

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT (FULL ASSESSMENT)

Department:	Housing
Section:	Quality and Performance Unit
Persons responsible for Assessment:	Quality and Performance Manager
Name of Policy Assessed:	Homelessness Policy
Date of Assessment:	20 September 2007

Screening Results: Equalities groups relevant to this assessment (People with dependants, Disabilities, Race, Offenders, Age)

Equality Indicators identified 1-6

1. Background to Policy

The Homelessness Policy sets out the Council's statutory obligations with regard to the prevention and alleviation of homelessness. The overall aim of the policy is to take preventative action where possible to reduce the number of people in Dundee becoming homeless. It aims to ensure that where homelessness occurs, each application will be assessed fairly and sympathetically, taking the specific needs and circumstances of individuals into account.

Particular concerns that must be addressed within the policy are:

- Information must be available in formats which are accessible to all equality groups.
- The assessment process must not directly or indirectly discriminate.

2. Data/Research

Information on homeless applicants and housing outcomes for this group are recorded on statistical returns provided to the Scottish Government. Information contained in Dundee's Homeless Strategy relates to applicants with disabilities, young persons and older people. This information was used in the development of this policy.

3. Expert Groups

- 3.1. Staff working within the Council's Homeless Service considered the policy and its impact on operational issues. Discussions took place with staff that carry out assessments, manage temporary accommodation and provide advice and information services to homeless people. Wider consultation was carried out with the Council's equalities groups on race, age and disabilities and a range of groups with an interest in homeless issues and services. The Homeless Co-ordinating Group, Youth Homeless Group, the Hostel Sub Group and the RSLs with whom the Council has Section 5 arrangements for referral of homeless applicants for permanent rehousing were included, along with other groups, with interests in equalities issues.

- 3.2. The policy document was placed on the Council's website. A short questionnaire was sent out to 160 individuals and representatives of groups to canvass views on the policy.

Twenty one written responses were received from groups and individuals including:

- Dundee City Council Social Work Department (including Supporting People Team).
- NHS Tayside (Medical Advisory Service).
- Dundee Domestic Abuse Forum.
- Shelter (Scotland).
- Sense Scotland.
- Positive Steps Partnership.
- Rockwell Tenants and Residents Association.
- Scottish Veterans Housing Association.
- Cairn Housing Association.
- Hillcrest Housing Association.

- 3.3. Other groups who were consulted, but did not return written responses included:

- Salvation Army.
- Dundee Anti Poverty Forum.
- Dundee Association for Mental Health.
- Capability Dundee.
- Tayside Islamic Centre.
- Tayside Chinese Association.
- Dundee North Law Centre.
- Age Concern.
- Commission for Racial Equality.
- NCH.
- Criminal Justice Services.

4. Findings and Conclusions

4.1. Impact assessment has identified two possible areas of concern relating to a number of equalities groups. These are:

- Certain groups may be disadvantaged by the arrangements for dealing with appeals. The policy states that appeals must be made in writing. Both expert groups and respondents to the policy questionnaire expressed concerns that this requirement could disadvantage groups of applicants. The suggestion was made that advocacy services should be made available to assist those who wished to appeal and that applicants should be made aware of this option. The policy document will be amended to reflect this. Staff will be made aware of this option for applicants.
- The arrangements for placing applicants in temporary accommodation caused some degree of concern about the suitability of accommodation for certain groups. Although these concerns were not strictly related to equalities issues within the stated policy and were more concerns relating to practicalities of managing temporary accommodation, a number of valid points were made. Examples given were the stress caused to individuals by being homeless and placed in temporary accommodation, the lack of emergency accommodation, the impact on families of being in temporary accommodation for extended periods of time with particular concerns raised about the use of bed and breakfast for families.
- **The wording of the policy at 5.10 will be amended to read " When providing temporary accommodation for families with children, the Council will comply with the requirements of the Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2004."** This order limits the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for children with families to periods not extending 14 days.

4.2. Other issues raised by respondents and expert groups related to processes and practical issues rather than the aims or outcomes of the policy. They will require further action in the implementation of the policy to ensure equality of access. These actions are:

- Consider the needs of applicants with literacy difficulties when advertising the service.
- Referrals and signposting for victims of domestic abuse is reinforced by training for front line staff.
- Ensure staff are aware that mediation services may not be an appropriate response to domestic abuse.
- Ensure staff are aware of applicants' religious and cultural needs when allocating temporary accommodation.
- Ensure the support needs of individuals are considered whilst in temporary accommodation.
- Clarify processes for staff dealing with evictions, so that the council will take all reasonable steps to work with landlords to ensure that evictions (for any reason) are only carried out when all other avenues have been explored.

These action items will be taken forward by Managers within the Housing Department. Training for staff on the Homeless Policy and awareness of domestic abuse issues has already been carried out.

- 4.3. Further comments and suggested amendments to the policy were received which include the following:

Equalities (Section 5.2)

Two respondents felt that the word 'claim' should be removed and replaced with present. This will be amended and will now read:

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that everyone who presents as homeless or threatened with homelessness is treated fairly, consistently and with respect.

Landlord Action and Court Orders (Section 5.4.4)

Two respondents felt that avenues should be explored in all cases before eviction. This will be amended and will now read:

The Council will take reasonable steps to work with landlords to ensure that evictions (remove 'due to rent arrears') are only carried out, when all other avenues have been explored.

Provision of Temporary Accommodation (Section 5.10)

One respondent felt that there is no mention in this section that the Council would ensure the tenant is provided with housing support, if necessary. Support needs of individuals are considered as part of the assessment process, and 5.10 of the policy already states that. "Time spent in temporary accommodation is as short as is practical, taking into account the availability of permanent accommodation and any support required by the individual."

Non-Priority Status (5.12.)

One respondent felt that the following paragraph should not state "for a period of up to 28 days" but should be amended to read the following:

Temporary accommodation will be made available in accordance with the Code of Guidance. The Code of Guidance states that:

The aim of the service is to assist those who do not have a priority under the legislation by giving advice and information for other housing options to help them through temporary accommodation and into a secure form of housing. Given the constraints on the service, the Council considers 28 days to be a reasonable period. In determining what is "reasonable", the circumstances of individuals are taken into account. The policy will, therefore, remain at "a period of up to 28 days".

Permanent Accommodation (5.13)

One respondent felt that the following sentence should be added to the final paragraph.

"When a decision is being appealed, accommodation will continue to be provided until such time as the appeal is resolved.

This is already covered in the last paragraph of Review of Decisions (appeals 5.14.1).

"The applicant will have the right to remain in, or be provided with temporary accommodation and their goods remain in storage until the appeal is heard and the outcome is notified to the applicant."

Performance Monitoring (5.16)

One respondent suggested that the following monitor should be added to the measures listed.

- Number of breaches of Unsuitable Accommodation Order.
- This will now be added to the list of monitors kept.

5. Monitoring and Review

Performance monitoring of the homelessness policy will analyse the following data:

- a. Percentage of people who apply as homeless from minority ethnic groups.
- b. Outcomes for minority ethnic groups.
- c. Percentage of people who apply as homeless with disabilities.
- d. Outcomes for people with disabilities.
- e. Length of time spent in temporary accommodation.
- f. Breaches of Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2004.

In addition to this, customer satisfaction surveys will be carried out for those in temporary accommodation, identifying trends in ethnicity.

Analysis of the completed questionnaires is attached at Appendix 1.

HOMELESSNESS POLICY CONSULTATION RESPONSES

The Council consulted approximately 160 individuals and representatives of organisations and asked for their views on the Homelessness Policy.

Twenty one responses were received, which included the following individuals and organisations:

- Social Work Department (2 responses)
- NHS Tayside
- Dundee Domestic Abuse Forum
- Shelter
- Sense Scotland
- Positive Steps Partnership
- Scottish Veterans Housing Association
- Cairn Housing Association
- Hillcrest Housing Association

In order that views were gathered consistently, representatives were asked to complete a consultation questionnaire. A summary of questions and answers follows, along with any additional comments/viewpoints not covered by the questionnaire.

Q1. Do you think anyone will be disadvantaged by this policy?

86% (18) felt that the policy did not disadvantage anyone.

14% (3) felt that it may disadvantage the following:

Where priority need was identified the policy does not specifically mention those who have addressed alcohol or other addiction issues. Two respondents also felt that in order for anyone not to be disadvantaged, it was imperative that all staff understand the policy and adhere to it at all times.

Q2. Do you think the policy is clear about how people can contact and access the service?

95% (20) felt that the policy was clear about how people can access the service.

5% (1) felt that the policy may be unclear to the following:

People with literacy difficulties may be disadvantaged if the advertising of the service is only in written format. One respondent also voiced a concern that the policy needs to clarify that in terms of accessing the service it should be made clear that mediation services are not an appropriate response to domestic abuse.

Q3. Does this policy consider differences in age, culture, religion, race, gender and make suitable arrangements for homeless applicants?

90% (19) felt that the policy does consider differences.

10% (2) had some reservations and voiced the following concerns:

The demands on the service might impact on vulnerable groups as suitable temporary accommodation might not be readily available. One respondent did voice a concern about those with mental health issues and whether they would be signposted to appropriate accommodation. A further concern was raised about the suitability of some forms of temporary accommodation for those with different cultural or religious needs.

Some respondents suggested that staff training would ensure that all groups were treated the same.

Q4. Do you think there are groups that might be disadvantaged by the arrangements for placing applicants in temporary accommodation?

38% (8) thought that groups were not disadvantaged by arrangements.

43% (9) thought there may be some groups disadvantaged.

5% (1) felt that there are groups disadvantaged.

14% (3) were unsure if any groups were disadvantaged.

This question received a mixture of responses. The responses in the main related to the processes and practical issues rather than the policy intention. Concerns raised by respondents include:

- Long term arrangements particularly disadvantage children and young people.
- Individuals with issues (e.g. mental health) may find the process stressful.
- Limited availability of temporary accommodation can result in inappropriate placement for those with chaotic lifestyles.
- People with visual impairment may have difficulty re-learning their accommodation.
- The policy made no mention of the Council providing housing support whilst in temporary accommodation.

Q5. Do you think the arrangements for enabling applicants to appeal disadvantage any group?

71% (15) did not think arrangements for appealing disadvantaged any group.

24% (5) did have concerns about the arrangements made.

1% (1) felt it definitely did disadvantage applicants.

Of those who had responded as having a concern or felt that the arrangements did disadvantage applicants, concerns were raised about the need for the appeal to be made in writing and thought that advocacy services should be made available to those who wish to appeal. It was pointed out by one respondent that the disadvantage applies where decisions are made in writing.