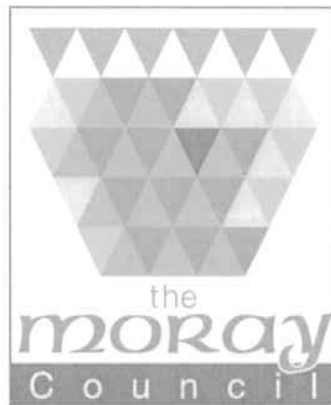


The Moray Council



Draft Homelessness Strategy

2010-2015

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Section 1

1. Introduction

1.1 The Homelessness Strategy sets out the key challenges in tackling homelessness in Moray and translates them into priorities for action. The purpose of the strategy is to outline how the Council, with its partners, will prevent and alleviate homelessness in Moray over the next five years.

1.2 Homelessness is not a lifestyle choice that people make; it can happen to anyone, and is the most extreme form of housing need. It is rarely just a 'bricks and mortar' problem - it is a complex issue. Many people who experience homelessness are vulnerable and have some support needs but a smaller proportion may have complex needs which require more intensive support. The solution to homelessness often requires involvement from a range of agencies including housing providers, professionals in health, social work and education; the voluntary sector and employers.

1.3 The Council's Statutory Responsibilities for Homelessness

1.3.1 The statutory responsibility for homelessness was originally defined in the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977. Subsequent legislation has added to the duties. The Code of Guidance on Homelessness circulated in September 1997 was replaced in May 2005 by an updated edition which takes account of the changes to the legislation

1.3.2 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 required local authorities to carry out an assessment of homelessness and to submit a strategy for preventing and alleviating homelessness. Scottish Government guidance has since stated homelessness strategies, together with housing support strategies, should be integrated into the Local Housing

Strategy. The Council, however, in recognising the importance of tackling homelessness has produced a Homelessness Strategy to cover the period 2010 –2015.

1.4 Developing the Homelessness Strategy

- 1.4.1 It is recognised that although the Moray Council has the lead role in developing the Homelessness Strategy, homelessness is not solely a Council issue or indeed, a housing issue. Homelessness must be tackled in partnership and by sharing responsibility with a range of services and agencies if we are to meet our aspirations to end homelessness in Moray.
- 1.4.2 Development of the Homelessness Strategy has been led by the Homelessness Strategy Group comprising of representatives from the Council's Housing Service, Social Work, Environmental Health and Education departments NHS Grampian, Registered Social Landlords, CAB, voluntary sector and local accommodation and support providers. The full list of participating organisations is detailed in **Appendix I**.
- 1.4.3 The Moray Council produced its first Homelessness Strategy in March 2003 to cover a five year period. The Homelessness Strategy 2010-2015 seeks to build on the achievements of the first Homelessness Strategy.
- 1.4.4 **The Strategy re-affirms our commitment to preventing and alleviating homelessness in all its forms.**
- 1.4.5 The Strategy proposes the objectives that sit within the headings of:
- Prevention
 - Provision of accommodation (temporary and permanent)
 - Support and sustainable solutions

1.5 The Moray Homelessness Strategy 2003-2008 - Achievements

1.5.1 The actions fully implemented from the previous strategy are as follows:

- Homepoint Audit and Accreditation of Information and Advice Service;
- Modelling exercise to assist in identifying the Council's approach to the 2009 and 2012 targets for the abolition of priority need;
- The Scottish Churches Housing Action "Gathering the Threads" training programme for staff, partners and the voluntary sector on understanding homelessness, funding, relationships and partnerships.
- The development of Moray Fresh Start and the "starter pack" initiative for new tenants who have experienced homelessness. This resulted from the partnership work of Scottish Churches Housing Action with the ecumenical steering group of Church organisations.
- Development and implementation of a Private Sector Leasing Scheme
- Re-provision of Cluny Annexe, Buckie
- Review the operation of the previous rent deposit guarantee scheme and the launch of the Moray Keyfund.
- Development and implementation of the Furniture with Rent Scheme
- Review of the Allocations Policy and the introduction of three lists (waiting, transfer and homelessness) with annual targets identified for each list.

1.5.2 The Council has a corporate duty under Section 2 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to ensure the provision of advice and information for homeless persons and those threatened with homelessness and to ensure they are available free of charge. Since the first

Homelessness Strategy was produced in 2003, the following has been achieved:

- Development and ongoing review of a range of posters and leaflets
- Development and annual update of the Housing Options Guide for Moray
- Service Level Agreement with the Citizens Advice Bureau for the delivery of independent information and advice
- Development of referrals and protocols with other agencies e.g. support services, partner organisations etc
- Ongoing development and improvements of the in-house Advice and Information Service
- Homepoint Audit and Accreditation of Information and Advice
- Homepoint training for staff involved in the delivery of information and advice
- 'Happy to translate' toolkit
- All leaflets and appropriate information in "Plain English" and crystal marked

1.6 Links to other strategies/strategic planning framework

1.6.1 This section details how the Homelessness Strategy fits with other relevant strategies, policies and plans. In this regard it should be noted that as relevant strategies are compiled on a rolling basis and to different timescales to the Homelessness Strategy, there is inevitably some disparity between past and current actions and priorities – these reflect changing circumstances. These include:

- Social Inclusion Strategy
- The Moray Community Plan
- The Local Housing Strategy
- The Strategy for Older People in Moray
- Financial Inclusion Strategy
- NHS Grampian Health and Homelessness Strategy
- Moray Youth Justice Strategy

- Moray Drug and Alcohol Strategy
- Moray Parenting Strategy
- Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) Integrated Service Plan for Children and Young People
- Child Protection Policy and Guidelines
- Community Services Improvement Plan
- Education Services Improvement Plan

1.7 Single Outcome Agreement

1.7.1 In 2007, representatives of national and local government signed a concordat which committed both to moving towards Single Outcome Agreements (SOA) for all 32 of Scotland's Councils. SOAs are agreements between the Scottish Government and each council which set out how each will work in the future towards national outcomes for local people in a way that reflects local circumstances and priorities.

1.7.2 The Homelessness Strategy contributes, through the Local Housing Strategy, to the Single Outcome Agreement between the Council and the Scottish Government. The Single Outcome Agreement reflects how the Community Planning Partnership of the Council will contribute to the delivery of the national outcomes. One of the overarching national outcomes is "Outcome 10 - We live in well-designed, sustainable places, where we are able to access the amenities and services we need". One of the local outcomes identified by the Community Planning Partnership and set as a priority to achieve Outcome 10 was to address the shortage of affordable housing and to tackle homelessness.

1.8 Community Planning

1.8.1 Community Planning establishes the over arching framework within which all other strategy and planning work should operate. The Moray

Community Plan 2006 to 2010 sets out the overall vision for the future of Moray and includes a number of actions and targets specifically related to addressing homelessness and engaging homeless people.

- 1.8.2 The actions previously identified in the Community Plan will be required to be revisited in the light of this revised Strategy and the Council will look to the Moray Community Planning Partnership to reflect the Homelessness Strategy in objectives and actions in this area.

1.9 The Local Housing Strategy

- 1.9.1 The Local Housing Strategy is the key strategy in relation to housing; the Homelessness Strategy is expected to support and inform the LHS. The priorities and actions within this Strategy have yet to be incorporated within an updated version of the LHS, but actions already included will assist the delivery of the Strategy.

- 1.9.2 The review of the LHS 2004/2009 is currently underway and will be considered by the Housing Strategy Group on 30 June 2009. In December 2008 the Housing Strategy Group agreed that Moray Council will develop an interim LHS 2010/ 2013 with a full review and new LHS to be produced in 2013. This timing reflects the requirements of SPP3 and the Scottish Government's reviewed LHS Guidance published in June 2008.

- 1.9.3 The overall aim of the LHS is:

To ensure that good quality, affordable housing is available to meet the needs of people living in or requiring housing in Moray.

1.10 The Temporary Accommodation Strategy 2009

- 1.10.1 The Temporary Accommodation Strategy 2009 was developed to support the Homelessness Strategy by setting out the strategic

priorities and actions for the Council and partner agencies in the provision and standard of temporary accommodation for homeless households.

1.10.2 The Strategy was drafted following work carried out to model the impact of the abolition of priority need and modelling of the implications of this for temporary accommodation requirements in Moray. The Temporary Accommodation and the Homelessness Strategies, have also been strongly influenced by the Scottish Housing Regulator's Inspection of the Council's homelessness services and in particular by the recommendations to the Council arising from the inspection.

1.11 NHS Grampian Health and Homelessness Strategy 2002-2005

1.11.1 The Health and Homelessness Action Plan continues to address inequalities in health and homelessness. The Homelessness Strategy 2003 – 2008 reflected the objectives of the Health and Homelessness Action Plan within the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan and the objectives will continue to be reflected, if appropriate.

1.11.2 The publishing of the Health and Homelessness Standards of NHS Grampian Boards is an important link to the Homelessness Strategy

1.11.3 The eight objectives of the Health and Homelessness Action Plan are:

- To provide a co-ordinated response to the wellbeing and health care needs of homeless people in Grampian;
- To contribute to increased understanding of the profile of homelessness within Grampian;
- To increase the knowledge and understanding of the health and wellbeing needs of homeless people within Grampian through the provision of theoretical and practical skills training to relevant NHS staff, voluntary and public sector staff;

- To support the NHS Grampian to provide appropriate access to health care services for homeless people;
- To ensure health improvement is integral to all health and wellbeing for homeless people;
- To ascertain and address barriers faced by homeless people in accessing mainstream services;
- To demonstrate through planning, policies and practice within the NHS Grampian, a culture that supports the prevention of appropriate health care services for homeless people;
- To monitor progress towards the Health and Homelessness Action Plan

1.11.4 Some of the key actions from the local Health and Homelessness Action Plan implemented during 2008/09 are as follows:

- Training Workshops for frontline practitioners on Drug and Alcohol Misuse, Sexual Health & Blood Borne Viruses and Nutrition.
- Mental Health First Aid and ASSIST training workshops for frontline practitioners.
- Delivery of smoking cessation support to service users and providers.
- Targeted food literacy to disadvantaged communities and groups i.e. supported accommodation etc.

1.12 Scottish Housing Regulator Inspection

1.12.1 Under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, social housing landlords are subject to scrutiny by the Scottish Housing Regulator, and as part of this process, the Housing Service of the Council was inspected in August/September 2008. The inspection focused on three sections of the housing service, namely Housing Management, Asset Management and Repairs and Homelessness. The homelessness service achieved a Grade "C" which is deemed to be a fair performance. This grade required an Improvement plan to be developed based on the

recommendations from the Regulator. The Regulator identified a number of improvements to be made in temporary accommodation and advised that the Temporary Accommodation Strategy Action Plan will be monitored as part of the Improvement Plan.

1.13 Equal opportunities

- 1.13.1 The planning and delivery of good quality housing and appropriate advice and information services and prevention of homelessness in Moray embraces the principle of equal opportunities.
- 1.13.2 Local Authorities are required under Section 106 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to state how they will comply with equal opportunities in terms of implementing their Homelessness Strategies. An Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out and monitored on an ongoing basis, to ensure that equal opportunities are addressed at each stage of the process.
- 1.13.3 The Council recognises that homelessness is an area where prejudice and discrimination is common. The reasons why people become homeless are complex. Individuals at risk from homelessness include people with alcohol and drug issues, people involved with the criminal justice system and people with mental health issues. Homeless people are themselves by definition disadvantaged and frequently experience more difficulty than others in accessing mainstream services. Therefore, all the actions proposed in this and related strategies are aimed at overcoming disadvantage and tackling the exclusion of groups of individuals experiencing homelessness.
- 1.13.4 The number of presentations from minority ethnic communities is low and this is representative of the demographics in Moray. The Council will continue to work with its partners to ensure that the housing needs of minority ethnic communities in Moray are met.

1.13.5 There is a lack of monitoring surrounding the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community which can lead to a lack of awareness of the housing need of this particular community. The aim is to improve on this and enable this community to access appropriate help and support to prevent homelessness.

1.14 Relevant legislation

- The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000
- The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001
- The Disability Discrimination Act 2005
- The Equality Act 2006

Section 2

THE CONTEXT OF HOMELESSNESS IN MORAY IN 2008/09

2.1 The Legislative and Policy Agenda since 2003

2.2 Recommendations made by the Homelessness Task Force led to specific legislation included in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. This compels local authorities to:

- Assess homelessness in their area and to draw up Homelessness Strategies aimed towards preventing and alleviating homelessness
- Ensure that advice and information about housing and other services are available free of charge to anyone considered to be at risk from homelessness
- Provide temporary accommodation to all homeless people regardless of priority need.

2.3 The final report of the Homelessness Task Force was presented to and fully endorsed by the Scottish Executive in February 2002. The 59 recommendations of the Task Force influenced the introduction of the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003. The main provisions of the Act are that:

- Priority need to be extended in stages, so that by 2012, there will be no priority need test and everyone who is homeless will be entitled to the full range of help;
- People who are deemed to be intentionally homeless will get temporary accommodation and help with their problems; and
- Ministers may suspend the local connection rules, thus preventing councils referring homeless applicants to another area.

The new legislation commenced in phases with the first phase in January 2004.

2.4 In December 2005 a Ministerial Statement was published as required by the Act, setting out a range of measures towards meeting the 2012 target of abolishing the Priority Need distinction. The statement set out a number of interim objectives as follows:

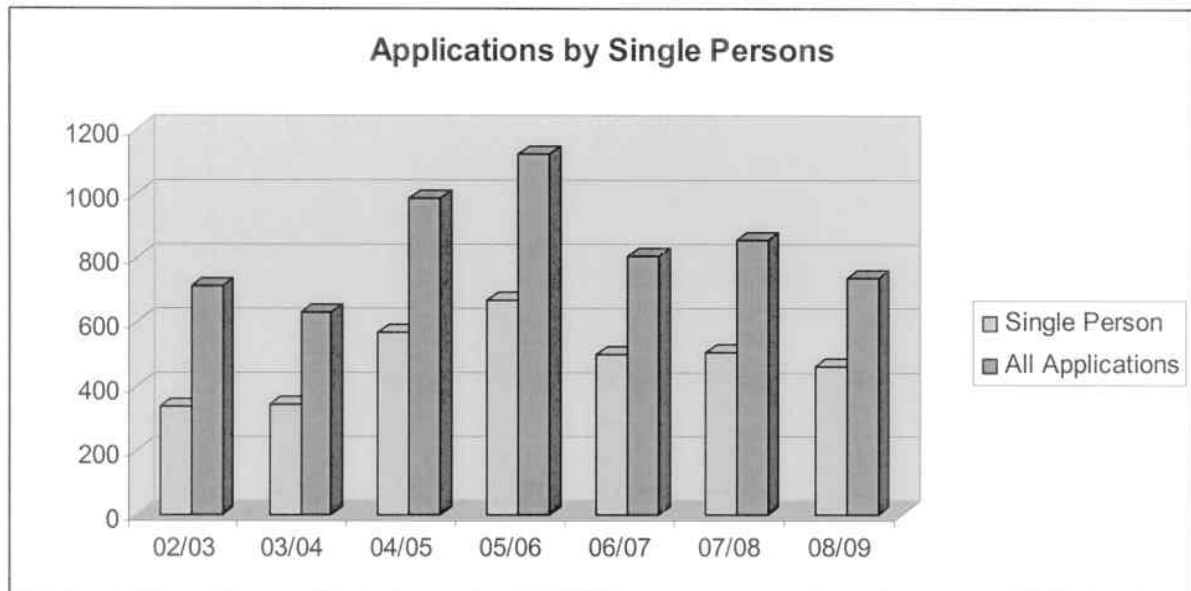
- Local authorities to return the affordable housing needs pro-forma every two years, or as agreed with the Executive, linked to their Local Housing Strategy.
- Homelessness Monitoring Group to report on progress towards 2012 as part of their annual reports.
- Scottish Executive to take account of the information detailed in this section in assessing local authorities' capacity to achieve the 2012 target.

2.5 The Code of Guidance on Homelessness provides good practice guidance on the practical implementation of the homelessness legislation. A revised Code of Guidance was published in 2005 emphasising the need for homelessness prevention, which was

subsequently supported by research in 2007. The Code of Guidance is regularly updated by the Scottish Government to reflect changes in legislation and good practice.

2.6 Homelessness in Moray

- 2.6.1 In 2008/09, there was a 14% decrease in the number of homeless applications compared to 2007/08. In Scotland in 2008/09, there was a small increase of 0.2% in the number of homeless applications made to local authorities from the previous year. Nationally the level of applications has decreased to 57,000 in 2007/08 and 2008/09 compared to 60,500 in 2005/06. The level of applications in 2005/06 was due in part to changes in homelessness legislation which placed new duties on local authorities to provide temporary accommodation to homeless applicants who were assessed as having no priority need.
- 2.6.2 The percentage of homeless applications in Moray in 2008/09 by age indicates that the percentage of applications each year from younger applicants (aged 16 to 25 years of age) now accounts for 47% of all applications. The percentage of applications from those aged between 26 to 59 years of age shows a slight decrease from 2007/08 but still accounts for 49% of applications. The percentage of applications from the age group 60+ years was 4.5% in 2007/08 and shows a slight decrease in 2008/09 to 3.9%.
- 2.6.3 In 2008/09, almost 62.3% of homeless applicants in Moray were single and this shows a 3.4% increase from 2007/08. The percentage of applications from single people is slightly higher than the national figure of 61%. The number of single people presenting as homeless is a serious challenge in relation to 2012 and the requirement for one bedroom properties. In seeking to meet the challenge it is intended to investigate the feasibility of developing a Young Persons Housing Strategy and to consider the option of flat sharing for young people.



2.6.4 Single parents account for the next largest group of applicants at 18.8%, a decrease 5% from 2007/08. In comparison, the national figure for single parent households in 2008/09 is 24%. The Homelessness Strategy and the Temporary Accommodation Strategy will endeavour to limit the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for households with children in terms of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order 2004.

2.7 Reasons for homelessness

2.7.1 The main reasons for homelessness in Moray in 2008/09 were:

- applicants asked to leave by family/friends - 25.3%
- non violent dispute within household/relationship breakdown - 21.4%
- dispute within household : violent or abusive – 11%
- action by landlord terminating tenancy (not for rent arrears) – 9.3%

2.7.2 The reasons for homelessness in 2008/09 in comparison to 2007/08 show a decrease of 6% in applicants being asked to leave by family and friends and a 1.5% decrease in landlord terminating tenancies. However, the most significant change is the 9.3% increase from

2007/08 of non violent dispute within household/relationship breakdown as the reason for homelessness.

2.8 Challenges

2.8.1 The ambitious target of 2012 whereby applicants who are unintentionally homeless will be entitled to settled accommodation will be a major challenge for the Council. Whilst supportive of this intention it is recognised that at present the Council does not have the availability of housing stock to enable this to be achieved.

2.9 Meeting the 2012 Target

2.9.1 In 2007, consultants were commissioned to develop a comprehensive model to assess the impact of implementing the homelessness legislative agenda, including the impact of the 2009 and 2012 targets on the current and projected supply of social housing in the Moray area.

2.9.2 The assumptions used in the modelling exercise were agreed following discussions with officers in the Housing Service and the Homelessness Strategy Group partners.

2.9.3 The key findings of the modelling work indicated that, based on the assumptions, there is an acute shortfall of social tenancies required to accommodate homeless households. The modelling exercise estimated that between 2007/08 and 2011/12, a shortfall of around 840 tenancies would be evident across Moray. It was also envisaged that the shortfall would be most evident in one bedroom properties.

2.9.4 The Scottish Government target to move towards the abolition of priority need by 2012 based on the 2007/08 figures, estimated that the Council would have a duty to secure permanent accommodation for a further 183 households in 2012. As progress towards the abolition of priority need, the Scottish Government also set an interim target for 2009, which sought to achieve a 50% movement towards the 2012

target. To achieve the 2009 target, the Council would have required to find an additional 70 households as being in priority need, and with a statutory duty to secure permanent accommodation.

2.9.5 A report submitted to Policy Committee in March 2008 considered the implications of expanding the priority need categories to achieve the 2009 target. However, in March 2008, the Council was finding it increasingly difficult to source temporary accommodation and it was therefore decided not to expand the priority need categories at that time.

2.9.6 A further report to consider the progress towards 2012 was submitted to Communities Committee in August 2009. The Council again considered the implications of expanding the priority need by age based categories but recognised that this would only add further pressures on to temporary and permanent accommodation. The Committee did agree that officers should develop a matrix of need that would allow the Council to have a more flexible approach towards vulnerability. It was also agreed that a meeting with the Housing Minister should be held to discuss the Council's difficulties in achieving the 2009 target.

SECTION 3 – AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STRATEGY

3. Our vision, aims and objectives

3.1 The Council's overarching vision is to ensure that everyone in Moray should have dry, warm affordable and secure housing.

3.2 The overall aim of the Strategy is
to prevent homelessness where possible, but when it does arise, to ensure that appropriate assistance and support is provided.

3.3 The objectives of the Council's Homelessness Strategy will continue to focus

on –

- prevention
- provision of accommodation
- support services and sustaining solutions

3.4 These objectives were developed following reference to the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003 and research carried out by the Council to meet the 2012 target for the Abolition of Priority Need.

Strategic Objectives

3.5 The actions required to achieve the identified objectives are detailed in the Action Plan in Section 4 of this Strategy. The Action Plan is intended to form the basis for a monitoring and evaluation framework that enables the Council, its partners and other agencies to measure the achievement of the Homelessness Strategy's objectives.

Prevention

- 3.6 The continuing lack of affordable housing impacts on the ability to provide both temporary and permanent accommodation – this includes a lack of affordable private rented housing as well as social rented housing. The lack of accommodation places a greater emphasis on prevention of homelessness and early intervention.

Provision of Accommodation

- 3.7 As much of the Council's homelessness is due to the lack of affordable housing, the Strategy sets out ways to tackle this and increase the range of housing options for homeless households.

Support Services and Sustaining solutions

- 3.8 The provision of housing support is fundamental to sustaining accommodation and preventing homelessness and repeat homelessness. The Strategy sets out how improvements will be made so that access to a wide range of housing and non-housing services is available to those who require supports. The Council will ensure that housing support services achieve the outcomes of ensuring that people can live independently and do not become homeless again.

Monitoring and Reviewing the Homelessness Strategy

- 3.9 The Homelessness Strategy Group will be responsible for the overall monitoring of the Homelessness Strategy. Sub Groups will take forward any specific tasks that may arise from the Homelessness Strategy.

Progress on the implementation of the Homelessness Strategy will be reported annually to the Communities Committee.

The Council will continue to monitor and evaluate on an annual basis, the number of applicants approaching as homeless and its availability to source temporary and permanent accommodation, in considering its options to achieve the 2012 target.

Strategic Objective:	To maximise the opportunities to prevent homelessness
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To achieve the strategic aim of prevention of homelessness, the Council will seek to:

- Raise awareness of homelessness and provide training to identify risks and ensure more responsive services;
- Reduce the numbers who require temporary accommodation at point of homeless presentation.
- Reduce the number of evictions and repossessions.
- Develop protocols with landlords and creditors in response to Section 11 of the homelessness legislation.
- Ensure that preventative information, advice and advocacy are available to everyone who requires it.
- Increase the number of young people who receive information on housing options
- Investigate the possibility of developing a pre-tenancy “living-skills” course in conjunction with a local education provider.
- Carry out a review of the Mortgage to Rent Scheme and implement recommendations

Strategic Objective	To develop suitable accommodation for a range of housing needs
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To achieve this strategic aim in the provision of accommodation, the Council will seek to:

- Make the most efficient and effective use of current accommodation resources.
- Decrease the use of bed and breakfast accommodation (Unsuitable Accommodation Order)
- Increase the number of temporary accommodation units and decrease the length of stay
- Set targets for processing void temporary accommodation and measure the number of refusals of temporary accommodation
- Increase the number of permanent units measured by location and type in accordance with the LHS/SHIP
- Advocate the use of the private rented sector as a permanent housing solution
- Research tenancy options in other local authorities e.g. flat/house sharing.
- Work in partnership with others to ensure the continued supply of accommodation

Strategic Objective	To design services which will reduce repeat homelessness
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To achieve this strategic aim of providing support services and sustaining solutions, the Council will seek to:

- Enhance and further develop protocols for people leaving prison, hospital and the armed forces.
- Ensure that the approach to meeting the needs of homeless applicants can deliver sustainable housing options
- Reduce length of time spent in temporary accommodation
- Investigate alternative housing options to reduce homelessness among young people.
- Ensure that those who have experienced homelessness can access the services and support mechanisms necessary to avoid repeat homelessness.
- Ensure the level of repeat homelessness is kept at below the Scottish average
- Measure access to the service as to where, when and how information and advice accessed
- Monitor and publish annually service user comments on experience of service

Strategic Objective:	To ensure access to appropriate support services
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To achieve this strategic aim in the provision of support services and sustaining solutions, the Council will seek to:

- Reduce time between homeless application and access to support
- Ensure 95% occupancy of homeless support units
- Increase % of applicants who access support services
- Seek to achieve a single route to access housing and support services
- Ensure commitment to and implementation of the Health and Homelessness Action Plan to improve the health and wellbeing of homeless people