

WESTERN ISLES MENTAL HEALTH PARTNERSHIP PROCEDURES MANUAL FOR MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR AND HEBRIDEAN HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

Procedures for the Assessment and Allocation of Housing to People with Mental Health Needs.

BACKGROUND

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar transferred ownership of all of its housing stock in the Western Isles to Hebridean Housing Partnership (HHP) in September 2006. The Comhairle therefore no longer has any involvement in the allocation and management of social rented housing, but retains responsibility for private sector housing, housing strategy and planning and the discharge of statutory duties to Homeless Persons.

Hebridean Housing Partnership is a not for profit Housing Association and the principal Registered Social Landlord in the Western Isles. It is independent and it exists to meet housing need and to provide housing services in the Western Isles. It is run by a Board of 15 members – 5 tenants, 5 Councillors and 5 community representatives. People wishing to apply for rented housing now have to do so through HHP rather than the Comhairle.

The Homeless Service is still run by the Comhairle and is managed by the Housing Services Team in the Department for Sustainable Communities. Comhairle staff are responsible for the assessment and determination of applications by Homeless and Potentially Homeless people, and for arranging temporary accommodation for them if necessary. The Homeless Service is located within HHP offices to ensure good agency communications and for the convenience of clients.

The Comhairle and Hebridean Housing Partnership have developed a Service Level Agreement to structure joint working between the two organisations, and to ensure the best possible response to both mainstream housing and homeless applicants. The Comhairle leases a number of properties from HHP for use as temporary accommodation units and refers applicants deemed to be in 'priority need' of re-housing to HHP for the allocation of a permanent dwelling.

Service Principles

Both the Comhairle and Hebridean Housing Partnership acknowledge that people with mental health needs are at an increased disadvantage if they are homeless, at risk of becoming homeless or living in unsuitable housing.

Their working practices therefore seek to give due priority to this client group within the context of a serious shortage of social rented housing throughout the islands, and the competing and perhaps equally urgent needs of individual applicants and other specific needs groups.

The Housing agencies appreciate that the majority of applicants with mental health needs do not require anything exceptional with regards to housing design, the most important factor in their ability to live safely and independently being the provision of regular appropriate support.

However, there are some specific issues which staff in the referring agencies should be aware of when assisting individuals to address their housing needs.

1. The fact that mental health services in Lewis and Harris are focused on Stornoway does have the effect of increasing demand for housing there, where there is already the greatest competing pressure for social rented accommodation.
2. There is no centralisation of mental health services in Uist or Barra and so no corresponding demand for housing in any one area.
3. There is no emergency accommodation other than hospital for clients suffering a crisis in their condition. The temporary accommodation held by the Homeless Service is unsupported, and in some instances shared with several other people. It is therefore not appropriate for vulnerable people in need of intensive care and support.
4. Temporary accommodation is at a premium throughout the islands and the Comhairle's Homeless units are subject to competing pressures. Every effort will however be made by the staff participating in multi agency case conferences to avoid the discharge from hospital to a B&B establishment of any person with mental health needs.

It is crucial that any requirement for accommodation, whether temporary or permanent, be notified to the Housing agencies as soon as possible after the clients admission to hospital. This will allow the best opportunity of identifying suitable long term or permanent accommodation for the client and will minimise the risk of a delayed discharge, or a discharge to an inappropriate setting.

In the case of a client living in the community, any need for alternative housing should be referred on as soon as the assessment is made.

It is important that referring agencies give a fair picture of both urgency and seriousness when making housing referrals on a client's behalf, and that they avoid making crisis referrals in situations of low risk. They should also acknowledge the constraints on providing social rented housing in Stornoway and should when discussing care plans and discharge arrangements try to give clients a realistic picture of their housing options.

Referrals to the Homeless Service or to Hebridean Housing Partnership may be made by the applicant or their representative e.g. Social Worker, Hospital Staff, CPN or GP.

If clients are on CPA and are Homeless or have a designated care manager and are Homeless the referral to the Housing agencies should be progressed as a matter of urgency by a multi-agency case conference.

Housing staff will attend individual case conferences and review meetings where appropriate and contribute as part of the care team around an individual client.

Criteria for Additional Priority

To facilitate the assessment of housing applications in line with the stated policy the following categories of priority have been identified;

Priority 1 People who are experiencing difficulties because of their mental health and are on CPA and Homeless

Priority 2 People who have mental health needs, are homeless, and have a designated care manager

Priority 3 People who have mental health needs in the community or in hospital and are homeless

Priority 4 People who have mental health needs and where there are additional factors such as dependant children, physical illness, or disability.

Priority 5 Other people with mental health needs

Priority Categories 1 – 3 inclusive will have their housing needs assessed under Homeless Persons Legislation and their application progressed through the Comhairle's Homelessness procedures

Priority Categories 4 & 5 will have their needs assessed in terms of Hebridean Housing Partnership's Allocation Policy. Applicants may submit supporting information from e.g. their GP, CPN or Social Worker. Applicants may also be awarded additional medical priority points following an assessment of the medical information provided.

Homelessness

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar operates the Homeless Service to assist the ever-growing number of people who find themselves homeless or threatened with homelessness.

The following section explains who may be entitled to apply for housing under Homeless Persons legislation and sets out the procedures used by the Comhairle to assess an application.

Homeless Application

The Homeless Service operates entirely separately from Hebridean Housing Partnership's Allocations Section, and Homeless Applicants have to meet different requirements to those applying for housing through the waiting list system.

There are many reasons why people become homeless. The most common are family or marital disputes, financial difficulties, following emergencies such as fire or flood and following action by a landlord.

If a client is already without accommodation or there is reason to think that they shortly will be, contact should be made with the Homeless Persons Officer at the nearest Housing Office to discuss the situation. The applicant will be asked to complete a housing application form, which will be considered in terms of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 Part 11 as amended by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and the Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003, and the type of help the Comhairle can offer will depend on the individuals personal circumstances.

Homelessness: The Legal Position

In terms of Law:

An individual is Homeless if he/she

- a) Does not have accommodation he is entitled to occupy e.g. has been put out by relatives
- b) Does not have accommodation which can be reasonably used, e.g. there is a risk of violence in the home
- c) Does not have accommodations where his/her family can live together

An applicant will have priority need if he/she is:

- a) Responsible for dependent children (those under 16 years or under 19 years if they are still in full-time education or training)
- b) Pregnant
- c) Vulnerable due to old age, mental or physical disability or some other special reason
- d) Homeless due to fire, flood or other disaster

An applicant will also qualify as having a priority need if someone who normally lives with them comes into one of these categories.

Assessment of Applications

It will normally be established by the end of the initial interview whether or not the applicant is likely to have a priority need of housing.

If there is no priority need, advice and information will be offered regarding private rented accommodation. The applicant will also be advised to submit an application to be assessed for inclusion in the housing waiting list as soon as he has a permanent address. If necessary, temporary accommodation may be arranged by the Homeless Service. This will be for a limited period only to allow a longer term solution to be found.

A written determination of the homeless application will be prepared even if priority housing cannot be offered. If the individual does not have an address at the time of application, the decision letter can be collected from the Housing Office.

If an applicant does appear to be in priority need, the Comhairle must make further investigations into the circumstances and details of their application. This may take some time, and if the applicant does not already have temporary accommodation (including hospital), a place may be offered in either one of the Comhairle's furnished Homeless Units, or if these are unavailable, in private Bed and Breakfast accommodation. The latter option will not be offered to applicants who are obviously in a distressed or vulnerable mental state as there is no support available within the premises.

Whilst considering the entitlement to permanent housing under Homelessness Legislation the Comhairle has a duty to find out whether the loss of the previous accommodation could have been avoided, and whether the applicant has an established and current local connection.

Housing staff may have to contact landlords, solicitors, social workers, doctors, banks or other landlords about the application, depending on the circumstances.

If the applicant is in hospital or has been referred to Housing by Social Work or Health staff, a multi-agency case conference will be convened to progress the investigations.

If information is deliberately withheld, false statements made regarding the applicants housing situation or there is a failure to notify any change in circumstances, the homeless application will be cancelled.

Outcome and Decision

<p>Homeless/potentially homeless with</p> <p>PRIORITY NEED i.e. have special circumstances as detailed above the</p> <p>APPLICANT WILL Be entitled to an offer of permanent housing And be provided with temporary accommodation until then</p>	<p>Intentionally homeless or potentially homeless with</p> <p>PRIORITY NEED i.e. have caused the homelessness the</p> <p>APPLICANT WILL Be offered temporary accommodation if necessary and assistance to find private accommodation</p>	<p>Connected with another area (i.e. have no established local connection)</p> <p>APPLICANT WILL Be referred back to the District Council where there is a connection OR helped to find private accommodation in this area</p>	<p>Homeless/potentially homeless with</p> <p>NO PRIORITY NEED</p> <p>APPLICANT WILL N Be offered temporary accommodation if required (but only for a limited period) and helped to find private accommodation</p>
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The decision regarding a homeless application will usually be made within 28 days and the applicant will be notified of the outcome in writing.

Appeals Procedure

If the applicant feels that the decision regarding his homeless status is not in accordance with the terms of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 Part 11 as amended by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and the Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 he may appeal against the findings of the Homeless Service.

Details of the Appeals Procedure will be provided with the outcome letter.

Offers of Housing

If the Comhairle decides that an applicant is entitled to housing under Homeless Legislation, the determination will be passed to Hebridean Housing Partnership and an allocation of permanent accommodation will be made as soon as possible.

The serious local housing shortage means that areas of preference cannot be guaranteed when housing is urgently required, though every effort is made to meet a client's requirements. It may be necessary for the applicant to remain in temporary accommodation for a time until a property can be permanently allocated to him/her.

In all cases (as with mainstream waiting list applicants) a maximum of two offers of appropriate housing will be made by Hebridean Housing Partnership. If both are refused the application is suspended for one year and no further offers of accommodation will be made within that period.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Homeless Services

Homeless Service Lewis & Harris
C/o Hebridean Housing Partnership
Gleann Seileach Business Park
Willowglen Road
Stornoway
Isle of Lewis
HS1 2EP

Tel: 01851 707909

Homeless Service Uist
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Offices
Balivanich
Isle of Benbecula
HS7 5LA

Tel: 01870 602425

Homeless Service Barra
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Offices
Castlebay
Barra
HS9 5XD

Tel: 01871 810431

Hebridean Housing Partnership

Hebridean Housing Partnership
Gleann Seileach Business Park
Willowglen Road
Stornoway
Isle of Lewis
HS1 2EP

Tel: 0845 6039 180

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