they pay. (Charter 13)
- A balance is struck between the level of services provided, the cost of the services and how far current and prospective tenants and others can afford them. (Charter 14)
- Tenants are aware of their responsibilities and clear that the council will intervene where individuals are not fulfilling the terms of their tenancy agreement and creating problems for other tenants and residents.

Theme 4: Safe and Secure Communities

Outcomes:

- Tenants and residents live in attractive, well managed neighbourhoods, free from anti-social behaviour and vandalism where they feel safe. (Charter 6)
- We manage our Gypsy Traveller sites so that they are well maintained and managed. (Charter 16)
- Tenants homes meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standards (SHQS) by April 2015 and continue to meet it thereafter, and when they are allocated are always clean, tidy and in a good state of repair. (Charter 4)
- Tenants homes are well maintained with repairs and improvements carried out when required and tenants are given reasonable choices about when work is done. (Charter 5)

Theme 5: Involving and Empowering our Communities

Outcomes:

- Tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with. (Charter 3)
- Tenants get clear information on how rent and other money is spent, including any details of individual items of expenditure above thresholds agreed between landlords and tenants. (Charter 15)

Legal and Strategic Context

Housing and homeless services operate within the Council's Corporate Plan, the Community Plan and the national and UK legislative framework. They are focused on achieving the Scottish Social Housing Charter's outcomes and are organised to reflect the four pillars of public sector reform. More detail on specific relevant legislation is detailed in Appendix A.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 introduced the Scottish Social Housing Charter which came into effect in April 2012. The Charter provides the basis for the Scottish Housing Regulator to assess and report on how well landlords are performing and enables the regulator, tenants and other customers and social landlords to identify areas of strong performance and areas where improvement activity is required.

The Housing Bill (Scotland) which was passed by the Scottish Government in June 2014 is intended to safeguard tenant's interests, support improvements to housing quality and

secure better outcomes for communities in terms of housing allocations and tackling anti-social behaviour.

The Community Empowerment Bill was introduced to the Scottish Parliament in June 2014 and aims to make the most of the talents that exist in our communities, delivering high quality and improving public services and support strong local democracy and local decision making.

The Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act was introduced in 2014 and lays the legislative foundation for the integration of health and social care to support positive outcomes for individuals and communities.

The Council's legal responsibilities to people presenting as homeless differs depending on the outcome of a comprehensive homeless assessment. The Council has a legal responsibility to:

- Provide advice and assistance and prevent and alleviate homelessness wherever possible
- Assess the circumstances of households seeking homelessness assistance
- Provide suitable temporary accommodation
- Assess the support needs of all homeless households and provide support
- Provide suitable settled accommodation to alleviate the homelessness

As a landlord the Council has a range of responsibilities as prescribed by legislation and detailed within the tenancy agreement including:

- To keep accommodation in a reasonable state of repair i.e. habitable and wind and water tight.
- To consult tenants on policies regarding housing management, repairs and maintenance if the proposal is likely to significantly affect them and take their views into account before making a decision.

Key Achievements

Through implementing previous strategies, we and our partners have achieved a range of improvements in the quality and delivery of housing and homeless services throughout Perth and Kinross. We have reported progress annually to the Council's Housing and Health Committees and at Annual Homeless and Neighbourhood Services Conferences and events where we have consulted with key partners and stakeholders.

In the period 2009 – 13 covered by previous strategies, we have radically transformed our homeless service, achieving significant and sustained improvements in the delivery of

homeless services across all areas including prevention, accommodation and support. During 2013/14 we continued to focus on investing in strong partnership relationships with local residents and agencies and enhanced our focus on working within communities.

Key achievements have included:

- ✓ Reviewing and enhancing the delivery of **housing options** with a strong focus on **early intervention** and **prevention**, thereby preventing homelessness and reducing homeless presentations by 27% over the last 4 years
- ✓ Developing a number of **prevention** measures to target youth homelessness, including the roll out of a housing education programme and a family mediation service
- ✓ In July 2013 the Homeless Support Service were awarded Excellent and Very Good grades for - Quality of Care and Support and Quality of Staffing and Quality of Management and Leadership
- ✓ In June 2013, the Service was awarded a Care Accolade for the delivery of their move on support for homeless customers from the Care Inspectorate
- ✓ Increasing the supply of **affordable housing** through our new builds and buy-back scheme, building 118 new Council houses in the last 6 years and buying back 28 former council houses in the past 2 years. We are currently building 38 units and will be starting on a further 48 later in the year.
- ✓ Bringing empty properties back into use for social rent is also a priority and this initiative won the Camelot Scottish Empty Homes Champion Award in November 2013
- ✓ Maintaining excellent levels of tenancy sustainability within our tenancies
- ✓ Undertaking a range of initiatives and activities to **maximise the income** of our tenants and minimise rent arrears
- ✓ Improving voids performance, minimising rent loss and supporting quick access to housing
- ✓ Implementing new arrangements for the delivery of sheltered, retirement and amenity housing to meet the varying future needs of older people from April 2014
- ✓ **Improving the quality** and appearance of our housing stock and achieving an overall increase in compliance with the SHQS to 83% at March 2014
- ✓ Making good progress with the central heating programme enabling an increase in the number of houses meeting the energy efficiency standards and providing more energy efficient homes
- ✓ Successfully securing £3.1 million funding from the Home Energy Efficiency Scotland – Area Based Schemes (HEEPS- ABS) to undertake a large scale energy efficiency works for residents of Perth and Kinross
- ✓ Planning the regeneration of garage sites and lock-ups with local communities
- ✓ Establishing plans to undertake **environmental improvements** and Neighbourhood Initiatives to improve the attractiveness of our communities

- ✓ Successfully regenerating Old Mill Road council properties to provide much needed housing and build the foundations for a new and sustainable community in Rattray
- ✓ Through the Strategic **Tenant Engagement** and Annual Rent Setting group we have enhanced tenant involvement in our rent setting process

The Housing Service has also been recognised for its delivery of excellent and innovative services and has received a number of the Council's Securing the Future Awards in recent years. These included:

- ✓ Greyfriars House
- ✓ Homeless Service
- ✓ Prisoner Protocols
- ✓ Rent Bond Guarantee Scheme
- ✓ 'Moving In / Moving On'
- ✓ Private Sector Leasing
- ✓ Quality Panel
- ✓ Us and The Housing
- ✓ Texting Project

Challenges and Opportunities

While we are proud of our many achievements, we continue to face new challenges, including Welfare Reform and the lack of settled housing options for individuals and families. Demand for housing remains acute and the availability of affordable housing options is limited. The financial pressures faced by our tenants as a result of the economic climate and welfare reform are increasing. Low household income and poverty often leads to multiple and complex issues, drug and alcohol misuse, mental health issues and increasing likelihood of crime and anti-social behaviour and homelessness. Our close working with community care, health colleagues and education and children's services' colleagues, continues to be critical.

Many aspects of the corporate and national agenda however present exciting opportunities to deliver higher standards of service delivery, more efficiently and with a greater focus on innovation and community empowerment.

A number of influences and key challenges and opportunities have dictated the priorities and intended outcomes of this strategy, these include:

Key Opportunity: Public Sector Reform

The challenges and priorities outlined in this strategy fit within Public Sector Reform agenda. Through our transformation of the housing service over the forthcoming months we will continue to ensure that our services are delivered and designed around the 4 pillars of

public sector reform with a continuing and increasing emphasis on place, people, prevention and performance. A focus on homelessness prevention activity over the last 4 years has already yielded very positive outcomes. A robust approach to performance improvement through the strategy's monitoring framework and performance management and quality assurance frameworks have facilitated improvements across all areas.

Key Opportunity – The changing role of frontline housing staff

There is both local and national recognition that the role of the housing officer is adapting to the contextual changes and new demands from housing customers. There are external drivers for change – welfare reform, reduced housing supply, an ageing population, greater use of mobile technology and an increasing gap between household incomes and housing costs. Partnership working with a range of agencies and organisations has become increasingly important.

Consequently, a number of different skills and competencies will be needed by our frontline housing professionals, such as problem solving, understanding the needs of vulnerable groups, communication and customer focus. Aspects of housing management, such as maximising rental income and managing empty properties (voids) also needs housing officers to be commercially minded, but balancing the business mind with a social heart balance.

Key Opportunity - Health and social care integration

Working with health and community care colleagues to prepare for Health and Social Care integration presents a real opportunity for the housing service to strengthen well established partnerships to work innovatively with health and community care colleagues within our communities to collectively achieve positive outcomes, supporting people to live at home or in a homely setting, with locally delivered services.

Key Challenge: Welfare Reform

The changes to welfare benefits arising from Welfare Reform continue to pose unprecedented challenges in the delivery of housing services. Significantly reduced incomes arising from the range of benefit changes place a risk of homelessness for many households. Restricted access to the private sector, for single people aged under 35 years have necessitated new and innovative accommodation options. The 'bedroom tax' has resulted in an increase in rent arrears and placed greater pressure on demand for 1 bed-roomed accommodation, an area where the Council is already unable to meet the level of demand.

While unemployment levels in Perth & Kinross are generally low, average monthly earnings are below the Scottish average. With Welfare Reform and the rising cost of living, the gap between earnings and housing costs means we need to support our tenants to maximise their incomes and manage and sustain their tenancies. Feedback highlights a low level of

understanding among our tenants of welfare reform and the introduction of Universal Credit (52%). This is an area that our Neighbourhood Services teams will continue to prioritise in the forthcoming year.

Key Challenge: Securing settled accommodation

During 2013/14, 54% of homeless households received a tenancy in either a Council or Housing Association property, compared to 69% for Scotland. This was a result of 482 of the 915 (53%) available social tenancies being let to homeless people. Interestingly, this is significantly higher than the national average where an estimated 38% of social vacancies were let to homeless people during 2013/14. These figures underline the significant challenges faced by Perth and Kinross Council in meeting homelessness and acute housing needs and demonstrate the continuing mismatch between demand for housing and supply.

In March 2013, 695 homeless households were awaiting a secure offer of housing. This had reduced to 545 by March 2014 and is currently 575. This is the lowest level of homeless households waiting for secure accommodation since 2011.

Despite the reduction in the number of homeless households on the waiting list, the average time to discharge the Council's homeless duty increased from 41 weeks in 2011 /12, to 46 weeks in 2012/13 and is currently 50 weeks, compared to the national average of 31 weeks (2013/14). This increase is due to the mismatch between demand for housing and available supply, with single homeless people waiting the longest to secure permanent accommodation.

One of our key priorities for the forthcoming year is to review allocations of social rented accommodation to homeless households and to continue to work with partners to explore opportunities to facilitate additional units of accommodation to enable homeless people to access suitable settled accommodation within a reasonable timescale.

Key Opportunity: Early Years

Launched by the Scottish Government in October 2012, the Early Years Collaborative aims to accelerate the practical implementation of 'Getting it Right for Every Child' (GIRFEC) and the Early Years' Framework across Scotland reducing inequalities and delivering improved outcomes for children.

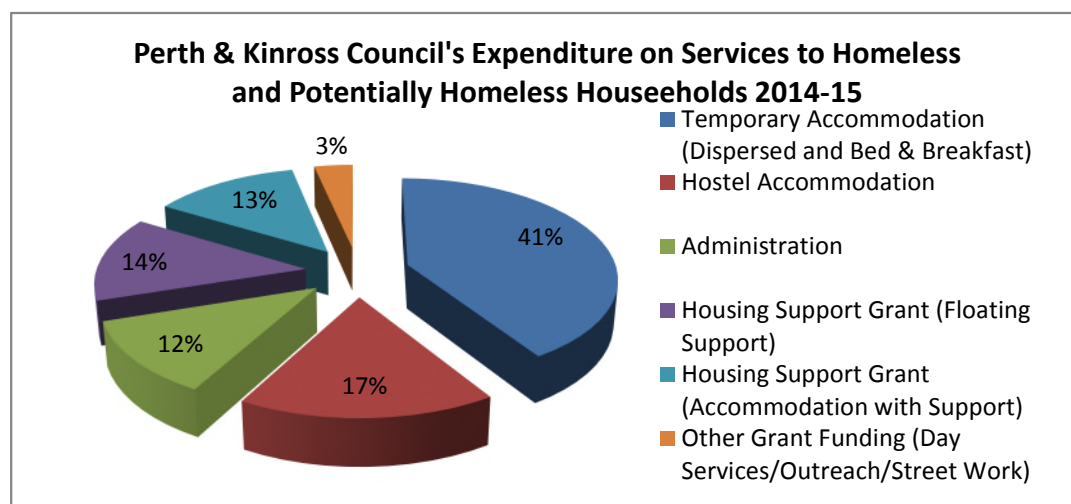
Providing housing fulfils the basic human need for a roof over our head and many partners find it difficult to address critical issues, such as substance misuse, parenting skills and health issues, until the home situation is stabilised. The impact of poor quality housing, overcrowding and homelessness on health, employment opportunities, educational attainment and children's outcomes in life are very real.

The Council has made significant improvements in reducing the impact of homelessness on children through a range of measures, including the elimination of the use of Bed and

Breakfast and minimising overcrowding within Council tenancies. The provision of high standards of accommodation and the delivery of excellent homeless support and housing management services, along with access to a range of housing options and settled housing solutions, will remain a key priority. The strategy will ensure that the delivery of housing and homeless services across Perth and Kinross supports the Council's commitment to improving outcomes through the Early Years' Collaborative.

Financial Expenditure

Homeless Service

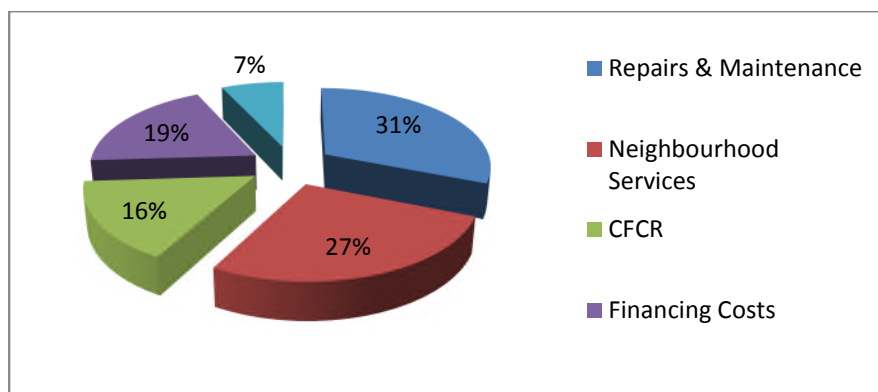


The majority of expenditure in delivering homeless services relates to the provision of temporary accommodation with the total gross expenditure equating to £5.86 million. Income received through rents and service charges ensures that net expenditure is actually substantially less. Expenditure through Housing Support Grant enables the delivery of a wide range of 'floating support' and accommodation-based support provided by partners in the voluntary sector. Other grants help deliver services, such as advice, information, day, outreach and street work services which complement the work undertaken in these areas by the Council.

Welfare Reform will continue to have an impact on the delivery of homeless services as many elements of service delivery are funded through income currently received through housing benefit. In forthcoming months as the changes arising from welfare reform are fully realised, this will be an area for future review and development, ensuring we have a service that is affordable and sustainable. Priority is to develop more mainstream accommodation, assisting the throughput of people from temporary to settled accommodation.

The Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is financed primarily from the rents paid by our Council tenants. The budget for 2014/15 is £26million, for every £1 paid in rent; costs are as follows:

- Repairs & Maintenance – 31p in every £ spent
- Neighbourhood Services – 27p in every £ spent
- Financing the HRA Debt – 19p in every £ spent
- Support Services – 7p in every £ spent
- Contribution towards the Capital Programme (CFCR) – 16p in every £ spent



HRA Capital Programme 2014-15 to 2018-19

Housing & Health Committee approved the following capital programme for the Housing Revenue Account in January 2014. This investment will enable Perth & Kinross Council to meet and exceed the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by 31 March 2015, with limited exemptions.

The capital improvement programme has a five year budget of £61.4m which includes improvements to:

- Central heating/rewiring (£11.5m)
- External fabric (£7.4m)
- Energy efficiency (£5.2m)
- Double glazing (£5.1m)
- Door entry (£1.6m)
- Multi-storey flats (£1.6m)
- Kitchens and bathrooms (£0.9m)
- Environmental Improvements (£0.4m)
- Fire Precaution Measures (£0.4m)
- New council house (£15.3m)
- Increase in housing stock (£4.5m)
- Garages & Lock-ups (£2.5m)
- Adaptations (£2.0m)
- Mortgage to rent (£1.2m)
- Lift replacements (£0.4m)
- Other (£1.4m)

Profiles

Housing Management – managing our houses effectively

Four Area Housing Teams currently deliver housing management and tenancy services to our tenants and the wider communities across Perth and Kinross.

The four areas are:

- Perth City
- Letham/Hillyland
- North Perthshire
- South Perthshire

Neighbourhood Services provide a frontline landlord service, including tenancy and neighbourhood management and a general housing advice and information service to all tenants. Advice, support and assistance are also offered to vulnerable households experiencing the negative effects of social inequalities. Our work is focused on the prevention of problems before they escalate, such as rent arrears and antisocial behaviour.

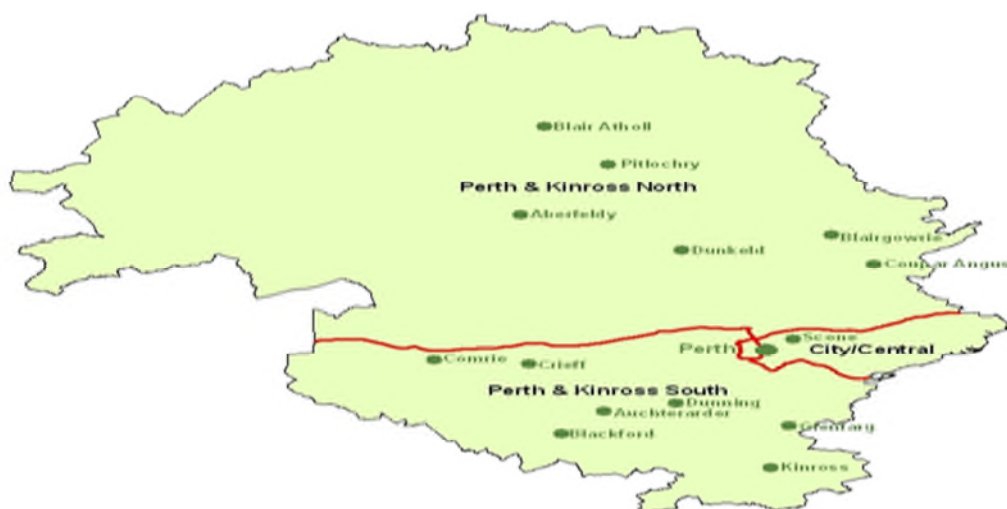
We work in partnership with other support services, including the Safer Communities Team, community care teams, social workers within Education and Children's services and drug and alcohol services. The effective management of our estates is important to residents and this involves us working collaboratively with The Environment Service in areas such as the maintenance of open spaces, with the Fire and Rescue Service and Police Scotland for community safety .

Our geography means that there are distinct communities within each of the areas each with distinct assets, challenges and profiles.

Area	Pop.	PKC Houses (Mar 14)	FTE staff	No. wait.list (Mar 14)	No. Lets (13/14)	% rent arrears
Perth City	40,365	2,245	7.00	1,714	258	10.68%
Perth North (Letham)	22,267	1,753	9.00	611	162	11.35%
Rural North Perthshire	38,250	1,888	12.60	918	288	7.28%
Rural South Perthshire	45,770	1,514	10.89	807	202	7.84%
HRIS team *	-	-	106.37	-	-	-
Homeless	-	-	50.90	-	-	-

Area	Pop.	PKC Houses (Mar 14)	FTE staff	No. wait.list (Mar 14)	No. Lets (13/14)	% rent arrears
Other Areas **	-	-	41.14	-	-	-
Total	146,652	7,400	237.90	4,050	910	9.37%

House figures as at March 2014; FTE staff and % rent arrears as at March 2014; No tenants in rent arrears as at 17 April 2014; *HRIS – Housing Repairs and Improvements team; ** Other Areas include Housing Access, Sheltered Housing, Caretakers, Court Team, and Gypsy Travellers.



Perth City

This area covers Perth City Centre and extends to North Muirton, Muirton, Bridgend, Craigie, Friarton and Moncrieffe, Scone, Errol, Glencarse, Inchtute. The Area Housing team is based in Pullar House, Perth. The City Centre itself is densely populated and this team has responsibility for all our multi-storey flatted properties at Market, Milne and Lickley, Pomarium and Potterhill. Close working with the community in Scone has been taking place to transform unused ground into an allotment and to erect notice boards to display community information.

Letham

Currently based in the Letham Centre, the team deliver housing services to the communities of Letham, Hillyland and Double Dykes. While Perth is the economic centre, unemployment levels are the highest in the North area of the City which includes Letham and Tulloch. These areas account for 36% of Perth's population and have a higher percentage of children and working age adults. The area has lower levels of income and employment than the Perth and Kinross average and the Scottish average. Community engagement and partnership working are well established within Letham where projects, such as Letham

Climate Challenge and North Perth Allotments, have significantly benefited the community. Service and partner agencies working within this area have established excellent working relationships through the Tasking and Coordinating Groups and the Complex Case Integration Group (CCIG) to support vulnerable individuals and families and promote safer communities. Further opportunities to build on this integrated approach through touch-down space or co-location will be presented when the team move to new premises next year.

North Perthshire

The Perth and Kinross North team cover our largest area geographically and operate out of three bases in Blairgowrie, Pitlochry and Aberfeldy. Delivering services to these remote and rural communities is a challenge especially as there are a higher proportion of elderly residents here. A critical aspect of the agenda for health and social care integration is the development of locality working and locality planning within each partnership area. The North Perthshire Locality Development Forum is the most advanced and housing staff in this area continue to work closely with colleagues from Community Care, NHS, Police Scotland and a range of voluntary services.

South Perthshire

The South area encompasses rural locations to the South of Perth and operates in Crieff and Kinross, with an appointment system at Auchterarder. While Crieff is a popular area for people to retire, Kinross-shire has a larger proportion of younger people and is popular for commuting to employment in Fife, Edinburgh and Perth. Housing staff from Crieff and Kinross are co-located with Education and Children's Services at the Community Campuses and have established strong partnership working.

Staff at Kinross were involved in the 'Better Place to Live' fair which took place at Loch Leven Community Campus last year. This provided an opportunity for community members, groups and organisations to celebrate achievement, network and showcase the activities they provide in the area.

Profile of Homelessness

This section gives an overview of homelessness within Perth and Kinross. It indicates:

- A reduction in homeless applications, including from younger people
- A reduction in the number of people presenting as homeless who have been asked to leave their previous accommodation
- A decrease in single people and single parents presenting as homeless
- An increase in the number of couples with and without children presenting as homeless
- An increase in homelessness due to disputes within households which has been violent and / or abusive

- An increase in the number of people presenting following discharge from hospital, prison and / or care

Table 1: Numbers of homelessness presentations, assessments and closed cases 2012/13 - 2013/14

Year	2012/13	2013/14	% change
No. presenting	909	824	- 9.3%
No. cases assessed in year	897	853	- 4.9%
No. cases closed in year	789	876	+ 11%
No. repeat homeless presentations	10	9	

Source – Scottish Government - Quarterly Report for Perth and Kinross, Apr 13 – Mar 14

Between 2012 / 13 and 2013 / 14, Perth and Kinross had an overall reduction of 9% in homeless applications, similar to a national reduction of 8%. Within this there was a 5% reduction in youth homelessness (16 to 25 year olds) which can be attributed to preventative work in schools, partnership working with Education and Children's Services and greater levels of support being given to young people in their accommodation. A more significant decline of 13% was experienced with families, evidencing our commitment to minimising the impact of homelessness on children. This reduction is largely due to the introduction of housing options and the implementation of a range of initiatives, such as flat-sharing and better access to the private sector.

The main reasons for households becoming homeless have largely remained unchanged, with 'being asked to leave' being the main reason for homelessness, followed by a dispute within the household due to violence and / or abuse and relationship breakdown.

In 2013/14, 53% of homeless applicants were single people and 28% were single parents. Nationally and locally, the profile of households has remained similar over the last 10 years.

The number of people re-presenting as homeless has reduced significantly over the past four years, with 30 cases in 2010/11, compared to 9 in 2013/14 (-70%).

Our Strategy Themes

This next section covers each of the five themes of the strategy, summarising achievements, challenges, performance, and future actions. The themes are ordered in sequence to reflect an individual's journey through our service, from access to tenancy and community involvement.

Theme 1:

Housing Options and Access /Homeless Prevention

Outcomes:

- People looking for housing find it easy to apply for the widest choice of social housing available and get information they need on how the landlord allocates homes and their prospects of being housed. **(Charter 10)**
- People looking for housing receive information to inform their choices and decisions about the range of housing options available to them. **(Charter 7)**
- Tenants and people on housing lists can review their housing options. **(Charter 8)**
- People at risk of losing their homes receive advice on preventing homelessness
- Homeless people receive prompt and easy access to help and advice **(Charter 9)**

Theme 1: Service User Feedback

'A lot of things happening and they are really good, the Allocations Service is a very good service'

'Housing Options: Good but not everyone can use a PC'

'The Educational Officer is doing good work and it would be nice to see them working with other age groups, possibly 18-25 years old as well'

'Texting is a good way to communicate and the different ways suit different people, even facebook'

'A friendly medical service that does not discriminate or judge you because you are homeless'

'We have been on the list a long time – no one has contacted us about our application'

Over the past four years significant improvements have been made in preventing homelessness. The Scottish Housing Regulator stated that *“The Council’s approach to providing advice and preventing homelessness is excellent. It provides a good range of support to its tenants and has an excellent range of initiatives to help it to prevent homelessness and sustain tenancies.”*

Local Authorities across Scotland have been developing and implementing Housing Options services as a key way of preventing homelessness, improving tenancy sustainment and delivering best practice for people in housing need.

A continued strong focus on prevention through dedicated Prevention Officers and the Housing Options approach has enabled continued improvement. Family mediation and the housing education programme has led to a reduction in youth homelessness and the team has also successfully prevented homelessness for 26 households through Section 11 notifications and prevented 20 evictions from a total of 41 evictions from Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) accommodation.

There has been a reduction in the number of people re-assessed as homeless or potentially homeless within 12 months of the previous case being completed. In 13/14, these accounted for 1.3% of homeless presentations, compared to 2.5% in 2011/12 and a national rate of 5.8% in 2013/14. This downward trend of repeat homelessness can be attributed to the continued high quality of support delivered by all partners which have led to high levels of tenancy sustainability. Low levels of lost contact at every stage of the homeless journey due to services maintaining good contact with homeless people, has also been a contributory factor.

Theme 1: Progress 2013/2014

The Council has introduced a range of initiatives to increase access to housing, prevent homelessness and to meet the outcomes of theme 1. These include:

- ✓ Delivering a Housing Education programme, “Think Twice” within secondary schools, Navigate and other youth settings to over 690 young people.
- ✓ Introducing a Family Mediation Service assisting 10 young people and enabling 5 young people to return home, and supporting staff to provide low level mediation to people threatened with homelessness
- ✓ Appointing dedicated Prevention Officers to offer support and assistance to people in all housing types who are at risk of homelessness
- ✓ Introducing on-line housing options self-assessment providing over 2,500 people with information and advice on their available housing options, resulting in a 24% decline in the number of people presenting with low level housing needs
- ✓ Continuing to develop the Tayside, Fife and Central Housing Options Hub
- ✓ Preventing 189 households becoming homeless through housing options and homeless prevention activity, avoiding an estimated expenditure of £500,000 for temporary accommodation during 2013/14
- ✓ Participating in peer audit reviews with Dundee and Fife Council - homeless / housing options services identifying good practice and areas for improvement

- ✓ Continuing with the Evictions' Prevention Panel to support and sustain tenancies
- ✓ Enhancing communication with our customers through the creation of a Facebook page, Twitter, texting and You Tube and strengthening links with the Homeless Voice Association
- ✓ Participating in multiagency groups, such as the Complex Case Integration Group, Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) and Multi Agency Tasking and Coordination (MATAC) to assess and meet the needs of homeless people
- ✓ Minimising overcrowding within our Council tenancies
- ✓ Continuing to promote the tenants incentive scheme to support our tenants to move to more suitable accommodation.
- ✓ Maintaining high levels of housing applicants accepting the first offer of tenancy
- ✓ Significantly improving assessment timescales, lost contacts, rough sleeping, repeat homelessness and tenancy sustainability
- ✓ Increasing the supply of affordable housing through new builds and the buy- back scheme and generating vacancies chains to maximise our approach to resolving housing need

- ✓ During 2013/14 we significantly exceeded our 20 day target by processing housing applications within an average of 8 days.
- ✓ Our Allocations Waiting list Customer Satisfaction Survey indicated that 65% of applicants were either very satisfied or satisfied with our service.

Theme 1: Key Challenges

We will continue to face a number of challenges in relation to preventing homelessness and ensuring that people within Perth and Kinross have easy access to help and advice and the availability of housing options. The recent achievements in this area could be potentially undermined as the impact of Welfare Reform continues to be realised.

Ensuring a focus on prevention activity through the Housing Options approach involving all key partners will remain critical to ensure the delivery of comprehensive and consistent services that are available to all persons in housing need.

Theme 1: Future Actions

We will continue to work with partners and service users to:

- Continue with the youth-specific prevention and housing options services to prevent youth homeless, where possible, and to make sure young people have the right advice and assistance to make informed choices
- Maintain Housing Options to homelessness with a focus on homeless prevention and tenancy sustainability and continue to expand this approach to include key partners
- Maintain partnerships and joint working with other service providers in order to prevent homelessness and avoid crisis homelessness arising
- Continue to improve the quality of services including through mystery shoppers, benchmarking with other local authorities
- Review our allocations approach to improve throughput for homeless people and

- make sure housing opportunities are maximised through vacancy chains
- Continue to work with partners through the Common Housing Register to deliver on our key outcomes, enabling people to apply for the widest choice of social housing available
 - Continue to develop comprehensive monitoring mechanisms to evidence the success and outcomes of homeless prevention activity

Theme 2:

Providing temporary, re-settled and permanent accommodation for homeless people

Outcomes:

- Homeless people are provided with suitable, good quality temporary or emergency accommodation, when this is needed, and are offered support to help them get and keep the home they are entitled to (**Charter 12**)

Theme 2: Service User Feedback

'Static caravans could be used as form of temporary accommodation'

'Could we have voluntary testing to increase chances of getting a house i.e. drugs test'

'Flat share is a good idea for some people who need the company and don't like to live alone'

'Support sessions are different from hostel to hostel. The support should suit you needs and be individual to the person and take account of resident's feelings and needs'

'Help with cost so you are not penalised for working'

The homeless service manages a diverse range and type of accommodation, including properties from Registered Social Landlords and mainstream Council properties. Accommodation ranges from one-bedroom single person properties, to larger family size

properties, predominantly located within the Perth area, but also in rural areas.

In addition to the Council's range of homeless accommodation, there is a range of supported hostel and individual and group living establishments managed by external providers. We work closely with these providers to ensure that homeless people are placed in the most appropriate accommodation.

Theme 2: Progress 2013 - 2014

Over the past year we have made significant improvements to the provision and management of temporary accommodation, including:

- ✓ Continuing to minimise the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation, using this only in exceptional circumstances. During 2013/14 only 9 people were temporarily accommodated in B&B, for an average of 4 nights
- ✓ Developing Rio House for families with children to help meet the aims of the early years agenda
- ✓ Re-provisioning Tayview House to provide self-contained temporary accommodation for young people and strengthening our working relationship with Wellbank House
- ✓ Developing units of accommodation at St Catherine's Square for single homeless people to provide on-site support from CATH (Churches Action for the Homeless) and enhanced security
- ✓ Providing greater access to the private rented sector including, PKC Lets, Private Sector Leasing, the Empty Homes Initiative and more recently the Homes for Multiple Occupancy (HMO) and Flat Share Schemes
- ✓ Exceeding the Rent Bond Guarantee Scheme target of 150 units by securing 172 properties for people in housing need
- ✓ Working with Housing Benefit and Welfare Rights colleagues to maximise tenant incomes and reduce rent arrears in temporary accommodation
- ✓ Achieving the Council's target of 100 units of affordable housing per year.
- ✓ Implementing management and compliance framework and minimum standards for all forms of temporary accommodation
- ✓ Introducing scrutiny checks by service users on our temporary accommodation standards, using the findings to improve our service.
- ✓ Developing more effective customer engagement tools to gain feedback from temporary accommodation residents in order to improve service delivery
- ✓ Reducing Private Sector Leasing properties from 81 to 20, making financial savings
- ✓ In November 2013 the Empty Homes Initiative was recognised nationally as an example of good practice winning the Camelot Scottish Empty Homes Champion Award

The average length of stay spent in all types of self-contained temporary accommodation increased from 255 days in 2012/13, to 283 in 2013/14. The increase can be attributed in part to the reduction in the pool of temporary accommodation and continued difficulties in securing settled accommodation outcomes for homeless people.

In 2013/14, 482 of the 915 (53%) available vacancies were let to homeless people, compared to 51% in 2012/13 and 38% for Scotland. However, 54% of homeless applicants secured a social tenancy during 2013/14 which is lower than the Scottish average of 69%. These figures highlight the significant challenges faced by Perth and Kinross Council in this area and the need to increase availability of affordable housing and to continually explore ways to improve access.

Theme 2: Key Challenges

The continued low turnover of vacancies and affordable accommodation remains a challenge and continues to impact on the Council's ability to discharge its homelessness duty, resulting in people spending lengthy periods of time in temporary accommodation. The ongoing mismatch between available vacancies in terms of size and type compared to current demand may result in the Council using less suitable and more expensive Bed and Breakfast accommodation. Ongoing work with private sector landlords to maximise access to the private sector, as well as continued review of allocations of social rented accommodation, and maximising every opportunity to facilitate additional units of accommodation will be required to improve the provision of settled accommodation.

Theme 2: Future Actions

To achieve the outcomes in relation to accommodation the Council will continue to work with partners, and with service users, to:

- Maximise access to the private sector for homeless or potentially homelessness people by working closely with private landlords
- Expand initiatives, such as flat-sharing and empty home, to provide additional units of affordable accommodation
- Review the Buy Backs process to ensure value for money and create vacancy chains for maximum units of accommodation
- Work with colleagues to progress, where appropriate, the Mortgage to Rent Scheme
- Increase the supply of affordable housing through new-build and acquisition programmes
- Continue to work with the Police and Women's Aid to provide suitable safe local accommodation and support for people experiencing domestic abuse
- Maintain standards of temporary accommodation in line with good practice guidelines
- Continue to review allocations of social rented accommodation to homeless households to reduce the backlog and the length of stay in temporary accommodation

Theme 3:

Managing and sustaining tenancies

Outcomes:

- Tenants and customers receive the information they need on how to access accommodation, when this is needed, and are offered continuing support to help them find and sustain a home.
- Tenants, owners and other customers receive services that provide continually improving value for the rent and other charges they pay. **(Charter 13)**
- A balance is struck between the level of services provided, the cost of the services and how far current and prospective tenants and others can afford them. **(Charter 14)**

Theme 3: Service User Feedback

'I work in a charity shop and like this as it gives me something to do. It gives me a sense of purpose'

'People who have experienced situations like alcoholism, drugs, homelessness could become key workers or a form of support for people who are going through these situations'

'More things to do for those who can't afford it, like the Boxing project and Cook-It'

'More settling in when you get a house if you need the help but not every two minutes'

'Inside this booklet is the first indication I have seen that in the future benefits will be paid monthly. Please notify me when this is going to happen and of any other changes.'

'Perth and Kinross Council have been so supportive in my application from my daughter, diagnosed autistic. They have been understanding and did such hard work to rehouse us to a better home and environment. I was offered advice on benefits which my local job centre did not offer me. The housing staff were always very friendly and welcoming and phoned me weekly to let me know how the house was going. And thanks to them finding us a new home, my daughter's diagnosis has improved in many ways'

One of our key outcomes is to provide suitable good quality affordable accommodation with the necessary support to enable our tenants to sustain their accommodation. A wide range of factors contribute to someone successfully maintaining their tenancy, including providing the right size and type of housing in a location where the household has links to family and social networks. Providing housing support, advice and information to maximize people's income and help them manage their tenancies is also vital.

We remain committed to providing tenants with value for money services and maintaining affordable rents. In 2014, 81% of tenants responding to our survey thought that the accommodation and services they receive provide good value for money. Levels of satisfaction with our services remain high: we continually meet repairs response times and have invested heavily in improving the condition of our Council stock to achieve the SHQS by 31st March 2015. We have achieved these outcomes whilst maintaining our rent levels at the 9th lowest in Scotland and at an average of £62.58 below the Scottish average of £63.91.

We will continue to take a supportive but firm approach to managing rent arrears, focusing on promoting tenancy sustainability and preventing homelessness. Emphasis is on early intervention, face to face contact advice and support and referral to specialist advice services, before using legal options open to the Council.

Theme 3: Progress 2013 – 2014

We have high levels of tenancy sustainability at 93% and lower levels of repeat homelessness at 1.3% compared to the national average of 5.8% is a testament to the quality and level of support offered to individuals.

Focusing on prevention, early intervention and support, we held 600 settling-in visits with new tenants last year, 93% (compared to 86% the previous year) within 20 working days of them beginning their tenancy, making sure they had settled in and to discuss if support was needed.

During 2013/14, 53 households were referred to Community Mediation from a variety of sources including Housing, Safer Communities Team, RSLs, Police and self-referral. 20 cases were closed during the year of which 50% reached full agreement in resolving their issue and 25% saw significant improvement.

All tenants affected by the under-occupation charge were visited (446 tenants initially reducing to 384 tenants due to promotion of mutual exchanges and providing assistance through housing options. In January 2014 69% of tenants who were under occupied had arrears of rent, reducing to 38% by March. 374 tenants received Discretionary Housing Payments amounting to £141,582 to support them and help them remain in their homes

We have introduced a range of initiatives and actions which have contributed to the above achievements. These include:

- ✓ Enhancing the 'Moving In / Moving On' service to support people to successfully prepare and move on to settled accommodation
- ✓ Having weekly representation at the Complex Case Integration Group (CCIG) attended by a range of partners to meet the needs of the most vulnerable homeless people
- ✓ Joint working with CATH to deliver a greater level of support and assistance to residents at St Catherine's Square
- ✓ Having weekly representation at the One-stop Women Learning Centre (OWLS) to offer housing advice, support and assistance to help end the cycle of criminal behaviour
- ✓ Introducing a new Rent Arrears Policy and corresponding procedures, with a strong focus on early intervention and prevention

- ✓ Providing additional resources across our Area Housing Teams to provide income maximisation support, advice and assistance to tenants struggling to meet their rent payments
- ✓ Appointing temporary Benefits Take up Officer and the introduction of income maximization checks for all new tenants to support our approach to arrears prevention at the commencement of new tenancies
- ✓ Working closely with Citizens Advice Bureau and Welfare Rights colleagues to support tenants and tenants with budgeting skills and income maximisation
- ✓ Delivering comprehensive staff training to ensure housing staff have the necessary skills and knowledge in relation to arrears management , welfare reform and income maximisation
- ✓ Ongoing liaison with and referrals to the Community Liaison service and the use of a range of early intervention and preventative tools to achieve early and permanent resolutions to neighbor disputes and anti-social behavior
- ✓ Continuing to support tenants affected by the under-occupancy rules to minimise arrears and longer term options, such a mutual exchanges

Theme 3: Key Challenges

Challenging financial times for public services will require services to continue to work together to make sure we provide cohesive services and support, removing inefficiencies and duplication. The impact of Welfare Reform may result in more households facing financial difficulties and greater levels of vulnerability, increasing the likelihood of demand for homeless services and housing support. O u r focus on support and tenancy sustainability will enable community care and homeless support teams to focus on more vulnerable households and deliver support to private sector households. As we modernise the role of our Housing Officers, we will shift from tenancy enforcement, to tenancy support.

Despite additional resources and a strong focus by our Neighbourhood Services team, the range of pressures facing households has led to an increase in levels of personal and household debt and an increase in arrears over the year. We continue however, to collect 98% of rent due. Income support and maximisation will continue to be a priority for staff as they work with and support tenants.

Theme 3: Future Actions

To achieve the desired outcomes of sustaining our tenancies and supporting homeless people, we will continue to work with partners in Health and the Voluntary Sector, including the Early Years' collaborative, and with service users, to:

- Support our frontline Housing Officers to modernise their role to meet the changing environment within which housing services operate and shift the focus from tenancy enforcement to support with a greater emphasis on community engagement
- Appoint two Tenancy Support and Sustainment Officers within Neighbourhood Services to support the transition to mainstream tenancies and provide practical support to vulnerable tenants at risk of tenancy breakdown

- Continue to prioritise arrears management across the service, maximizing tenants incomes and taking action where appropriate.
- Continue to explore new ways of mitigating the impact of Welfare Reform and prepare our services and customers for the introduction of Universal Credit
- Continue to work with colleagues to maximise Discretionary Housing Payments and income for customers to support tenancy sustainability
- Develop a peer mentoring support service through the Homeless Voice Association and expand consultation and involvement of homeless people to enable them to participate in and influence services
- Continue to work closely with colleagues in NHS Tayside to promote affordable, healthy lifestyles for homeless people through diet and exercise
- Review the training needs of our support staff to ensure that they have the key competencies to assess and provide the appropriate level of support and advice to meet the changing needs of our homeless population
- Enhance employment and education opportunities for homeless people
- Continue to progress with projects and initiatives to support the early years' agenda
- Undertake a rent restructuring service to streamline and harmonise rents to ensure equity across all Council properties
- Review and update tenant and customer information to ensure that it is relevant easy to understand, accurate and accessible
- Progress mobile IT solutions for fieldwork staff to realise business efficiencies and facilitate modern ways of working

Environmental Improvements and Neighbourhood Initiatives

The quality and use of open space and the external environment around housing is clearly important. It impacts on people's health and wellbeing, sense of place and community. However, in the past many open spaces were designed to reduce maintenance costs and led to open areas having limited use by communities.

We want to support safe and secure communities and involve and empower our communities and therefore plan to launch a programme of environmental improvements and neighbourhood initiatives which will:

- Further involve tenants and elected members in planning and developing local projects
- Further enhance the quality of our housing estates and neighbourhoods
- Be funded through the HRA capital programme and revenue budgets
- Enhance employability opportunities in our neighbourhoods.

These measures span both Themes 4 and 5.

The 2013 Tenant Satisfaction Survey, whilst showing 85% of tenants were reasonably satisfied with their neighbourhoods, also revealed a level of dissatisfaction in how safe people felt, the general condition of the area in which they lived, the condition of green open spaces and concerns about drugs, litter, and noise and youth disorder.

Our own assessment also highlights that some external areas are beginning to show signs of disrepair, including to paths and parking areas. Currently urgent repairs are carried out through responsive repairs and planned maintenance where serious disrepair is identified. Recognising the need for more immediate improvements, the formal programme for comprehensive environmental improvements initially scheduled to begin in 2018 /19 will now start in 2015/16. This work will also be informed by the housing Stock Condition Survey to be carried out later this year.

We are keen and committed to making sure our tenants and residents are involved in identifying and developing environmental improvements in their local areas. As a result, during 2014/15 we will be working alongside tenants and elected members to identify projects which will improve the quality of their estates and neighbourhoods, making available a community /participatory budget for improvements to common, open spaces, including landscaping, fencing, security and parking.

We will introduce neighbourhood walkabouts with tenants, councillors and staff to discuss and highlight options and initiatives.

The major environmental improvements will be funded by the planned capital budget accelerated to 2014/15 and the local community environmental initiatives through the revenue budget which has already been identified for this work.

Importantly, there are additional benefits and tangible outcomes that could emerge through this work, namely in community capacity building and personal and social development if for example, some of these initiatives use employability schemes, social enterprise and, where appropriate, the unpaid work team. There are a number of voluntary sector charities and projects which offer this type of activity as a way of helping unemployed people to become more employable, so benefitting themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy. The impact/ value for money spent on low level environmental and construction projects could be increased by investing in the development of Employability Social Enterprise and by adding requirements to training and employability conditions when tendering or contracting/commissioning of work.

Community capacity building could be achieved by enabling local community groups and organisations to carry out environmental projects and prompt the transfer of assets from the HRA to the community. Examples of this are the Letham Climate Challenge and the North Perth Allotment Association in Tulloch both of whom have established allotment.

So, an exciting initiative with lots of potential benefits for individuals and communities.

Theme 4: Safe and Secure Communities

Outcomes:

- Tenants and residents live in attractive, well managed neighbourhoods, free from anti-social behaviour and vandalism where they feel safe. **(Charter 6)**
- We manage our Gypsy Traveller sites so that they are well maintained and managed. **(Charter 16)**
- Tenants homes meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standards (SHQS) by April 2015 and continue to meet it thereafter, and when they are allocated are always clean, tidy and in a good state of repair. **(Charter 4)**
- Tenants homes are well maintained with repairs and improvements carried out when required and tenants are given reasonable choices about when work is done. **(Charter 5)**

Theme 4: Service User Feedback

"I feel truly blessed to have been allocated this flat in such a wonderful neighbourhood and place of beauty that has, in time, become my home. There is no doubt in my mind that it is the reason why I am now on the road to recovery"

"I am very satisfied with the area that I stay in and with my house and the way the Council help and when I need it"

"I am concerned about drug dealing and drug use in my close... Why can't proper security solutions be found for my street"

"I would like to see the communal area, out the back, cleaned up where we hang out washing with new washing lines as the other's falling apart, the place is a mess and not very nice"

"Dogs without leads in front of house and in front of gardens that don't have a gate and on green land"

"I've had a succession of noisy neighbours above me, the current one is the worst, and there's nothing anyone can do about it, and it's affecting my health, both physically and emotionally"

Theme 4: Progress 2013 -2014

- ✓ In 2014, 70% of our tenants indicated their satisfaction with our management of their neighbourhoods. In addition, 7 Gypsy Travellers from Bobbin Mill and Double Dykes (out of 26 households) responded to our satisfaction survey in 2013 and 100% told us that they were either Very or fairly satisfied with the quality of their home. 71.5% said they were satisfied with the site and the management of the area where they live. 57% felt that the rent for their property represented good or fairly good value for money.
- ✓ We continued to perform well with our repairs response times, undertaking 97% of our emergency repairs within the 24 hour target, 92% of urgent repairs within the 7 day target and meeting 99% of our repairs appointments
- ✓ Supporting our neighbourhoods and focusing on reducing anti-social behaviour, neighbour complaints reduced by 31% and environmental complaints by 11% 2013/14.
- ✓ In addition, through a greater focus on tenancy support and sustainability, we reduced the number of abandonments, continuing to maintain these below the Scottish average.
- ✓ We are one of only a few Local Authorities in Scotland to have introduced a Tenancy Fraud Policy to enable us to prevent, detect and recover properties which are being occupied by unauthorised occupants and we have delivered comprehensive training to our frontline staff in this area, widely publicising our new approach with our tenants. We issued 11 Notice of Proceedings in 2013/14, compared to 20 in 2012/13 which can be attributed to a reduced level of complaints and a stronger focus on initiatives, such as tenancy fraud.
- ✓ Making sure people have quick access to houses has been a priority for the service and during the year we undertook a range of actions to improve our 'voids' performance , ensuring the availability of properties for people in housing need and minimising rent loss to the Council. As a result, we had an overall average re-let time of 29 days, 1 day better than the BMIP target, with more recent performance averaging 19 days.
- ✓ Through our programme of capital improvements and modernisation the Housing Service has improved the quality and appearance of its housing stock achieving an increase in overall compliance with the SHQS of 83% in 2014. This programme has resulted in significant improvements for individuals and communities.

A range of initiatives and actions were also carried out to support individual and community safety:

- ✓ Ongoing involvement in the multi- agency Community Tasking and Co-ordinating (CTAC) Groups supporting our communities and progressing initiatives to address with community safety issues
- ✓ Securing funding within North Perth to design and purchase fire tape highlighting problems of dumping and the dangers it presents and supporting residents to remove items timeously. The Fire Service is now considering extending this nationwide

- ✓ Ongoing participation in the Complex Case Integration Groups (CCIG) and Locality Forums enhancing our networks of staff who meet regularly to support complex cases
- ✓ Introducing a Neighbourhood Agreement for the newly refurbished Old Mill Road, Rattray to support community cohesion and sustainability
- ✓ Implementing the Gypsy Travellers' Strategy to foster positive relationships with the Community and work with them to provide the services they need
- ✓ Introducing Local Lettings Plans at Double Dykes and Bobbin Mill, which acknowledge kinship and cultural sensitivities and support balanced and sustained communities
- ✓ Identifying a number of projects through the Safer Communities Working Group to improve community safety, such initiatives have included cold caller prevention stickers and Gypsy Traveller awareness sessions
- ✓ In partnership with colleagues from The Environment Service and the North Muirton Community Council we have been working to improve local open spaces
- ✓ In partnership with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service we have conducted a service wide review of our fire precaution and safety measures and implemented enhanced joint working arrangements to minimise the risk of fire within our properties
- ✓ Making significant progress with the Letham Climate Challenge, the Garden Share scheme and the North Perth Allotments to develop areas and gardens previously neglected and unused into thriving sustainable initiatives with significant community involvement

Theme 4: Future Actions

To achieve the outcomes in relation to Safe and Secure Communities the Housing Service will:

- Encourage more tenants and residents to become involved in the Safer Communities Working Group to actively participate in a range of initiatives
- Enhance our housing support service for tenants and arrangements with community care services to ensure a successful problem solving approach to complex cases
- Support the Service User Review and Evaluation Team (SURE) to conduct an independent review and evaluation of our Estate and Tenancy Management Service
- Work with the Community Capacity Building team to support local communities to undertake environmental projects and prompt the transfer of assets from the Housing Revenue Account to the community
- Continue to progress the Garage Sites and Lock Ups project to enhance the local amenity of our areas and deliver a well-managed, good quality service
- Continue to work with The Environment Service and our communities to improve our management of open spaces and promote sustainable community ownership of these areas
- Continue to maintain good levels of performance in relation to void management

- Progress our programme of neighbourhood initiatives and commence a programme of estate walkabouts and inspections with tenants, councillors and staff to promote greater partnership and involvement in identifying projects now and in the future
- Continue to progress our programme of improvements to meet the SHQS across our housing stock by March 2015
- Finalise and implement our Repairs and Improvements improvement action plan
- Continue to explore and examine the suitability of potential Gypsy Traveller site locations (either temporary or permanent) for which funding has been identified and continue to progress anti -discrimination advice and equality of access to services

Theme 5: Involving and Empowering our Communities

Outcomes:

- Tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with. **(Charter 3)**
- Tenants get clear information on how rent and other money is spent, including any details of individual items of expenditure above thresholds agreed between landlords and tenants. **(Charter 15)**

Theme 5: Service User Feedback

"Through training and guidance, the Council are doing their utmost to involve tenants to participate and have influence in the outcomes of the Scottish Social Housing Charter at all levels. Unfortunately it still is only the minority that take an active part, and those that are involved get a satisfaction of knowing that they are being heard."

"The Quality Panel do not work for, but work alongside the Council, which is helping to bridge gaps and encourage friendship with staff and tenants and interested people from different areas of Perth and Kinross."

"Tenants will find it easier in today's life to become involved in tenant participation, but they will not be able to influence Landlords' decisions because I feel the landlord or Board of committee will decide on policies regardless of what tenants feel."

"Homeless Voice has influenced the lives and activities of homeless people with projects such as the boxing project, snow worries and moving stories"

Involving and empowering our communities is at the heart of achieving the outcomes of this Strategy, enabling our communities to use their assets to take control of the things that matter to them, increasing their skills and confidence and working to improve the things that need to.

Theme 5: Progress

Over the past year we have significantly strengthened our engagement with our tenants and residents, for example:

- ✓ The North Perth Allotment Association transformed a derelict bowling green into a community allotment. All the plots are let out and the site has a communal poly-tunnel, a composting toilet and shared tool and meeting sheds. Regular community events have a friendly and welcoming atmosphere where people learn about growing. The first Open Day was recently held where people celebrated the 'Field of Dreams' coming to life
- ✓ Working alongside tenants and the wider community to review our garage sites and lock ups has been critical to the success of this work
- ✓ The Us and the Housing Group have received national recognition and awards for their aspiration to create safer communities by educating people about the impact of disability harassment in communities. Their thought-provoking DVD, 'It Goes On and On' is complemented by education materials that can be used in the workplace and in communities, to challenge the ongoing abuse some people experience on day to day basis
- ✓ Our new Strategic Tenant Engagement in Annual Rent Setting group (STEARS) is considered good practice across Scotland as it engages tenants in rent setting. The Tenant Participation Forum was consulted on the new process and Tenant Network events in July and August will also feed into the decision making process
- ✓ Over fifty people contributed to the review of the Homeless Strategy and a number of service areas including the Housing Options Self Assessment Team and the Central Health Care Team have fully involved services users in the development of services
- ✓ The weekly Homeless Voice Drop-In Session has led much of the engagement activity and have shaped and influenced the creation of a Tenancy Sustainment Toolkit to piloted in with homeless and mainstream tenants, topic include being a good tenant and neighbour, how to look after a new home and money management
- ✓ The Homeless Voice Association have worked in partnership with ourselves and Churches Action for the Homeless (CATH) to develop the Boxing Project enabling homeless people to take part in physical activity that benefits the mind as well as the body. Training sessions over a six week period, provide participants with the chance to progress to accredited learning. People tell us they feel fitter and are motivated to move on in other areas of their lives
- ✓ We have made long term commitment to invest in building the skills of people who are involved and supported people to participate in our Residents' Academy Programmes to attain academic qualifications. We have delivered Chartered Institute of Housing modules in Resident Inspection and Scrutiny and bespoke learning programmes supporting homeless people to scrutinise homeless services. Many who have reported back they grown in confidence and are taking a leading role in their communities

- ✓ Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) modules have also been delivered to over 20 staff to help them understand how and why we involve our customers in scrutiny of our services
- ✓ Our investment in learning has enabled people who use our services and our staff to develop the Service User Review and Evaluation (SURE) Team to support improvements in performance and validate the Housing Annual Performance Report. The SURE Team (12 service users of Housing Services, including tenants, residents and homeless customers) will be supported by an Independent Advisor and along with the Quality Panel and tenant and staff working groups are one of many opportunities people have to get involved in improvement activities
- ✓ The Quality Panel reviewed information held on the Neighbourhood Services website to make sure it was easy for tenants and customers to understand. They have highlighted a number of areas for improvement which will be included in our improvement action plan
- ✓ We provided a series of sessions for the Tenant Participation Forum, (the main mechanism for engaging with tenants and residents groups, interested parties and thematic groups) between August and November on Understanding Housing Services – Housing Access and Allocations, Homeless Service, Neighbourhood Services, Repairs and Finance to enable members to fully understand the services provided and decision making processes
- ✓ We have attended the Gypsy Traveller Lunch Club to engage with residents about a number of issues such as the Gypsy Traveller Strategy and the Local Lettings Plans

Theme 5: Performance Summary

The information below provides details of tenants' views about how the Council communicates with them and involves them in decisions that affect them. The information was provided by our tenants in the 2013 Tenant Satisfaction Survey.

- 68% of tenants who responded felt it was easy to participate in our decision making, compared to 61% the previous year
- 60% of tenants were very or fairly satisfied that views were taken into account when making decisions
- 70% said they did not want to get involved in influencing Council decisions on housing and their local neighbourhood
- 32% of tenants responding told us that they were aware of a tenants association in their area but chose not to get involved
- Only 1.6% of respondents were actively involved in a tenant or resident association in their area. 32% were aware but chose not to get involved. 32% did not know if there was a tenants' and residents' association in their area. 13% had not heard of tenants' and residents' associations
- 18% wanted to get involved as an individual tenant, 76% want to receive information through letters, 80% wanted to be consulted by letter

Theme 5: Future Actions

In next year we will:

- Work with local communities to identify and prioritise environmental improvements for their neighbourhoods. This should increase community capacity by enabling local community groups and organisations to undertake environmental projects and potentially transfer assets from the HRA to the community. Examples of this include the Letham Climate Challenge with the allotments and shops in Letham and also the North Perth Allotment Association in Tulloch. These groups encourage volunteering which supports employability and could have the potential to offer placements in the future for people to gain practical experience
- By taking this approach we could also offer a means of support to enhance skills and improve employability prospects benefiting the community and the economy. This could have a major impact by offering hostel and temporary/residents/CJS clients/mental health clients opportunities to progress in terms of personal development and recovery
- Continue to work with tenants and residents to involve them in assisting us to meet the Scottish Social Housing Charter
- Further increase our use of texting and the use of Social media to encourage participation in events
- Ensure Neighbourhood Services website pages are fit for purpose and encourage Tenants and Services Users to get involved and link to other relevant pages such as Tenant Participation
- Continue to work with tenants on the STEARs group to improve, monitor and evaluate our approach to rent setting
- Commence a Mystery Shopping Project, where tenants can learn new skills, identify and recommend services improvement areas
- Deliver Peer Mentoring Training to enable those who people who work with us to support their peers to get involved and support our work to empower communities across Perth and Kinross
- Continue to work with the Unpaid Work Team on environmental projects to enhance communities

Summary of key priorities

- Continuing to provide housing options to prevent people becoming homeless
- Increasing our mainstream accommodation/housing stock to help people move from temporary accommodation to permanent, settled accommodation, including through accessing the private sector

- Reviewing the allocations of our properties to make sure they are targeted appropriately
- Meeting Scottish Housing Quality Standards ensuring our tenants live in warm, efficient homes and making sure our housing repairs and improvements are efficient and offer value for money
- Supporting our tenants to remain in their properties, through managing their rent and maximising their income
- Developing community and environmental improvements, including garage sites and lockups
- Working in partnership with our tenants and keeping our customer focus
- Continuing to support individuals, including vulnerable individuals through working effectively with health, community care, education and children's services and the 3rd sector to meet their needs
- Preparing for health and social care integration

Monitoring and Review

We will establish a system to formally monitor and review this strategy to make sure it is effectively implemented and the priorities achieved. Progress against each of the themes will be reported internally to the Housing & Community Care Senior Management Team, annually to the Council's Housing and Health Committee and to the Scottish Housing Regulator as part of the monitoring of the Scottish Social Housing Charter. Information will also be made available to the public and our customers and tenants through the Council's Communication Team, using a range of media.

A new Housing Strategy Implementation Group will be established incorporating members of existing strategy implementation groups, and these will include representatives from a range of key Council services as well as partnering organisations, Registered Social Landlords, Perth and Kinross Community Health Partnership and the Scottish Government.

Conclusion

Over the past year the Council and its partners have made significant and lasting improvements in the delivery of housing services and to people facing homelessness. However, the economic downturn, the impact of Welfare Reform, the lack of affordable housing options, along with the legal requirements of priority need and new duties to assess and provide support, continue to present significant challenges.

Through the actions outlined in this strategy the Council and its partners will continue to work together to meet our key outcomes, preventing homelessness wherever possible, delivering a customer-focused housing service supporting tenants and residents to secure and sustain suitable housing.

Legislative and Strategic Overview

Delivery of housing and homeless services is in accordance and compliance with the following legislation and codes of guidance:

- The Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, as amended by the Housing (Scotland) Act Housing (Scotland) Acts 2001 and 2006
- Homeless Persons' Advice and Assistance (Scotland) regulations 2002.
- Homeless Persons' Interim Accommodation (Scotland) Regulations 2002
- The Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003
- Homeless Persons' (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2004.
- Housing (Scotland) Act 2010
- Helping Homeless People – Ministerial Statement on Abolition of Priority Need by 2012
- The Data Protection Act 1998
- The Children (Scotland) Act 1995.
- Code of Guidance on Homelessness 2005
- Code of Guidance on the Prevention of Homelessness 2009

The Homeless Persons' (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2004 prohibits the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for households with children or pregnant women.

The changes to the categories of priority need were introduced by the Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 which came into effect in 2004 when new priority need groups were introduced. The Act also detailed the longer term provision that priority need would be phased out by 2012 by which time all local authorities in Scotland would have a duty to provide permanent housing to all homeless households. In November 2012 the Scottish Parliament voted to approve the Homelessness (Abolition of Priority Need Test) Scotland Order 2012.

The Housing (Scotland) 2010 established a new Support Duty which came into effect in June 2013.

Regulatory and Inspection Framework

The Homeless Service is required to meet a wide range of standards relating to the quality of service delivery, customer outcomes, quality of staffing, standards and range of accommodation, quality of support delivery, customer engagement and key indicators.

HL1 and HL2 Returns

Operation of homeless legislation is published twice a year and comprises of an annual and six monthly summary publications. Data is obtained electronically from the Council's homelessness data systems and collected via the HL1 and HL2 returns.

The Council is also required to provide detailed performance information relating to a numbers of homeless Statutory Performance Indicators.

Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR)

The Scottish Social Housing Charter has several outcomes that relate to homelessness. The SHR's role will be to monitor and assess Perth & Kinross Council's progress against these outcomes and where necessary to take action if the Council is at risk of failing to meet the Charter outcomes. The Charter is a significant element of the SHR's future regulatory approach and will be a trigger for the SHR future regulatory intervention.

Care Inspectorate

The Council's Homeless Support Service is registered with the Care Inspectorate and is required to meet a wide range of standards under quality themes that are subject to external inspection and scrutiny through unannounced inspection.