



Prevention of Homelessness Guidance

The Scottish Government and the Convention of
Scottish Local Authorities

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Scope and Purpose of this Guidance

1. Part II of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 (as amended by the 2001 and 2003 Acts) sets out the powers and duties of local authorities in dealing with applications from people seeking help on the grounds that they are homeless or threatened with homelessness.
2. Section 37(1) requires local authorities to have regard to Guidance issued by Scottish Ministers in the exercise of their homelessness functions. This addition to the [Code of Guidance](#) (the Code) provides such guidance. While local authorities have discretion to deal with each application on its merits in making decisions under the 1987 Act, failure to have regard to the terms of the guidance may give grounds for judicial review of a local authority's decision. Local authorities have a statutory responsibility to prevent and alleviate homelessness. The Code should be used as a supporting document for local authority staff in carrying out relevant activities and discharging this responsibility, and should be seen as a repository of guidance and best practice to cover different scenarios.
3. The Code sets out a summary of legislative duties with supporting explanation and guidance. Previous versions of the Code have been principally intended for local authority staff dealing with homelessness policy and responsible for making decisions on homelessness applications. However, preventing and alleviating homelessness is a **corporate** responsibility and this addition to the Code is intended for the local authority as a corporate body; particularly in terms of its focus on early and integrated intervention. The Code is also relevant for **Community Planning Partners**, other local landlords including Registered Social Landlords, elected council members and a range of others involved in tackling homelessness in the statutory and voluntary sectors.
4. **The Scottish Government has a unifying [Purpose](#): to focus Government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth.** Everything that the Government does or supports others in doing should contribute directly to this Purpose. Our success in delivering it will be assessed by reference to the Purpose Targets, which relate to growth, productivity, participation, population, solidarity, cohesion and sustainability.
5. Our Purpose, introduced by [The Government Economic Strategy](#) in November 2007, is underpinned by five strategic objectives – to make Scotland **wealthier & fairer, smarter, healthier, safer & stronger**, and **greener**. Preventing homelessness through early intervention can contribute to all five strategic objectives by promoting equality, reducing costs by improving efficiency, improving health and wellbeing and supporting and empowering individuals and local communities.

Summary and Key Messages

6. The Homelessness Prevention Advisory Group¹ contributed to the development of this guidance. The Group, which met four times from June 2008, has adopted the following definition of homelessness prevention:

*“For the purposes of this guidance and central to our definition of homelessness prevention, we consider that; following a competent and person-centred assessment of the risks of homelessness, the approaches and activities undertaken to secure the most **effective, appropriate and sustainable** housing **outcome** for the person concerned should be deemed as acceptable prevention activity”.*

7. To reinforce and underpin the importance of the information contained within the guidance the Group agreed that the following key messages summed up the approach necessary for success:

- “The prevention of homelessness does not happen in isolation from other issues. An exclusive focus on homelessness may not yield the most efficient results; rather a holistic or systemic approach is needed.”²
- Alleviating homelessness is an expensive business both in monetary and societal terms; the principles of “spending to save” are proven in respect of homelessness prevention.
- Homelessness prevention is a corporate responsibility and must be embraced by all parts of the local authority and, where relevant, their local partners including Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and Health Services.
- Prevention in this context is not an alternative to increasing housing supply. Investing in housing supply is a key joint priority for the Scottish Government and [COSLA](#). However, even if we had surplus housing in every sector there would still be a need for an integrated prevention approach to counter the corrosive and damaging effects that homelessness can have on children, adults and communities.
- Homelessness prevention activity complements work already underway to improve services for children and families and others with particular needs through introduction of the [Early Years Framework](#), [Getting it Right for Every Child](#), the [Anti-Poverty Framework](#) and

¹ Daniel Coote, Scottish Council Single Homeless; Margaret-Ann Brunjes, Glasgow Homelessness Network; Alexis Camble, Shelter; Val Holtom, COSLA; Viv Boyle, Scottish Government; Lydia Okroj, Scottish Women’s Aid; Marion Gibbs, Scottish Housing Regulator; Sue Shone, CIH Scotland; Rosanne Cubitt, Relationships Scotland; Rob Jones, Scottish Federation Housing Associations; Mike Penny, COSLA; Judi Reid, Scottish Government; Ella Simpson, The Rock Trust, Michaela Smith, CEC; Tracy Lindsay, SLC; Fiona Jackson, SHBVN

² Scottish Government (2008), Evaluation of Homelessness Prevention Innovation Fund Projects, Research for Real

[Equally Well](#), the report of the Ministerial Task Force on Health Inequalities.

- Effective and sustainable homelessness prevention activity will only take place when partners work in tandem to tackle the causes.
- Pro-active and early intervention, based on a well understood knowledge of the local **triggers of homelessness**, will have more impact than traditional re-active responses to homelessness.
- Housing Options interviews and Personal Housing Plans are likely to provide earlier opportunities to avert later housing crisis.
- Homelessness prevention activity should focus on providing sustainable housing outcomes based on person-centred assessment and planning measures.

Introduction

8. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 placed a statutory requirement on local authorities to prepare strategies for preventing and alleviating homelessness. The first round of Homelessness Strategies was produced in 2003. Most covered a three year period and have since been refreshed and updated.

9. Local authorities are no longer required to submit discrete homelessness strategies to Ministers covering their activity to prevent homelessness; although they may choose to do so as a matter of local policy. Rather, the [Local Housing Strategy](#) will in future be the main strategic document incorporating housing, homelessness and support issues. Developing a single strategy framework assists in rationalising the reporting requirements of local government, however the statutory duty on local authorities under the 2001 Housing (Scotland) Act to address these areas remains. In many respects the duty to prevent homelessness as 2012 approaches has become more important than ever.

10. This guidance, which has been agreed between the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) and issued jointly, supplements Chapter 2 - Prevention of Homelessness within the [Code of Guidance](#) on Homelessness. The additional guidance was developed within a changing context in national policy direction and is in accordance with the revised relationship between central and local government established as a consequence of the [Concordat](#).

11. The guidance describes the action that local authorities should take to prevent homelessness arising in the first place and then recurring. Part II of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 (as amended by the 2001 Act) sets out the powers and duties of local authorities in dealing with applications from people seeking help on the grounds that they are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Section 37(1) requires local authorities to have regard to Guidance issued by Scottish Ministers in the exercise of their homelessness functions. This addition to the Code provides guidance on advice and information that should be available locally to people and outlines some new ideas for preventing homelessness not previously covered in the Code of Guidance.

Background and Context

12. In March 2008 the Scottish Government and COSLA developed a strategic approach to early intervention building on the principles of solidarity and cohesion set out in the Government Economic Strategy. A jointly issued policy statement on Early Intervention includes four key principles as follows:

- Our ambitions are universal – we want to reduce inequalities in a variety of policy areas, to have the same outcomes for all and for all to have the same opportunities.

- We take action to identify those at risk of not achieving these outcomes or having these opportunities and take action to prevent that risk materialising (action is not limited to those most at risk but applies at whatever level identified).
- We make sustained and effective interventions in cases where these risks have materialised.
- We shift the focus from service provision as the vehicle for delivery of outcomes to building the capacity of individuals, families and communities to secure outcomes, and addressing the external barriers which they may face in seeking to maximise their life chances, making use of high quality, accessible public services as required.

13. In this guidance the inclusion of good practice examples therefore has a twofold purpose: to demonstrate what is currently being done and to open dialogue about how these already do/could reflect Early Intervention principles.

14. Local authorities and their partners will wish to consider their response to homelessness within this framework of early intervention and would find it useful to adopt the principles across a range of related local planning and policy development procedures. Additionally, it may be helpful to consider the principles across the full spectrum of services available, including those delivered by the voluntary sector.

15. In March 2008, the [Towards 2012: Homelessness Support Project Report](#) was published. The project was set up to support local authorities to achieve the national homelessness target to abolish the priority need distinction by 2012. The report is independent of government and was prepared by two officers seconded from local authority homelessness teams, following visits and focused discussion with relevant staff at all 32 local authorities.

16. Prevention has a central role in the ways we tackle homelessness and it is essential for achieving the 2012 target. On that basis, local authority staff and partner agencies asked for additional guidance that has been agreed by the Scottish Government, the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers (ALACHO) and COSLA. Council officers specifically asked for clarity on acceptable interventions due to concerns that some prevention activity could be interpreted as “gate keeping”, either by the housing regulator or by potentially homeless households. The [Scottish Housing Regulator](#) will refer to this guidance during future inspection activity.

NB Gate keeping has been described as the practice of preventing or discouraging people from making homelessness applications as opposed to preventing homelessness from occurring.

17. In June 2008 the Scottish Government and COSLA jointly agreed four key priorities for achieving the 2012 target to abolish the priority need distinction. These priorities are:

- Continued leadership at both political and corporate level. As we move towards 2012, it is important there is both a shared leadership and accountability of central and local government's ability to reduce homelessness. Promoting and improving joint working between departments and services to address homelessness at both a national and local level.
- Preventing homelessness where possible, in line with general principles of early intervention.
- Ensuring that all housing providers (including RSLs and the Private Rented Sector (PRS)) work together to maximise the access of homeless households to existing stock.
- Investing in the right areas to meet homelessness and wider housing need.

18. Meeting the 2012 target is dependent on progress against each of the four key priorities and local authorities will want to ensure that all relevant partners are contributing to the shared objectives. Modelling carried out by the Scottish Government using a range of assumptions and projections indicates that an increase in prevention activity will have a proportionately greater impact than other activities; although all are considered equally important.

19. COSLA has stated that making progress towards the target will always be reliant on sufficient resources being in place and that includes the wider resources that can and should be harnessed to assist in homelessness prevention.

Target Audience and Who Can Help?

20. Preventing homelessness is a corporate responsibility for local authorities rather than just for homelessness and/or housing services, and should be embedded across the whole organisation. By ensuring a corporate approach, based on the principles of early intervention, local authorities will be more likely to implement homelessness prevention activities that gain optimum effectiveness and synergy with related policy efforts. Relevant policy areas will be, e.g., financial inclusion, housing and council tax benefit administration, education, early years, youth work and child protection, community justice and safety, domestic abuse, health improvement, addictions, employability, community engagement activity and equalities work.

21. More widely, whilst local authorities have a statutory duty to develop strategic approaches to homelessness prevention, it should not be seen as solely their responsibility. This is particularly relevant within the context of increased joint working with Community Planning Partners to further develop Single Outcome Agreements. Local partner organisations, which have an interest in providing housing and/or promoting social equality, such as RSLs, advice agencies, health boards, prisons and employability agencies, can and should contribute to the prevention activities in each local authority area.

22. Health Boards have already developed plans based on the [Health and Homelessness Standards](#) which should set out how they plan to ensure that the health needs of homeless people are met. As part of the planning process it would be anticipated that there is already well developed local liaison and engagement with relevant homelessness services, including discharge protocols, information sharing and effective joint working arrangements. There is clearly a role in homelessness prevention for [Community Health Partnerships](#) and there are examples of good practice for less well developed partnerships to draw upon.

Glasgow City Council and Greater Glasgow NHS Board have jointly developed [Statements of Best Practice](#) (SoBP) covering a range of topics and including the prevention and alleviation of homelessness. The SoBPs are comprehensive and provide detail and clarity of roles and purpose for all agencies, including the Community Health and Care Partnership.

23. Drug and Alcohol Teams (DAATs) and Community Mental Health Services have particularly important roles in the prevention of homelessness. Local services should be supporting vulnerable people with complex needs to access and maintain engagement with mainstream services as well as working jointly with partners to sustain people in their homes.

24. Registered Social Landlords have strategic and operational interests in homelessness prevention activities. Pressure on their housing supplies, as well as their legal obligations to assist in alleviating homelessness, require them to continuously monitor and review how allocation policies and procedures are working and how tenancy sustainment measures can assist in preventing homelessness amongst their own tenants and residents.

25. The Voluntary Sector contributes to homelessness prevention activity in most local authority areas, even when not directly commissioned to deliver services by the local authority. The sector can bring added value in the shape of additional resources levered in through direct bidding to, e.g. The Big Lottery, but also through other charitable organisations and trusts. The benefits of working pro-actively with the sector towards shared outcomes are clearly evident.

The Philosophy and Principles of Homelessness Prevention

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

27. From a “business case” perspective, evidence from two recent studies suggests that a typical example of homelessness can cost £15,000 to the public purse, with a more complex case costing in the region of £83,000. Costs derive from the services delivered to people in the form of advice, accommodation and support as well as costs associated with tenancy failure, void management and uncollected rent arrears. Within the more complex cases, additional costs associated with health and criminal justice services have also been considered and validated on the basis of extensive evidence. Even the most straightforward and least complex cases have a cost in terms of time and administration.

	Crisis Case Study 1	Crisis Case Study 2	SCSH Case Study 1	SCSH Case Study 2
Tenancy Breakdown Costs	n/a	£3,000	£6,141	£5,112
Temporary Accommodation Costs	£7,000	£21,000	£10,232	£5,038
Support Costs	£2,500	£4,500	£6,700	£2,600
Other Costs – e.g. can include health services, criminal justice costs	£5,500	£54,500	Not quantified	Not quantified
Duration of homelessness	1 year	2 years	1 year	6 months
Totals	£15,000	£83,000	£23,074	£12,750

Sources: Crisis ³, SCSH ⁴

28. There has been no single definition of homelessness prevention previously in use in Scotland. As a starting point it would seem useful to outline recent definitions of prevention to help illustrate the potential scope for activity. The guidance will also provide some practical examples of prevention work to demonstrate what can be done and to inspire others to try new methods. It is also important to distinguish for local operational teams and other interested agencies what homelessness prevention is and what it is not to ensure clarity of purpose and prevent “gatekeeping”.

³ Crisis (2003) How Many, How Much? Single homelessness and the question of numbers and cost, London: Crisis

⁴ SCSH (2007) Tenancy Failure – how much does it cost?

What Prevention Is

29. There is broad agreement across a range of organisations that there are three main stages where intervention can prevent homelessness⁵:

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

30. Research for Real⁶ outlined their view of prevention activities when they reported in November 2008 on the [Evaluation of Homelessness Prevention Innovation Fund Projects](#). The report focused on two broad categories of activity, namely **crisis response** activity which they define as responding to an imminent threat of homelessness and **precautionary** activity which they define as assistance to retain existing accommodation, manage life transitions and build personal resilience.

31. Both categories are valid and local authorities will want to ensure that consideration is given to the development of prevention services which achieve the best outcomes for households at risk of homelessness, either imminently or in the future. It is for local authorities to decide, on the basis of a sound assessment of the local causes of homelessness, how much relative emphasis should be given to crisis response and precautionary prevention activities. Regardless of the chosen approach, local authorities continue to have a duty under the legislation to accept an application made by anyone either homeless or threatened with homelessness within two months.

32. It is worth considering however, that increased effort and investment in precautionary activities will probably over time lead to fewer instances of homelessness crisis; and although crisis response services are valuable and necessary it can still be difficult to actually prevent a homelessness presentation at such a late stage. If efforts at the crisis stage fail, then the quality of alleviation and resettlement services becomes more critical. It will be particularly important to ensure that people are suitably and sensitively re-housed to meet their needs following any period of homelessness as this will more likely lead to tenancy sustainment and the prevention of repeat homelessness.

⁵ Communities and Local Government (2007) Evaluating Homelessness Prevention, Hal Pawson et al, Heriot-Watt University

⁶Scottish Government (2008) Evaluation of Homelessness Prevention Innovation Fund Projects, Research for Real

33. As progress is made towards 2012 and the removal of the priority need distinction, the development of suitable crisis response interventions may be viewed as the more important local priority. However, it will be important to guard against activities designed merely to prevent homelessness applications. This could partially be achieved by all partners agreeing local parameters of success and maintaining a focus on sustainable outcomes within local monitoring systems. The local authority and their partners should have a sound understanding of the current profile of people assessed as non-priority to ensure better targeting of prevention activity to meet identified homelessness risks. This data should be shared with partners to aid their understanding of the issues.

34. Each local authority will face different challenges based on characteristics and context within their area. Clearly therefore, decisions on the relative weighting and resources given to the most appropriate local approach will require the involvement of a range of council departments and other partner agencies. In terms of prevention techniques it should also be noted that an approach found to work in one area may not easily transfer to another area due to differing structures, resource allocations and local priorities. Although there are generic principles inherent in prevention activity, approaches may still need to be tailored to suit the local area.

What Prevention Is Not

35. Prevention of homelessness is not an alternative to addressing housing need. Rather, effective prevention activities should remove the need for housing in a crisis. It should allow people in housing need to understand what their options are and what they can do to meet their needs before crisis occurs (with the help of appropriate services) as well as allowing them to address problems that may be causing housing need. Homelessness prevention activity should not be viewed as an opportunity to deny people their rights under homelessness legislation, particularly in terms of accessing settled accommodation and meeting any assessed housing support needs.

36. Prevention should not be seen as an add-on to local authorities' homelessness duties. It is central to their whole homelessness strategy and this is supported by research carried out by Heriot Watt University⁷, showing that local authorities are increasingly placing more importance on prevention activities. Local authorities and their community planning partners should use the updating of the homelessness aspects of the Local Housing Strategies (LHS) to fully inform themselves about the causes of homelessness in their area, so that the resulting prevention activities are as fit for purpose as possible. This aspect of the LHS should be the subject of monitoring and regular review.

⁷ Scottish Executive (2007) Evaluation Of Homelessness Prevention Activities In Scotland, Pawson, H, Davidson, E and Netto G.

Identifying Homelessness Risk Factors

37. It is worth considering the main features that create homelessness risk to enable a more concerted understanding of what can be done to tackle it and why homelessness prevention is such a cross cutting issue, calling for partnership and multi-disciplinary working. The undernoted factors are indicators of homelessness risk, particularly when they become interrelated. This means that certain personal factors and/or the absence of protective factors could suggest increased vulnerability to homelessness, particularly where there is also housing instability. The following lists are examples, but not definitive lists of indicative risk factors.

38. Indicators of homelessness risk – personal factors:

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

39. Indicators of homelessness risk – housing instability:

- Previous homelessness or part of a homeless family as a child;
- Rent or mortgage arrears;
- Impending eviction or repossession action;
- Tenure insecurity; staying care of; tied tenancy with prospect of unemployment, e.g. Armed Services accommodation;
- Living in accommodation unsuitable for adapting to meet particular needs;
- History of/and current neighbour complaints; and
- Experiencing harassment/feeling unsafe in the area they live.

40. Indicators of homelessness risk – resilience/protective factors, which can mitigate against the risks:

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

41. Local authorities will wish to explore the most effective means of raising awareness of homelessness risk factors and the resilience/protective factors that can make a difference within relevant council services and within partner agencies, particularly as certain services, e.g. health, education and social work services may be best placed to note and respond to risks before crisis escalates. **This is important in the context of prioritising prevention activity, particularly for high risk groups.**

A part of the [HPIF](#), East Dunbartonshire Council has developed a web based diagnostic tool to identify potential risk factors with links to downloadable referral forms between services. Developed as a project for the Homelessness Prevention Innovation Fund, the tool has only recently gone live and evaluation of outcomes is as yet not achievable. However, feedback from staff at the local NHS Board indicates their satisfaction with the revised arrangements and a representative noted that they anticipate improved joint working and earlier intervention by local health services as a result. Contact: homelessness@eastdunbarton.gov.uk

42. Awareness raising and reducing stigma and prejudice should already be a policy aim of local authorities when tackling homelessness. By developing knowledge and skills within other parts of the local services landscape and amongst local citizens, this is more likely to be achieved. Use of the risk based approach offers increased opportunities to dispel some myths about homelessness and helps to illustrate that homelessness can happen to anyone. Providing a solid evidence base of the local features of homelessness risk can be an important aspect when engaging with communities and tenants organisations and can also assist when trying to resettle people who have experienced homelessness.

43. Local authorities will already be using feedback from service users to inform how they continuously improve their homelessness services. Additionally, they should make use of feedback from homeless service users about the interventions, services and assistance that from the service user perspective, could have prevented them from becoming homeless. [Glasgow](#)

[Homelessness Network](#) (GHN) used feedback from service users to report that many homeless people take personal responsibility for their homelessness, even when their case histories suggest that a range of structural and other challenges were likely contributors. This suggests that relevant partners could utilise the feedback too. The Scottish Government funds and GHN currently hosts the national co-ordinator responsible for the development of the **Scottish Homelessness Involvement and Empowerment Network (SHIEN)**. A Toolkit has been developed to assist local services in improving service user involvement techniques.

Structures, Skills and Working Practices

44. A prevention approach may require attitudinal and cultural change within an organisation. Moving from a responsive rationing of services to a more pro-active, “can do” type of service culture calls for strong and effective leadership, political and community support and organisational change. Local authorities are best placed as the lead partners in local communities to encourage, facilitate and enable the necessary change to take place. As part of that process, local authorities may wish to develop appropriate and proportionate information sharing protocols with a range of partners to ensure the free flow of relevant information sometimes necessary to prevent homelessness.

Statutory agencies across Lanarkshire have jointly agreed a [Data Sharing Partnership Protocol](#), which includes North and South Lanarkshire Councils, NHS Lanarkshire, the Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration, North Lanarkshire Community Health Partnership and the South Lanarkshire Community Health Partnership. The agencies have developed detailed guidance for staff and service users outlining the data that can be shared and the circumstances for doing so.

45. Evidence gathered through analysis of homelessness Local Outcome Agreements suggests that there is growing recognition of the need to introduce related new skills to the homelessness workforce. As a consequence, some specific posts have been created to focus on prevention work, either within councils or through out-sourcing of prevention services. However, the organisational structure currently delivering homelessness services may require further re-design and realignment to meet the new requirements of a prevention ethos. This is particularly relevant as we shift the focus of prevention activity, which is still largely “project” based in design, to a new focus and acceptance that prevention work and tenancy sustainment should be viewed as mainstream activities within housing and social care organisations. As a first step in this process it may be useful to consider guidance on developing effective partnerships.

The City of Edinburgh Council and Lothian NHS Board have a joint [Health and Homelessness Strategy for 2008 – 2012](#), developed by a range of partner agencies and service users. This is reflected in the detailed action plan to prevent homelessness, which has a number of NHS specific actions included. The action plan will be reviewed on an annual basis.

46. In order to ensure that everyone understands what the service aims and objectives are, and how they are intended to be achieved, local authorities will want to update and further develop homelessness and housing services policies and operational procedures. A degree of re-training is likely to be required to develop capacity and knowledge within the organisation and an element of team building in this context will also be helpful. This will be particularly relevant where operational staff teams are expected to develop new skills and knowledge, e.g. negotiating skills, improved knowledge and understanding of the private rented sector, mortgage rights and domestic abuse issues etc. Moreover, by developing staff teams in this way, everyone is more likely to understand their role in shaping and taking forward the local Single Outcome Agreement aims.

47. Elsewhere in local authorities, for example within their housing departments and within RSLs, an increased focus on tenancy sustainment is likely to lead to a requirement for specific prevention training targeted towards staff teams dealing with allocations, rent arrears recovery, estate management and housing benefit administration. Within stock transfer authorities, the department with responsibility for residual housing functions will need to maintain an interest in homelessness prevention performance amongst RSLs as an aspect of LHS implementation.

48. Joint training initiatives with other relevant departments and agencies, e.g. addictions and mental health teams, financial inclusion teams and social workers etc., has been shown to provide the most effective means of developing awareness, knowledge and understanding of homelessness issues. The potential for building capacity and fostering a collaborative approach is likely to be greater where operational staff are assisted to understand each other's roles and objectives. Assistance to understand and diagnose homelessness risk factors will enable staff in other departments and agencies to identify their respective roles in tackling the issue.

49. As well as contributing to the overall aims of the organisation any re-training will bring additional benefits in the form of the improved job satisfaction and motivation derived from providing more positive outcomes. Preventing homelessness is beneficial, cost effective and in the long run provides sustainable solutions. [The Chartered Institute of Housing](#) and [Shelter](#) are two organisations currently developing homelessness prevention training programmes in Scotland. Alongside the benefits of providing staff with the national perspective, local authorities would reap additional benefits by developing tailored programmes to fit with local issues and priorities.

Housing Options Work

50. Housing Options Work has an important and valuable contribution to make to homelessness prevention activity. There has been growing recognition of the potential value of providing a range of options when people make enquiries about housing. John Hills' review of social housing,⁸ published in 2007, highlighted the success of the "housing options approach" in preventing homelessness. To achieve most benefit from this approach, people should be assisted to understand the range of potential options available to them, in their area and based on their personal circumstances, at the earliest opportunity. This is likely to be when they first apply to be included on a housing waiting or transfer list, through a Common Housing Register or with an individual local authority or RSL. Other services and agencies will need to be familiar with the local approach being taken to ensure effective signposting and referral.

51. By utilising a "diagnostic" approach a personal housing plan can be developed and agreed with the applicant, which more clearly lays out how their housing needs can best be met. The most appropriate option may not be housing in the social rented sector but could include options in the private rented sector, home ownership (including low-cost options), adaptations or alterations to their existing home, mutual exchanges or actions to preserve existing living arrangements. Personal housing plans could be developed to suit the applicant household, regardless of their current tenure status. This would ensure, for example, that young people living with family members, tenants either in the private or social rented sectors or the armed forces and owner occupiers would receive appropriate advice and could agree a plan for going forward based on a realistic assessment of their particular needs.

52. Decisions about the most appropriate use of the "options" approach when an applicant contacts a council to make a homelessness application need to be balanced with the legal duty to respond to the application. It may be entirely appropriate to offer a housing options interview as a precursor to completion of a homelessness application; however, if the applicant is homeless at the time of interview or threatened with homelessness within 2 months, a homelessness application should also be completed. Efforts to prevent homelessness should then progress alongside the routine administration of the homelessness application, particularly where a diagnostic assessment indicates that a real opportunity exists to prevent it.

53. Applicants threatened with homelessness as a result of repossession should be provided with appropriate advice and information, including referral where required to independent sources of financial and other relevant advice. Applicants in this situation should also be assessed for suitability for the revised [Mortgage to Rent Scheme](#) or the [Mortgage to Shared Equity Scheme](#). Both schemes were introduced by the Scottish Government as part of the [Home Owners' Support Fund](#).

⁸ Communities and Local Government (2007) Ends and Means: The Future Roles of Social Housing in England, Professor John Hills.

54. Local authorities may wish to target housing options to the higher risk groups first as part of a revised general approach they develop over time. If fully developed, the Housing Options approach can also provide opportunities to identify other needs, e.g. health and social care needs, employability support needs and welfare and benefits advice needs etc. If other needs are identified it will be important to ensure that appropriate assessment and referral mechanisms are in place to trigger suitable responses, which will in turn lead to more sustainable outcomes.

Housing Information and Advice Services

55. Local authorities have duties under section 2 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to secure that advice and information about the prevention of homelessness and any services is available free of charge to any person in the authority's area. [The Homeless Persons Advice and Assistance \(Scotland\) Regulations 2002](#) set out the types of advice to be provided and the Code discusses these requirements. The guidance requires that local authorities ensure the provision meets the standards set out in the [Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers](#).

56. Even if local authorities no longer retain housing stock or perform a landlord function they should ensure that the necessary standard of advice and information is available and provide signposting and referrals to it.

57. Joint working to develop [Common Housing Registers](#) is likely to enhance communications between local authorities and RSLs and encourage the partnership approach necessary for effective homelessness prevention, particularly where communication links are not currently robust or delivering the best outcomes for people facing homelessness.

58. Independent sources of advice and information can be particularly beneficial in preventing homelessness as people often feel more comfortable in approaching non-statutory services to discuss difficult or embarrassing problems. The local authority should ensure that any independent advice, information and advocacy services have the required competencies and knowledge to deliver services successfully, preferably by meeting the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers. Efforts to develop and maintain signposting and referrals to good quality independent services are likely to lead to enhanced outcomes and the development of an appropriate outcomes monitoring framework will be worthwhile. A list of approved [money advice agencies](#), providing impartial money advice is available and other agencies likely to provide impartial housing advice include [Citizens Advice](#) and [Shelter](#).

Tenancy Sustainment

59. Effective housing management services will make a positive and significant contribution to homelessness prevention efforts. Good quality and continuously improving housing management services can have an impact on

tenancy sustainment, particularly where policies and procedures explicitly reference homelessness prevention as an objective.

Glasgow Housing Association (GHA) has developed a comprehensive Tenancy Sustainment Strategy,⁹ based on sound evidence about the causes of tenancy failure, collected through detailed research.¹⁰ The strategy has been endorsed by the [Scottish Federation of Housing Associations](#) and recommended to all Housing Associations.

60. The following examples describe aspects of housing management as delivered by RSLs and local authority landlords, and areas of related public administration, where homelessness prevention should be specifically considered. Some aspects also have relevance for private sector landlords:

61. **Access to Social Rented Housing Waiting Lists:** Homelessness and housing crisis can be avoided when people can easily apply for social rented housing and understand the relevant rules governing waiting lists. Applying for housing through a Common Housing Register is likely to significantly simplify the application process and help maximise access to social housing by means of a single application form and other common forms and procedures. In some areas, common application and health needs assessment forms have already been developed to make the process of applying for housing easier and less bureaucratic. However, regardless of the methods used to provide access for people to local waiting lists for social rented housing, the local authority and partner RSLs should ensure that they publicise access routes effectively and in a range of formats and languages.

62. **Housing Allocations:** The Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 as amended requires social landlords to allocate their housing in an objective and non-discriminatory way, based on an assessment of housing need. They are obliged to open their housing lists to all residents in the area over 16, as well as to those wishing to move to the area for medical, social or employment related reasons. They are required to award “reasonable preference” to those on the waiting list who currently reside in overcrowded or unsatisfactory conditions, in houses below the Tolerable Standard or in large families, as well as those who are homeless and threatened with homelessness.

63. Evidence suggests that when people are given informed choice in the allocations process they are more likely to sustain any resulting tenancy.¹¹ Choice in the type of housing offered and choice in the range of areas applicants can request when applying, when combined, are likely to lead to more successful tenancy outcomes. It is recognised that choice will be limited in some areas due to competing demand pressure; however the provision of a realistic assessment of an applicants’ options and choices at the outset of an

⁹ Glasgow Housing Association (2008) Tenancy Sustainment Strategy

¹⁰ Heriot-Watt University and Mandy Littlewood (2006) Investigating Tenancy Sustainment in Glasgow: GHA

¹¹ Improving Access and Maximising Choice: the Applicant’s Perspective on Allocation Schemes (Scottish Executive, 2007)

application are more likely to lead to a sustainable housing outcome. By ensuring that the full range of housing needs are recognised and by taking account of cumulative needs appropriately, applicants may be less likely to resort to using the homelessness route to access housing.

64. Housing providers should make appropriate use of the discretion they enjoy within housing legislation to manage their stock and make best use of it to meet individual needs. For example, encouraging and facilitating mutual exchange requests, transferring households to address under occupation or to partially alleviate overcrowding (as a short term measure), can all assist in preventing some of the tensions that can cause housing crisis and homelessness.

65. **Nominations:** Most local authorities have nominations agreements with relevant local RSLs, which provide access to housing association properties for people on the councils' waiting lists. By making optimal use of the local nominations arrangements, local authorities and RSLs can jointly provide additional options for people in housing need. Making best use of all available housing resources, and effectively managing the process, should ensure that people have access to the full range of stock to suit their needs. This calls for good communications, both strategically and operationally between the partners and the local arrangements should be transparent and effectively publicised.

66. **Section 5 Referrals:** The 2001 Act requires RSLs to give 'reasonable preference' to homeless households and to provide accommodation for those households assessed as being unintentionally homeless and in priority need by the local authority. Section 5 of the Act gives local authorities the power to require RSLs operating in their area to provide accommodation for homeless households. The responsibility to assess individual homelessness applications rests with the local authority.

67. Good communication links and effective outcomes monitoring procedures are vital in managing the Section 5 process and local authorities and RSLs should ensure that they share information appropriately to inform how operational procedures are being implemented.

68. **Working with the Private Rented Sector:** Local authorities now routinely work with the private rented sector through Private Landlord Registration, HMO Licensing or in the administration of Housing and Council Tax Benefit to claimants living in the sector. Engagement with the PRS has increased since the introduction of the [Anti-Social Behaviour etc \(Scotland\) Act 2004](#). Increasingly local authorities are also working with the sector to increase the availability of private rented stock for people who are at risk of homelessness either through Rent Deposit Guarantee Schemes or private sector leasing (PSL) schemes. As a consequence local relationships are likely to be more developed than previously and through this process conditions in the sector continue to improve. As part of a recent review of the sector in Scotland a [Good Practice Resource Pack](#) was developed to support local authorities. The commencement of [Section 11](#) on 1st April 2009 provides

additional opportunities to enhance local communication and aid mutual understanding and co-operation between relevant partners.

69. **Getting people into PRS accommodation:** Local authorities should consider how to make the most effective use of the following approaches to assist in the process of getting people into the sector, if appropriate, and sustaining them there:

- Rent deposit guarantee schemes;
- Provision of furniture packs and starter packs;
- Actively and routinely negotiating with private sector over terms and conditions of leases;
- Covering the cost of 2 rents - [28 day rule plus Discretionary Housing Payments \(DHPs\)](#) when people move between landlords or when a shortfall remains after [LHA](#) awarded;
- Fast tracking housing benefit applications to ensure people can begin paying rent promptly;
- Maintaining good communication links between landlords, housing benefit administration and support agencies to ensure early identification of vulnerable tenants in the event of missed rent payments.

70. **Resettlement and tenancy sustainment to avoid repeat homelessness:** Resettling a formerly homeless household appropriately is important if recurring homelessness is to be avoided. This is likely to be more sustained if consideration is given to the appropriateness of any settled accommodation offered but can also be assisted by the following:

- Short term low level support (e.g. visiting to ensure 'settled-in', providing starter pack of furniture/household items);
- Longer term assistance (e.g. training to address budgeting, cooking, 'life skills' or befriending to combat isolation);
- Specialised assistance and support (e.g. to address health/employment needs);
- Assisting access to beneficial social networks; and
- Assisting access to employability services.

71. The Homelessness Task Force recognised that positive social networks create strong foundations for sustainable, healthy communities and a route to preventing homelessness and exclusion generally. The Scottish Government funds the post of [Scottish Social Networks Co-ordinator](#) to assist local authorities and their partners to develop awareness and understanding of the importance of good social networks, particularly befriending, mentoring and mediation. A Toolkit has been developed to assist in this process.

72. Having access to nutritious food is key to good physical and mental health and is particularly important for people coping with stress. Cookery classes can provide a helpful way to develop new skills and can also aid integration with wider social networks, build confidence and improve links to other services. Community Food and Health Scotland has just evaluated the

impact of a two year activity programme funded by the Scottish Government to develop practice in the area. For further information contact Sue.Rawcliffe@consumerfocus.org.uk .

73. Access to employment services is a vital aspect for people resettling following a period of homelessness and is especially relevant for people who are additionally disadvantaged and excluded in other ways. Homelessness prevention strategies should include clear links with the full range of local employability and employment services and effective referral systems will assist in this process. The [Scottish Homelessness and Employability Network](#) is funded by the Scottish Government to develop knowledge and understanding of the issue. A part-time co-ordinator is employed to manage the network and to develop a toolkit for local authorities. The co-ordinator can be contacted at: SHEN@scsh.org.uk

74. **Estate Management Services:** Routine house visits, neighbour disputes and evidence of domestic abuse (signs to look for could include damage to internal fittings, door locks, pass doors etc), child protection issues, racial and other forms of harassment, anti-social behaviour remedies and associated support services are all aspects of estate management services. Improved communication between estates teams and prevention services is likely to benefit both parts of the service and could be developed through the use of an agreed homelessness risk checklist for estates staff. Information collected in this way is likely to also benefit the efforts of child protection services, perhaps through local Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) arrangements and is probably already in use for the development of broader reaching community safety services.

75. **Repairs, alterations, adaptations and assistive technology:** Local authorities are responsible for administering grants to adapt properties to suit particular needs. Landlords delivering repairs and maintenance services are also likely to be involved in assessing need and installing alterations and adaptations to meet particular needs within their own stock. Local agencies should work together closely to ensure that repairs and adaptations are installed timeously to assist in preventing avoidable homelessness. Some local authorities are making use of assistive technology to enable people to stay in their homes by sustaining their current living arrangements if appropriate. The emerging use of telecare and telehealth technologies presents opportunities for the prevention and management of homelessness, particularly when aligned with other forms of support. For example telehealth-care can be used for:

- The better management of environmental risks in the home, e.g. prevention of flood, fire;
- Motivational activities e.g. support to sustain a job;
- The home monitoring of health issues, e.g. dementia, diabetes and mental health problems;
- The management of supported accommodation to detect intruders or detect lack of activity.

76. Many areas are also using telecare technologies to support people who are the victims of domestic abuse by providing reassurance that a response will come if an alert is activated and providing a simple home security system. Highland Council has introduced telecare into the home of a young woman with a history of drug and alcohol misuse to assist sustain her tenancy whilst managing some of the impacts of her lifestyle on her home and neighbours.

77. **Early Response to Rent Arrears:** Early intervention in managing rent arrears is an accepted and embedded principle for local authorities and RSLs. Arrears must be tackled to prevent them from escalating to unacceptable and unmanageable levels for the landlord and the tenant. Good practice in arrears management promotes that every effort will be made to tackle arrears efficiently and sensitively with eviction only ever used as a last resort. As well as issuing letters indicating missed payments, home visits and/or face to face contact with tenants should be an integral aspect of arrears recovery methods. This is particularly important when dealing with tenants who have limited literacy skills and will assist the landlord in understanding if there are, e.g. housing benefit issues, which could be contributing to the arrears. **Section 12 of the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003 requires that sheriffs should consider reasonableness in repossession proceedings where rent arrears are due to a delay or failure in Housing Benefit.**

78. Responsible landlords will want to ensure that they provide sufficient opportunities for tenants to pay outstanding arrears by agreeing appropriate instalment plans, which take account of other outgoings and debts and recognise the wider needs of the household. Where possible, and prior to any action to recover the tenancy, landlords should utilise all available means of recovering the debt, e.g. wage and bank account arrestment, deductions from ongoing benefit where appropriate and small claims actions for arrears up to the value of £3,000. Where the landlord is a RSL or the local authority, additional duties to prevent and alleviate homelessness are likely to have a bearing on any activity with a potential to lead to homelessness.

79. The commencement of section 11 of the Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 means that from April 2009, landlords other than the local authority are required to notify the local authority of any court action to recover possession. Information sharing is vital to ensure that independent advice services and financial inclusion services can effectively engage with people who are struggling with rent arrears and other debt to achieve the most sustainable outcome. The undernoted example of practice was positively evaluated in November 2008 as part of the HPIF (see reference 2).

East Lothian Council successfully bid for funding from the [HPIF](#). The project was the first agreement in Scotland between a local authority and a Citizens Advice Bureau to enable an external agency to have direct access to local authority finance information and as such offers valuable lessons for other local authorities considering similar arrangements. The immediate project outputs were the installation of the appropriate IT arrangements, a training programme and agreed operating protocols between the two CABs involved and the council and between the CABs and their clients and audit arrangements.

Now the systems are in place and fully operational it seems likely that this relatively small scale intervention can become an established way of working between agencies in East Lothian and there may be scope to extend these arrangements to other local agencies. Other local authorities in Scotland should also be able to benefit from this example.

80. Evictions do take place and the resulting homelessness for households, particularly those with children, can have devastating consequences. The de-stabilising effects of eviction are likely to be relevant for local communities as well as individuals. On receipt of any subsequent homelessness application and even if homelessness was assessed to be intentional, local authorities are obliged to provide a minimum of temporary accommodation if required and advice and assistance. The [Code of Guidance](#) sets out a local authority's accommodation duties to homeless households. Services involved in rent arrears work, both in local authorities and in RSLs, should have a full understanding of the impact on families of any action taken to evict.

81. **Tenancy and Housing Support Services:** Access to tenancy and/or housing support services is likely to be found within either social work or homelessness services. Housing support has an important part to play in preventing homelessness; although it can have limitations. Housing support is not a substitute for some of the more intensive and specialist support services that many people at risk of homelessness will need, e.g. substance misuse services, family counselling services etc. but it can complement those services.

82. Housing support covers a range of activities that allow people to maintain their accommodation, meet their duties and responsibilities as a tenant and get involved in the local community. Housing support can include advice on budgeting and debt management; assistance with benefit claims; maintaining the security of the dwelling; assisting with disputes with neighbours; and general counselling and advice. It will be important for services delivering housing support services to maintain good communication links with other support services and with housing management teams.

83. **Housing Benefit Administration:** Delays in administering Housing Benefit can create additional difficulties for households already vulnerable to

homelessness for other reasons. Local authorities will wish to provide effective and sensitive services to people entitled to Housing/Council Tax Benefit and to ensure that services are publicised and promoted together with information on other welfare benefits. Good communication links are vital and should be established and managed, particularly between teams administering benefits and teams working to prevent homelessness. Formalised local protocols for sharing information will be helpful and should assist in ensuring that people entitled to benefit are receiving all available assistance in managing their financial affairs.

84. This includes making the most effective local use of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) and payments on two homes, for example, when people are moving on from a period in temporary accommodation. This approach underpins an effective corporate approach to income maximisation and the management of debt.

85. By linking the use of DHPs directly to the Local Housing and Homelessness Strategies, local authorities could help to achieve some explicit objectives related to tenancy sustainment, assisting families and supporting vulnerable residents. DHPs can cover various types of shortfalls including:

- Rent Officer restrictions such as Local Reference Rent (LRR), Single Room Rent (SRR), size criteria or when the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) does not meet the full rent cost;
- Rent Officer restrictions such as non-dependent deductions and income tapers.

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

Financial Inclusion

87. Financial inclusion activities cover a range of activities and services designed to develop financial capacity in various settings and can be useful in assisting disadvantaged people at risk of homelessness. Local authorities have been developing financial inclusion services as an integral aspect of community regeneration activity and this is in part funded through the [Fairer Scotland Fund](#) administered by the Scottish Government. RSLs may choose to develop financial inclusion services through use of [Wider Role Funding](#) and examples of homelessness prevention activity were noted within the [evaluation](#) of the fund in 2008.

88. The CIH in Scotland has appointed a Financial Inclusion Advisor whose role is to offer support, advice and assistance to social housing providers to

help them develop or review their financial inclusion strategy. The CIH recently published an [Action Plan](#) to support this process.

Typology of Homelessness Prevention

89. Many activities can contribute to homelessness prevention. It may be helpful for common understanding to establish and expand a typology of prevention. This section sets out different categories of prevention activities with a few brief examples.

Precautionary activity (Early Intervention)

- Education and general awareness raising about homelessness and its impacts made available to young people in educational settings and youth work environments. SCSH¹² has developed a range of materials to assist in this process, e.g. [My Space, My Place](#);
- Accessible and wide ranging advice and information about housing and related services;
- Corporate debt policies, which ensure that the impact of debt recovery mechanisms on individual households are appropriate and realistic by taking account of the entirety of the debt problems they are dealing with;
- Efficient and accurate Housing and Council Tax Benefit administration systems;
- Local campaigns to build community capacity, de-stigmatise homelessness and encourage people to ask for help at the earliest opportunity; and
- Implicit and transparent information sharing policies between relevant agencies.

Pre-crisis intervention

90. Local authorities should consider the provision of advice and information to all through appropriate routes on the following;

- Debt advice – how to get help to manage rent arrears, mortgage arrears and other debts. Information on [Debt Arrangement Schemes](#) and [National Debtline](#);
- Housing advice – where to go for help with finding housing, how LA and other relevant organisations manage housing, how people access waiting lists or Choice Based Lettings Schemes, how people access the private sector, tenants' rights. Information should also be available on accessing owner occupation including the likely income requirements and the potential range of mortgage products on the market;
- Mediation services to both prevent homelessness and improve and sustain family relationships for the future;

¹² <http://www.scsch.org.uk/>

- Support services (emotional and practical support) e.g. [The Shelter Families Projects](#); and
- Transitions planning mechanisms within Discharge Protocols.

91. It's important to stress the importance of referrals as a preferred approach, as signposting alone is often ineffective for people in denial about debt and they are unlikely to attend unless appointments are made with a specific individual at advice services.

Preventing Recurring Homelessness

92. In order to effectively prevent recurring homelessness, particularly within high risk groups, any personal housing plan should incorporate an assessment of support needs, which outlines how the tenancy will be managed and the levels of support required for tenancy sustainment. This is likely to incorporate a schedule for routine house visits to assess ongoing ability to cope, linked to an oversight of how the rent account and related financial affairs are being managed and good communication links with support providers and relevant services.

Particular Groups

93. Pre-crisis activity and working with high risk groups is an area where local authorities and their partners should inform themselves on the likely needs of the following high risk groups in their areas and act proactively and early to ensure that people in identified groups are most effectively targeted. It will be helpful to refer to the section on homelessness risk factors to ensure a good understanding of the inter-relationship between personal and housing instability risk factors and what can be done to help mitigate those risks:

Children and Young People

94. The child-centred approach set out in [Getting it right for every child](#) promotes a shared approach to meeting the needs of all children and young people. It builds from universal services through existing policies, strategies, legislation and practice. It expects anyone working with a child to identify and plan action to address the needs and risks faced by the child in a way which looks at the child as a whole and builds solutions with and around children and families. Similar themes are highlighted in the Early Years Framework, which was developed to ensure a strong focus on what needs to be done to ensure that all children, including the most vulnerable, get the best start in life. The Scottish Government recently published draft guidance on [Meeting the Best Interests of Children Facing Homelessness](#) and this has relevant information for housing providers considering homelessness prevention.

95. The list of identified homelessness risk factors highlights significant risk factors for children and young people, which can be identified early and certainly before they reach 16 years of age. Youth homelessness risks can and should be considered differently and separately from homelessness in later life. This is because there are opportunities for breaking the cycle of

homelessness by intervening much earlier to prevent it from ever occurring. Within the context of work with children and families, particularly work to support and protect children and where risks are assessed and managed, it will be beneficial to also incorporate an assessment of homelessness risk.

96. In particular, evidence of children “missing school”, “running away” and experiencing childhood domestic and sexual abuse have been shown to lead directly to homelessness either as a young person or adult. See [Youth homelessness in the UK](#)¹³ Interventions at the earliest possible stage to support children and young people and their families should incorporate information likely to help children and their families avoid homelessness in the future.

97. Intervention in the form of family mediation has been found to be particularly helpful in respect of young teenagers and there are examples of practice where earlier intervention led to successful outcomes for young people and their parents.

Amber is a mediation service for 14 – 24 year olds which works to prevent homelessness by mediating between young people and their families. It is run by Edinburgh Cyrenians, in partnership with Sacro, and was until recently funded by the City of Edinburgh Council. Amber opened up referrals to 14-16 year olds when it recognised the value in working with young people at an early stage before problems have escalated. Amber works with young people who are experiencing conflict within their home or have already left home but are interested in mending broken relationships. Referrals tend to be from housing and homeless services, social work, schools, health, policy, voluntary organisations working with young people and self referrals. The project will also offer advice, support and signposting as appropriate to the young person’s situation. Outcomes include young people being able to remain at home, but may also be young people moving out with the support of their families or moving back into the family home. Contact: Amber Project Manager, amber@cyrenians.org.uk

98. Practical support can also be offered to families where poverty creates additional strain on relationships that can cause housing crisis, e.g. in the form of short-term financial assistance to cover housing costs (DHPs) but consideration can also be given to supporting families in the form of furniture packs, additional beds and bedding or white goods to alleviate difficulties in laundering clothes or storing and cooking nutritious food. The Scottish Government funds the post of Furniture Re-use Co-ordinator and the post is located within Community Recycling Network for Scotland. The co-ordinator can be contacted at: Linsay@cns.org.uk .

Looked After Children, Young People and Care Leavers

99. Local authorities have particular responsibilities for all looked after children, young people and care leavers as the *Corporate Parent*. This covers those looked after at home and those looked after away from home. *Corporate parenting* means the formal and local partnerships needed between

¹³ Youth homelessness in the UK (2008), JRF, Quilgars, Johnsen and Pleace

all local authority departments and services, and associated agencies, who are responsible for working together to meet the needs of looked after children, young people and care leavers. [These Are Our Bairns, a guide for community planning partnerships on being a good corporate parent](#), was published by the Scottish Government in 2008¹⁴. In respect of prevention of homelessness, local authorities and partner agencies will wish to particularly consider chapters in this document on Social Work, Health and Housing Services. However, other sections are also relevant.

100. In addition local authorities have clear legal responsibilities both whilst children and young people are looked after and when a specific group of older young people leave the looked after system. [Supporting Young People Leaving Care in Scotland](#) Regulations and Guidance provides further information on these responsibilities. Care leavers should never leave the looked after system without careful advance joint planning to ensure that they do not enter the homelessness system at all. Appropriate accommodation and any required support should be in place prior to any looked after child leaving care.

101. Thereafter, it will be important to maintain regular and proportionate contact with young people who have left the looked after system. Local authorities should encourage the continuance of a joint multi-agency approach to supporting and sustaining young people in their accommodation and agencies could agree in advance the likely signals that indicate a possible tenancy failure.

102. Whilst responsibilities are towards children and young people, local authorities will also want to consider the needs of children's families both in respect of prevention activities and in resettlement activities. This approach can ensure stability of accommodation and also support the plans for supporting the child/young person, regardless of where that child/young person is looked after and what the future plans are. For example, for a child looked after at home with complex needs the loss of family accommodation will not support positive outcomes for that child.

103. It is also vitally important to consider the specific needs of a small but significant number of looked after children, young people and care leavers who present a risk of serious harm to themselves and others. Their care is particularly challenging to manage and can present significant issues for the corporate parent, for example when identifying suitable accommodation for a young person making the transition to more independent living. Particularly in these circumstances, multi-agency risk assessment and risk management is essential. Local authorities and other agencies will want to consider the following documents: [National Accommodation Strategy for Young People Displaying Sexually Harmful Behaviour](#) and [Getting it right for children and young people who present a risk of serious harm: Meeting Need, Managing Risk and Achieving Outcomes](#).

¹⁴ These Are Our Bairns, A guide for community planning partnerships on being a good corporate parent (Scottish Government, 2008)

Armed Forces

104. Armed Forces personnel can be vulnerable to homelessness at the point of discharge from the Services but also at later points in their housing careers as a consequence of poor health or disability. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) issues a Certificate of Cessation of Entitlement to Occupy Service Living Accommodation in the case of all service personnel approaching their date of discharge from the Services. The certificate is usually issued 6 months before discharge. Social landlords should not insist upon a court order for possession, or a Certificate of Cessation to establish that entitlement to occupy has ended. Where official documentation is provided, local authorities should take advantage of the six-month period of notice of discharge to ensure that service personnel receive timely and comprehensive advice of the housing options available to them when they leave the Armed Forces. A recent [circular](#) was issued to all social landlords providing guidance on meeting the needs of ex-Service personnel and their families and also provides information about other housing options and support¹⁵.

Hospital Discharge

105. Local authorities will already have a range of local planning arrangements with their partners in health services to ensure that delays in discharge arrangements are minimised where possible. This is particularly the case where people are moving into the community following a long stay in hospital. Nevertheless there are likely to be occasions where people are detained in hospital as a result of unsuitable accommodation options in the community. In cases where an identified or existing property could be made more suitable with alteration, partners should work together closely to ensure that any necessary adaptations or other aids are provided as quickly as possible.

106. People who are homeless at the point of admission to hospital, either on a planned or emergency basis, should never be discharged from hospital without referral to appropriate services in the community. Specific discharge protocols may need to be developed with a range of service providers in the community, including addictions, mental health and housing services.

Leaving Prison

107. Prisoners are a group at significant risk of homelessness following a custodial sentence and the lack of appropriate accommodation on release can increase the risk of reoffending. The types of housing issues that prisoners will present will vary, may be complex and will therefore require a range of appropriate responses. In order to meet these demands and comply with the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers, staff delivering advice and advocacy services will be conversant with, amongst other things, housing and homelessness legislation, the welfare benefits

¹⁵ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/260649/0077570.pdf>

system, the prison system and court processes, etc. Additionally, staff will have a mix of skills which cover interviewing, assessment, planning and evaluation. Staff experience of dealing with complex situations, multi-agency working and offenders would clearly be advantageous.

108. There would be benefits (for the prisoner, for the agencies concerned and for the wider public) in establishing clear protocols for sharing information between housing advice services, the Scottish Prison Service (SPS), local authority housing providers/registered social landlords and Community Justice Authorities (CJAs). Such protocols not only provide clarity about the procedures and context for appropriate information sharing, but they also assist the assessment and pre-release planning processes. This is of benefit to the prisoner because it should allow his/her problem to be addressed more speedily and fully. Ultimately it is also of benefit to the wider community inasmuch as the successful reintegration of the prisoner into the community has been shown to reduce the risk of further offending.

109. In order to support responsible authorities to meet the requirements of the Management of Offenders etc (Scotland) Act 2005 - to establish joint arrangements for assessing the risk of sex offenders and to support the wider 'duty to co-operate' on registered social landlords – the Scottish Government has developed the [Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements](#) (MAPPA) model and national guidance to inform the establishment and implementation of these duties.

110. MAPPA provides the framework, for the police, local authorities, the Scottish Prison Service and the Health Service to work together and with other agencies in assessing and managing risk. The approach is based on assessment of the risk of harm posed to the community and the allocation of resources to match the level of risk. The MAPPA model and the guidance is therefore designed to deliver a consistent approach across the country to the management of high risk offenders in the community, allowing early identification of those high risk offenders who must be managed on a multi-agency basis, the sharing of relevant information involved in assessment of risk and the management of the risk posed.

111. Alongside the MAPPA, the Scottish Government also published a National Accommodation Strategy for Sex Offenders ([NASSO](#)) in March 2007. This strategy was developed following the recommendation of the Expert Panel on Sex Offending, "Reducing the Risk: Improving the Response to Sex Offending" (the Cosgrove report) in 2001. This report called on the then Scottish Executive, Scottish Homes, local authorities and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA) to develop a National Accommodation Strategy to assist the management of sex offenders in the community.

People with Multiple and Complex Needs

112. A report commissioned by the Scottish Executive and prepared by Ann Rosengard Associates¹⁶ highlighted the needs of people with multiple and complex needs. The term 'Multiple and Complex Needs' has various definitions, many of which are helpfully explored in the report. For the purposes of this guidance the term can reasonably be applied to people who are vulnerable to homelessness for a range of reasons including substance misuse issues, mental ill health and other combinations of disadvantage. The [report](#) makes a number of observations and recommendations. Key observations on accessing and experience of services, which are particularly pertinent for homelessness prevention activity are that:

- Current advice services tend to treat problems in isolation; advice can be hard to access and referral mechanisms inefficient;
- Many people with multiple and complex needs do not gain access to the services they need or end up in inappropriate services;
- People with multiple and complex needs may be excluded from services because of criteria governing service use (e.g. age restrictions);
- Some targets undermine the will to work with clients with multiple and complex needs;
- People with 'multiple needs' may be defined out or excluded from services for organisational reasons, e.g. their needs are assessed as 'too complex or challenging' for the service(s) in question;
- Some feel staff attitudes are insensitive and unhelpful which prevents trust; and
- A 'silo mentality' works against co-ordination of support and risks people receiving inappropriate services with poor outcomes.

113. The range of service responses that were valued by people with multiple and complex needs were broadly similar to those valued by other service users and they fit particularly well with the early intervention approach recommended in this guidance:

- Targeted and outreach information in accessible formats;
- Single access points and 'one stop approaches';
- Services that address 'whole person' needs and do so in partnership;
- Personalised and person-centred service responses;
- Co-ordinated and integrated assessments;
- Outreach services that seek out and stick with 'hard to reach' groups; and
- Partnerships and agencies developing strategies to target improved responses to people with multiple and/or complex needs.

114. Homelessness prevention for people assessed as having multiple and complex needs requires an effective mainstream service response, from a

¹⁶ Scottish Executive (2007) A Literature Review on Multiple and Complex Needs, Ann Rosengard Associates

range of relevant agencies, working collectively to tackle the issues. As part of any needs assessment process, the prevention of homelessness should be included as a stated aim for the person concerned.

Domestic Abuse

115. The Scottish Government is committed to tackling all forms of violence and recognises the particular and prevalent issue of violence against women. Domestic abuse continues to blight the lives of women and children and the added difficulties and trauma associated with homelessness further compound their disadvantage. Multi-agency joint action is required at a local level to ensure the needs of those affected by domestic abuse and homelessness are tackled effectively.

116. [The National Strategy to Address Domestic Abuse in Scotland](#) (2002) outlined the key actions required to begin to tackle the problem and provided the gendered definition of domestic abuse used by the Scottish Government today, which states:

“Domestic abuse (as gender-based abuse), can be perpetrated by partners or ex-partners and can include physical abuse (assault and physical attack involving a range of behaviour), sexual abuse (acts which degrade and humiliate women and are perpetrated against their will, including rape) and mental and emotional abuse (such as threats, verbal abuse, racial abuse, withholding money and other types of controlling behaviour such as isolation from family or friends)”.

117. Despite many excellent policy and practical initiatives over the past decade, domestic abuse remains a serious, widespread and pervasive social problem. A recent UNICEF report estimated that one million children UK wide are affected by domestic abuse. The police recorded 45,796 incidents of domestic abuse in 2005-06. Of these incidents, 87% involved a male perpetrator and female victim.

118. Good practice in responding to domestic abuse comes about when agencies ensure they have well trained and sensitive staff and this is most likely to be achieved when they receive awareness training and guidance on the causes and impacts of domestic abuse. Joint multi-agency training is viewed as particularly helpful in understanding the effects of domestic abuse. General awareness raising can also assist in addressing some of the myths associated with domestic abuse and in tackling attitudinal issues affecting service provision.

119. [Scottish Women’s Aid](#) worked with the SFHA to produce a guide for RSL staff on dealing with domestic abuse and this is available to members on the [SFHA](#) web site.

120. In terms of homelessness prevention, social landlords should review, and where necessary, amend allocation and transfer policies to ensure they meet good practice and consider if rent arrears and repairs procedures are

unfairly penalising women affected by domestic abuse issues. More broadly, they should work closely with other relevant agencies to develop appropriate services.

In North Lanarkshire and Glasgow, Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs), bring together a wide range of agencies to discuss local cases and share knowledge and information about the victims and the perpetrators. The important aspect of the process is to agree the definitions of risk for the women concerned and to act accordingly.

121. In 2008, the Scottish Government launched the [Domestic Abuse Delivery Plan for Children and Young People](#). The plan outlines 13 separate priority actions based on the broad themes of Protection, Provision, Prevention and Participation. Priority 8 in the plan is to “Reduce the risk to women and children of becoming homeless as a consequence of domestic abuse and ensure, whenever necessary, they are supported to move into safe and suitable accommodation without facing additional emotional, economic or social disadvantage”.

Another project funded by the [HPIF](#) was developed by the City of Edinburgh Council to assist in preventing homelessness for vulnerable women and children who are at risk of domestic abuse. Called the Safe as Houses project, it was broadly based on advice, support and practical safety measures and adaptations to their existing accommodation. The project was developed as part of an advice-led approach to homelessness prevention in the city and by using the housing options interview approach, the project was keen to ensure that it shouldn't be seen as a deterrent to presenting as homeless.

122. Additionally, local authorities and RSLs will wish to liaise with specialist support agencies like local Women's Aid groups to ensure that women are able to access appropriate legal advice and that they have support to engage with it to seek appropriate legal remedies. Following an appropriate risk assessment it may also be helpful to explore programmes for installing security features in the current home, providing mobile phones and other forms of assistive technology to support external security.

123. Good practice principles for engaging with women affected by domestic abuse should lead to the development of guidance for staff on, e.g. interviewing techniques, dos and don'ts, and an emphasis on sensitivity and confidentiality. It is likely also to be helpful in cases of domestic abuse to have a clause in the Allocation Policy for housing the perpetrator of the abuse if they apply for re-housing.

Addictions

124. People with addictions and/or substance misuse issues are likely to require a range of support services to help prevent homelessness and aid

tenancy sustainment. The Scottish Government has recently published its strategy for dealing with substance misuse called [The Road to Recovery](#). It will be helpful also to look at information collated in the recent report from Audit Scotland called [Drug and alcohol services in Scotland, 2009](#). In 2008, the Scottish Government published a report providing evidence from an international [review of services for substance misuse and homelessness](#). The report provides information of use when planning accommodation and support services for people affected by substance misuse issues¹⁷.

Mental Health

125. People with mental health problems ranging from and including people with mild to moderate mental health conditions such as depressive illness to people diagnosed with personality disorder, are prone to homelessness. Information on a range of services and publications about mental health issues is available on the [Wellscotland.info](#) web site. Of particular interest is the Resource Paper for Community Health Partnerships, [Promoting mental health Preventing common mental health problems](#).

Family Break-ups

126. People who are at risk of relationship break-ups and also subsequently losing their accommodation should be offered advice and information about the range of housing options available to them. Families can be helped through mediation as seen from the Amber example and it would be helpful to contact [Relationships Scotland](#) to discuss alternative local services that can assist. Mediation is only really likely to keep a family together if introduced at an early stage and in the case of a potential break-up between parents and children could be introduced through the involvement of Education or Social Work.

North Ayrshire Council has a policy of responding to all homeless applications from young people aged 16 and 17 by visiting the family home on the day of presentation to discuss the circumstances with parents or carers. The main objective is to reunite young people with their families as a preferred option but there is recognition of some of the potential difficulties with this, including the risk of abuse etc. In the longer term a range of services can be offered including mediation and support for the family. During an inspection of the council's homelessness services, the Scottish Housing Regulator noted the initiative as an example of positive practice in the final report. For further information contact: janeinebarrett@north-ayrshire.gov.uk

Refugees

127. An asylum seekers is a person who has made an application to the UK Government for protection and who is waiting for a decision on their

¹⁷N.Pleace, Effective Services for Substance Misuse and Homelessness in Scotland: Evidence from an International Review (2008), Scottish Government

application. Asylum seekers are persons subject to immigration control with temporary admission but not leave to enter or remain in the UK. While they await a decision on their claim they may receive financial support and accommodation from the UK Border Agency¹⁸. An asylum seeker's application for asylum is assessed by the UK Border Agency and if he or she meets the criteria set out in the 1951 UN Convention relating to the status of refugees, the asylum seeker will be recognised as a refugee and granted refugee status. In some circumstances the asylum seekers may be granted a form of 'subsidiary protection' and status, either Humanitarian Protection or Discretionary Leave. The asylum seeker may also be granted status outside of the immigration rules.

128. Broadly speaking, refugees and those granted other forms of status above are eligible for mainstream benefits and support including homelessness assistance from a Scottish local authority. Local authorities' duties to asylum seekers, who are subject to immigration control, are complex – chapter 13 of the Code provides further information. This section deals with those granted refugee status and those granted other forms of protection status. For the purposes of this guidance they are referred to as refugees.

129. Refugees display multiple indicators of homelessness risk through their personal circumstances and lack many of the resilience measures which can mitigate against these risks. For example:

- Many are likely to have experienced persecution, torture or trauma in their country of origin or severe hardship in their efforts to reach the UK. As a result many may have medical, community care or mental health needs and a fear of authority;
- As a result of their flight many will have no personal savings or supportive friends and family in Scotland. In addition as an asylum seeker they are not allowed to access the labour market and thus whilst in the asylum process will have accrued no savings;
- English language may be a major barrier as well as knowledge of their rights and entitlements in the UK, especially if the refugee has recently arrived; and
- Refugees may have experiences of feeling unsafe in the area they were living during their asylum claim and have experienced harassment.

130. Refugees are likely to be most vulnerable to homeless at the point of receiving a positive decision on their asylum claim when the support and accommodation provided by the UK Border Agency is terminated after 28 days. At this point refugees will have to access accommodation, enter the labour market and make any benefit claims. Since 2007 and the inception of the UK Border Agency's New Asylum Model initial decisions on asylum claims have been made much faster, in some instances in less than 1 month of

¹⁸ In Scotland, Glasgow currently remains the only area where asylum seekers are accommodated by the UK Border Agency, however there are a number of asylum seekers across Scotland who are accommodated with family and friends and only receive financial support.

arrival in the UK. As a result, refugees will have had little time to learn about their new environment or develop support mechanisms in Scotland, and have little understanding about their rights and housing options.

131. A report by Heriot Watt University commissioned by the Scottish Refugee Council and Access Apna Ghar Housing Association¹⁹ highlights the issues that refugees in Scotland face in accessing permanent accommodation as well as sustaining tenancies. It makes a number of recommendations to instigate particular measures to prevent homelessness amongst refugees in Scotland. These include:

- Improved and continued multi-agency working to ensure that refugees do not become homeless during the 28 day transition period when they are granted status;
- Less prolonged stays in temporary accommodation;
- Impartial, specialist advice to assist newly-recognised refugees in accessing appropriate accommodation;
- As part of a needs assessment, consultation with refugees on their preferences for areas, including perceived safety from racial harassment; whether they would like to be accommodated with other refugees, with others from their country or origin or away from them; and close to places of work and worship;
- Home-based tenancy sustainment services that are tailored to meet the complex needs of new refugees; and
- Training staff dealing with applications from refugees in refugee issues to ensure responsiveness to the needs of households, including with respect to their duties in addressing racial harassment.

132. The Scottish Refugee Council provides specialist and independent housing advice to refugees: www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk. Scottish Refugee Council, Glasgow Homelessness Partnership and Glasgow Housing Association produced a Housing Information and Advice Pack in 2006.

Recording and Measuring Impact of Prevention Activities

133. The homelessness statistics system - HL1 - should be used to record homeless presentations and those threatened with homelessness if there is reason to believe that the applicant is homeless. Local authorities should not wait until the beginning of a formal assessment before starting an HL1 recording if there is an earlier informal assessment which indicates that the applicant is homeless.

134. Outcomes from activities, which aim to prevent homelessness or sustain housing will include:

- Households, which might otherwise have presented as homeless achieving a positive outcome and therefore not presenting;
- Households presenting as threatened with homelessness whose cases are resolved before they actually become homeless; and

¹⁹ Heriot Watt University (2009) Navigating the Maze: Refugee Routes to Housing Support and Settlement in Scotland, Netto G, Fraser A.

- Homeless households sustaining their tenancies following the outcome of their homeless presentations.

135. The HL1 can provide indirect evidence on the first of these outcomes and direct evidence on the second and third, but cannot tell the full story. To get a good understanding of the impact of your local prevention strategy it will also be important to identify and measure locally those aspects of the strategy, which you anticipate will be “key” to its success and which will not be picked up in the homelessness statistics.

136. The HL1 gathers information on the composition of households presenting as homeless, the circumstances of the applicant, the assessment, the support needs and the outcome. The revised HL1, introduced from April 2007, gathers detailed information on the previous living circumstances and main reasons for homelessness. Taken together, these can identify specific groups for which you will have targeted prevention activities.

137. The diagram at Appendix 1 uses the example of homelessness prevention for people awaiting discharge from hospital to illustrate what the HL1 can and can't tell you about the effectiveness of prevention activity for this group. Key points from the diagram about recording and interpreting the HL1 data and about useful information to gather locally are:

- **A positive prevention outcome** - from activity recorded on the HL1 includes those who were threatened with homelessness and for whom your local authority discharged its duty before they became homeless;
- **Negative prevention outcomes** - which would be expected to reduce as the targeted strategy becomes more effective – including the number who become homeless on discharge and those for whom the local authority did not discharge its duty before they became homeless. (In assessing negative outcomes, further analysis of final outcome of the application or time taken to complete the application should, nevertheless, be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of early intervention.);
- To get a good understanding of the overall impact of the prevention activity it would be important to record those who achieve a positive resolution without being recorded as either homeless or threatened with homelessness at any stage.

138. A key feature of this approach is the need to draw a clear distinction between those who are homeless and those who are threatened with homelessness. Analysis of current statistics suggests that a number of those recorded currently as homeless might be more appropriately recorded as ‘threatened with homelessness’. For example in 2007/08, of the 1,484 who were homeless or threatened with homelessness from prison, only 33 were recorded as threatened with homelessness. This suggests that either there is very little early intervention for this group, or that no clear distinction is being made between the two categories.

139. In addition to using the HL1 to record information, the following recommendations set out additional information that could be captured to help monitor the efficacy of prevention activities:

- A new [Accounts Commission](#) performance indicator – Indicator 19b - introduced from 2008/09 will record, for those placed in council stock as a result of a homelessness application, the proportion who maintain their tenancy for at least 12 months. The Scottish Housing Regulator has now decided to gather equivalent information for those placed in housing association stock through the [Annual Performance Statistical Returns](#) (APSR). Additionally, it is recommended that it would be helpful to collect data on tenancy sustainment for all groups to use as comparison. This would help to build a local picture of what works well and what doesn't;
- Where prevention activity is targeted at ensuring sustainable outcomes for particular groups following a homelessness application, an analysis of homelessness repeats for the group of interest will give a measure of negative prevention outcomes, which you would aim to reduce through your prevention strategy. Also, where an applicant does make a repeat application, the prior circumstances and reasons for homelessness for the latest application should give a useful insight into why the prevention activity failed in this latest case;
- Local authorities should consider monitoring the numbers of households referred for help to specific homelessness prevention services and the proportion of such cases resulting in “success” where such “success” is clearly agreed and defined;
- Local authorities using the private sector would find it helpful to negotiate with those landlords accepting, e.g. RDG scheme referrals, to notify them when tenancies are under threat, (i.e. before the landlord has any duty under section 11 regulations) and if tenancies are terminated. This will allow local authorities to intervene and negotiate if possible to prevent the tenancy from being lost or failing that to help arrange another tenancy for the household.;
- There are different definitions of success which may need to be taken into account when monitoring the efficacy of different types of prevention activities. For example, if someone is at risk of becoming homeless, measuring whether or not they have become homeless may seem like an obvious measure of success and is certainly useful to ascertain to see if they have avoided the crisis of becoming homeless. However it will not say anything about whether the underlying cause of their vulnerability to homelessness has been addressed; for example a young person who is assessed as being at risk of becoming homeless due to family problems may continue to stay in the family home - but this arrangement may be at risk of breaking down with little notice if the underlying causes of friction are not addressed.

- When Housing Options services are more fully developed it would be helpful to monitor the number of people assisted into sustainable accommodation as an outcome.
- Additional helpful guidance on outcomes monitoring can be found in the attached document, [Managing outcomes a guide for homelessness organisations](#)²⁰

²⁰ (2003) Sara Burns and Sally Cupitt.

APPENDIX 1.

Example of measuring impact of prevention on a specific target group

Number becoming homeless on discharge from hospital

