

HOUSING ADVICE AND INFORMATION PLAN

Introduction

The development of a Housing Advice and Information Plan has been identified as a key objective within the Homelessness Strategy 2008-13 and the Local Housing Strategy.

In developing this Plan we aim to:

- **maximise choice** by providing advice on housing options,
- **prevent homelessness** by providing advice before the point of crisis,
- **provide good quality housing information and advice** that meets the needs of the residents of Falkirk.

In doing so, we will take account of the following issues:

- equal opportunities,
- accessibility,
- customer needs,
- choice,
- confidentiality,
- accountability,
- best value and effectiveness,
- customer feedback.

Statutory Requirements and National Standards

We have prepared this Plan taking account of statutory requirements and the National Standards for Information and Advice Providers.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and the Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act, 2003 emphasise the importance of good quality information and advice in preventing homelessness. Specifically, the 2001 Act states that local authorities should:

- provide housing information and advice in accordance with the Scottish National Standards for Housing Information and Advice,
- ensure that there is enough funding to provide a sufficient supply of housing information and advice services of the right quality,
- plan for the provision of a range of information services as required to meet identified needs in the local authority area, including access to independent advice.

The Scottish National Standards for the provision of housing advice and information have been developed by HomePoint (previously part of Communities Scotland but now an integral part of the Scottish Government). The Standards are the recognised quality framework for organisations providing housing, money and welfare related benefits advice.

The National Standards cover the following activities:

- Listening to clients,
- Diagnosing the problem,
- Giving information ,
- Advising on the options available,
- Taking action on behalf of client, or advocating with other services,
- Negotiating on their behalf,
- Representing client's cases at tribunals or courts,
- Referral where suitable,
- Enabling or empowering individuals to take informed action on their own behalf.

The Standards also identify three levels of service that staff provide when offering housing advice and information:

Type 1: Advice Information Signposting & Explanation – The provision of information orally, or in writing, where the enquirer is signposted or referred to a resource or service,

Type 2: Casework – Casework includes diagnostic interviews that assist the enquirer to achieve their desired outcome,

Type 3: Advocacy – Advocacy involves further actions arising from casework. This may involve **independent** advocacy and representation on the client's behalf. Some advocacy activities can only be undertaken by a lawyer.

In preparing this Plan we have taken account of all three levels to ensure that comprehensive housing advice and information services are available across the Council area.

Current Provision of Housing Advice and Information in Falkirk

Housing advice and information is currently provided across the Council area as follows:

Council Services

- a specialist service is provided for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness at the Accommodation Resource Centre (ARC),
- a locally-based housing advice service is offered through the Council's network of Neighbourhood Offices and One Stop Shops,
- a Community Advice Service provided assistance in respect of housing/welfare benefits and debt problems.

External Services

- locally-based RSLs provide housing advice and information to their tenants,
- independent housing advice is provided by Citizens Advice Bureaux,
- some voluntary organisations offer their clients help with housing matters.

Over the past year we have developed the **Falkirk Housing Options Guide** to help people access a range of information on housing options in the Falkirk Council area. The Guide provides information about Council housing, housing associations, the private rented sector and buying a property. The Housing Options Guide is available on the Council's website at www.falkirk.gov.uk and is supplemented by a range of leaflets which are widely available through our local office network.

Future Provision of Housing Advice and Information Services in Falkirk

We know that good quality housing advice and information has a vital role to play in preventing homelessness by helping people to take appropriate action to sustain their accommodation and by assisting them to gain access to suitable housing. With the 2012 Scottish Government target that, by 2012, anyone who is not intentionally homeless will have a right to permanent accommodation and the proposed abolition of the *priority need* test, there is an increasing requirement to both prevent homelessness and to ensure that people are aware of the full range of housing options that are available to them.

Over the period of our new Homelessness Strategy (2008-2013) we will:

- move from an approach that is based on reacting to homelessness when a crisis occurs, to one that helps people take reasoned decisions about their housing circumstances at the earliest possible stage,

- help local people to have a better understanding of the full range of housing options that are available to them,
- publicise our services more widely so that there is a greater awareness of the advice and information that can be offered,
- extend the ways in which we provide information to maximise take-up,
- take account of customer feedback on the information we provide to ensure it meets their needs.

Priority actions for us in the coming years include:

- Continuing to update and improve our Housing Options Guide and to make it available in a range of formats so that it is easily accessible to the widest range of people,
- Redesigning our homelessness and housing advice and information services so that specialist, highly trained Housing Options Officers are available at all our local offices as well as at the ARC,
- Extending our portfolio of leaflets and other publicity material to cover all aspects of housing advice and information,
- Advertising the availability of our housing advice and information services more widely so that the public is actively aware of the assistance we can provide,
- Working in partnership with independent providers of housing information and advice to ensure that a good quality advocacy service is available for those who need it.

Equal Opportunities

It is vital that our Housing Advice and Information Plan is able to meet the needs of everyone in our communities. For this reason, all our leaflets state that they can be provided in other formats e.g. large print, or in other languages. In addition, posters are on display in all our Neighbourhood Offices/One Stop Shops and the ARC to inform service users who speak limited English that an interpreting service is available. "Point Pages" are also on display in our offices and these include a number of simple phrases and welcome statements in different languages – Urdu, Chinese, Russian, Lithuanian and Polish. By using the "Point Pages" our staff can find out what language a service user speaks and whether the matter is urgent so that we can then contact the correct interpreter.

Housing advice and information is available from our network of Local Neighbourhood Offices/One Stop Shops and the Accommodation Resource Centre.

Bo'ness One-Stop-Shop,
24 East Pier Street, Bo'ness, EH51 9AB
☎ 01506 778899

Camelon One-Stop-Shop
308 Main Street, Camelon, FK1 4DY
☎ 01324 503640

Falkirk One-Stop-Shop
Unit MSU1 Callendar Square, Falkirk, FK1 1ZF
☎ 01324 506868

Denny One-Stop-Shop
Carronmank House, Denny, FK6 6GA
☎ 01324 504050

Grangemouth One-Stop-Shop
5 York Lane, Grangemouth, FK3 8BD
☎ 01324 504550

Stenhousemuir One-Stop-Shop
398 Main Street, Stenhousemuir, FK5 3JR
☎ 01324 503340

Dawson Centre
David's Loan, Falkirk, FK2 7RG
☎ 01234 501450

Accommodation Resource Centre,
23– 25 High Street, Falkirk, FK1 1ES
☎ 01324 503600
☎ 0800 587 4440 (freephone)
✉ arc@falkirk.gov.uk

Independent housing advice and information is available from:	
Citizens Advice Bureaux	
Falkirk CAB 27 – 29 Vicar Street Falkirk, Fk1 1LL Tel: 01324 611244	Denny and Dunipace CAB 24 Duke Street Denny, FK6 6DD Tel: 01324 823118
Grangemouth and Bo'ness CAB 1 Kerse Road Grangemouth, FK3 8HW Tel: 01324 483467	Shelter Housing Aid Centre 1 Courthouse Square Dundee, DD1 1NH Tel: 0844 515 2528

If you would like this information in another language, Braille, **LARGE PRINT** or audio, please speak to member of staff at the Accommodation Resource Centre.

Arabic

إذا كنت ترغب بالحصول على هذه المعلومات بلغة أخرى، بريل، احرف كبيرة او مسجلة صوتيا، نرجوا منك التكلّم مع احد موظفينا في مركز مصادر السكن.

Chinese

如果你需要這個信息其他版本，如：另一種語言文字，盲人用點字，大字體印刷或者錄音版本，請你聯系房屋資源信息中心的工作人員。

Lithuanian

Jeigu jūs norėtumėte gauti šią informaciją kita kalba, Brailio raštu, stambiu šriftu ar įgarsintą, prašome kreiptis į Gyvenamųjų Patalpų Fondo darbuotoją.

Polish

Jeśli Śyczą sobie Państwo tych informacji w innym języku, Braillem, DUŚYM DRUKIEM lub w wersji audio, prosimy zwrócić się do pracownika Accommodation Resource Centre.

Urdu

اگر آپ یہ انفارمیشن کسی دوسری زبان، بریل، بڑے حروف کی چھپائی یا آڈیو میں چاہتے ہیں تو براہ مہربانی آکوموڈیشن ریسورس سینٹر کے اسٹاف ممبر سے بات کریں۔

Punjabi

ਜੇਕਰ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਜਬਾਨ, ਬਰੇਲ, ਵੱਡੀ ਛਪਾਈ ਵਿਚ ਜਾਂ ਆਡੀਓ ਤੇ ਲੈਣਾ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ ਤਾਂ ਐਕਮੋਡੇਸ਼ਨ ਰੀਸੋਰਸ ਸੈਂਟਰ ਦੇ ਕਿਸੇ ਬੰਦੇ ਨਾਲ ਗੱਲ ਬਾਤ ਕਰੋ।