

## **Item: 12**

**Education, Leisure and Housing Committee: 6 February 2019.**

**Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers.**

**Report by Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing.**

### **1. Purpose of Report**

To advise on the process of reaccreditation of the Housing Service relating to the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers.

### **2. Recommendations**

The Committee is invited to note:

#### **2.1.**

That the advice and information functions within Housing Services were subject to an inspection, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, as part of its reaccreditation under the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers.

#### **2.2.**

That the process of reaccreditation, undertaken by the Scottish Legal Aid Board consisted of two separate parts, namely:

- Peer review.
- Audit.

#### **2.3.**

A process of peer review, being a detailed review of case work, was undertaken remotely during January and February 2018 with the reaccreditation then ratified by the Scottish Legal Aid Board.

#### **2.4.**

Recommendations made during the peer review process related specifically to individual cases rather than policy matters.

#### **2.5.**

During the second phase, a remote desktop audit was undertaken on a broad range of the Council's policy and business management processes with an onsite inspection taking place during October 2018.

## **2.6.**

The Compliance Audit Report, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, which contains two recommendations as detailed in section 5.3 of this report.

## **3. Background**

### **3.1.**

The Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers, formerly known as HomePoint, are a national accreditation provider, owned by the Scottish Government, which is applicable to a range of advice providers including Local Authorities.

### **3.2.**

The Council's Housing Service was subject to a review, as part of the accreditation/reaccreditation process under the National Standards for Information and Advice Providers: A Quality Assurance Framework 2009.

### **3.3.**

The overall objectives of the audit were to review and report on the internal controls surrounding the:

- General Management and Standards.
- Standards for Planning.
- Standards for Accessibility and Customer Care.
- Standards for Providing the Service.
- Standards around competence.
- Resourcing standards.

### **3.4.**

The Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers are designed to help not-for-profit organisations providing housing, welfare benefits and money/debt advice to the public in Scotland to assess and improve the quality of their advice services.

### **3.5.**

The main purpose of the standards is to encourage agencies to adopt a culture of continuous improvement for their advice work. Accreditation also demonstrates to the public and funders that the advice service is well managed and provides good quality advice.

### **3.6.**

Accreditation is voluntary, and a limited number of councils hold the accreditation.

### **3.7.**

Accreditation is available at three different levels as follows:

- Type 1: Signposting.
- Type 2: Case work.
- Type 3: Representation.

### **3.8.**

The Council received its first accreditation, at Type 2, under the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers, then called HomePoint, in 2008. A further reaccreditation was obtained in 2012.

### **3.9.**

More recently the process has changed substantially and responsibility for undertaking audits has been assigned to the Scottish Legal Aid Board and there have been some delays in awarding reaccreditations accordingly.

## **4. Reaccreditation Process**

### **4.1.**

The reaccreditation process consists of two main parts being peer review and audit.

### **4.2.**

Initially a process of peer review was undertaken remotely which focussed on a detailed review of case work crossing the main topics of advice. This took place during January and February 2018.

### **4.3.**

During the second phase, a desk-top audit was undertaken remotely, of the Council's policy structure and business processes, across matters relating to housing advice, financial management, quality of staffing, performance management and matters relating to equalities and accessibility.

### **4.4.**

An on-site inspection took place in October 2018.

### **4.5.**

Throughout, the Council provided significant levels of information to the Scottish Legal Aid Board in order to be able to evidence what is an extremely in-depth process.

## **4.6.**

Information on the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers Framework and inspection process can be found at

[https://www.slab.org.uk/providers/advice/Accreditation\\_Model.html](https://www.slab.org.uk/providers/advice/Accreditation_Model.html)

## **5. Inspection Outcomes**

### **5.1.**

The Council's Peer Review Assessment Report is operational and has not been attached for reasons of client confidentiality.

### **5.2.**

The Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers' Compliance Audit Report is attached at Appendix 1 to this report.

### **5.3.**

Two recommendations were made as a result of the Compliance Audit Report as follows:

- It was identified that collation of service statistics was not made available to the public.
- The documents provided to support the training did not fully evidence the duration of all formal training referred to in the training logs.

### **5.4.**

The recommendations of the Compliance Audit Report will be addressed as follows:

- Service statistics relating to the provision of advice and type will be published in Housing News. Performance information relating to homelessness and advice is reported to the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee annually in June. The performance report will be adjusted accordingly to ensure that advice cases are reported by type and topic in addition to the information currently included.
- The Service will ensure information is held to evidence not only that a training event was booked but also will evidence that the relevant member of staff attended the training event as anticipated through booking information.

### **5.5.**

By being reaccredited, the Council can continue to use the logo for the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers.

## **6. Corporate Governance**

This report relates to governance and scrutiny and therefore does not directly support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Council Plan and the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan.

## **7. Financial Implications**

There are no significant financial implications associated directly with this noting report.

## **8. Legal Aspects**

There are no legal implications arising directly from this noting report.

## **9. Contact Officers**

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## **10. Appendix**

Appendix 1: Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers Compliance Report.

Appendix 1



SNSIAP Compliance Audit Report

Audit of Orkney Islands Council – Housing Services

Financial Year 2018/19

Date Issued December 2018

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 We conducted a review of Orkney Islands Council - Housing Services (OICHS) as part of the accreditation/reaccreditation process as defined in the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers: A Quality Assurance Framework 2009.

1.2 We would like to express our appreciation for the co-operation and assistance given by staff of OICHS during the course of the audit.

## 2. SCOPE

2.1 The overall objectives of the audit were to review and report on the internal controls surrounding the:-

- General Management Standards,
- Standards for Planning,
- Standards for Accessibility and Customer Care,
- Standards for Providing the Service,
- Standards around Competence, and
- Resourcing Standards.

## 3. CONCLUSIONS

### 3.1 General Management Standards

3.1.1 The Housing Service Structure document sets out the management structure of the advice service. This is supported through the job descriptions for the Housing Officers and Team Leader roles.

The job descriptions for the Housing Officers and Team Leader roles also sets out the scope of their role and, where appropriate, identify to whom, when and how they could refer matters for decision.



3.1.2 The OICHS manages a 'Housing Policies' folder which contains the 'Homelessness and Advice' folder to support the role of the advice function. There is a further document control procedure and database in relation to the policies, procedures and information.

The 'Orkney Islands Council (OIC): 'Housing Services Staff Development and Training Policy' sets out the induction process to provide familiarity and understanding of organisational policies and procedures. All staff has access to the policy folders relevant to their role as detailed above.

3.1.3 The 'Homelessness and Advice Service Delivery Plan 2018/19 to 2020/21' document sets out the Financial Resourcing for the service incorporating the advice function, supported by OICHS's budget monitoring process. Cost Centre Budget Statements are produced for homelessness and homelessness strategy and these reports are produced and monitored on a monthly basis. An annual budget is prepared and the homelessness and housing advice function is incorporated into this document. It can be evidenced that OICHS has a clear financial strategy and financial management processes.

3.1.4 It is noted that Homelessness and Advice Team meetings are conducted on a weekly basis, in addition Housing staff meetings are undertaken on a monthly basis. Team Leader meetings are also undertaken on a monthly basis and these internal modes of communication meet staff needs.

3.1.5 OICHS is aware of the legislation relevant to the agency & its role as a service provider & employer. Policies are held on the Council's website and are also available to the public and employees. A suite of policies and procedures relevant to the homelessness and advice function are available to staff.

Current insurance provides the necessary protection which includes, Employer's Liability and Public and Products Liability.

3.1.6 Overall the controls governing the general management standards are satisfactory.

## 3.2 Standards for Planning

3.2.1 OICHS's 'Homelessness Procedures', 'Advice and Information Strategy 2017 - 2021' documents sets out the aims and objectives of the advice function and 'Orkney Islands Council Housing Advice Service Client Charter' sets out the aims and objectives of the advice service which are clearly identified.

3.2.2 The 'Orkney Islands Housing Needs & Demand Assessment 2016' document provides an assessment of housing need, demand and the provision of related services in their area. The 'Orkney Economic Review 2015 / 2016' and the 'OIC - A Profile of Homelessness 2014-2019' document also provides data to manage the requirements of the advice function.

‘OIC’s - Homelessness and Advice Service Delivery Plan 2018/19 to 2020/21’ sets out how the advice service will be provided utilising the data collated through the profile of the community reports.

3.2.3 ‘OIC’s - Homelessness and Advice Service Delivery Plan 2018/19 to 2020/21’ sets out how the advice service considers future demand, availability of resources and advice patterns.

3.2.4 The ‘OIC’s - Homelessness and Advice Service Delivery Plan 2018/19 to 2020/21’ appears to be reviewed on a 3 years basis and not considered on an annual basis. The ‘Homelessness and Advice & Information Delivery Plan Leaflet’ also sets out the methods of delivery of the service. On an ongoing basis OICHS has a number of streams that consider the requirements under the standards including the 2018 Homelessness in Orkney document which looks at the volumes of advice provided by the service and considers resourcing. The service also has a 24hours homelessness service out of office number for contact. The Customer Satisfaction survey relating to the advice function is provided to users on an ongoing basis to seek feedback on the standards requirements. Section 3.4.3 deals identifies OICHS’s relationships with other providers.

3.2.5 The ‘OIC - Homelessness and Advice Service Delivery Plan 2018/19 to 2020/21’ sets out the collation of service statistics, including topic and type of housing advice, analysis and consideration by those responsible for advice service planning.

It was identified that this data was not made available to the public, however the document has been updated to confirm that articles will be published in Housing News and Lets Update moving forward.

3.2.6 As part of OICHS’s registration with the SHR they are subject to an Annual Return of the Charter review and provide key information on their performance in achieving the outcomes and standards in the Charter.

In addition OICHS are subject to inspection through the Care Inspectorate.

OICHS has an Internal Audit function and aspects of the advice function are considered as part of this process through risk assessment and weighting.

As per section 3.2.4 OICHS also has an Advice and Information Customer Satisfaction Survey that is carried out on an ongoing basis which seeks feedback in relation to the service that is provided and these are considered by management.

Standard	Issue	Recommendation	Implementation		Status
			Completion Date	Owner	

3.1	It was identified that collation of service statistics was not made available to the public.	The 'OIC - Homelessness and Advice Service Delivery Plan 2018/19 to 2020/21' has been amended to show that collation of service statistics will be published through articles in Housing News and Lets Update. It is recommended that copies of the service statistics as published through Housing News and Lets Update are provided when carried out.	November 2019	Frances Troup	
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3.2.7 Overall the controls governing the standards for planning are satisfactory.

### 3.3 Standards for Accessibility and Customer Care

- 3.3.1 The 'OIC - Housing Services Equalities Policy' and the 'OIC - Housing Services Accessibility Policy' documents set out how the advice service meets the needs of the whole community, including those with protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010.
- 3.3.2 The 'Orkney Islands Council Housing Advice Service Client Charter' document sets out the expectations of staff and service users.
- 3.3.3 The 'OIC - Homelessness and Advice Service Delivery Plan 2018/19 to 2020/21' sets out the place of business considerations that are provided by OICHS. The 'OIC - Housing Advice Service Client Charter' document also sets out the interview processes and the location where these can be undertaken. It can be evidenced that IIC consider: physical accessibility; location; and the need for confidentiality.
- 3.3.4 The 'OIC - Homelessness and Advice Service Delivery Plan 2018/19 to 2020/21' sets out the annual review of your service delivery. This document is supported by ongoing Customer Satisfaction Surveys and any negative feedback would be addressed at that stage.

- 3.3.5 The 'OIC - Homelessness and Advice Service Delivery Plan 2018/19 to 2020/21' document provides details as to the opening hours and is fed through the Housing Advice Customer Satisfaction Survey questionnaire as it seeks feedback relating to the opening hours.
- 3.3.6 The 'OIC - Homelessness and Advice Service Delivery Plan 2018/19 to 2020/21' document sets out the advertising of the service for the advice function. OICHS utilise publications in the housing news publications, newsletters and distribute posters to relevant organisations to publicise the service.
- 3.3.7 The 'OIC - Accessibility Policy' document sets out the provision of information in alternative formats.
- 3.3.8 The 'OIC - Accessibility Policy' document sets out procedures utilised in the use of interpreters.
- 3.3.9 The 'OIC - Housing Services Confidentiality Policy' document sets out the procedures in place relating to the holding of client information and access to this information, confidentiality and forms of authority.
- 3.3.10 The 'OIC Housing Services - Procedure on Storage and Destruction of Files' and the 'Housing Services' Records' documents set out the procedures relating to the storage and destruction of files.
- 3.3.11 OIC has a Complaints Procedure which is held on the OIC's website and also provided to users at interview.  
OIC has product liability Insurance to cover the advice work undertaken by the service.
- 3.3.12 The Housing Advice Customer Satisfaction Survey questionnaire seeks feedback relating on the quality of service they have received and OICHS uses this to inform its service planning and is considered under the 'Homelessness and Advice Service Delivery Plan 2018/19 to 2020/21' document.
- 3.3.13 Overall the controls governing the standards for accessibility and customer care are satisfactory.

## 3.4 Standards for Providing the Service

- 3.4.1 The 'OIC Housing Services - Confidentiality Policy sets out the conflict of interest procedure. OICHS has a service level agreement with Orkney CAB to ensure the residents of Orkney have access to independent housing and homelessness advice services where there is a conflict with OICHS.
- 3.4.2 OICHS has up-to-date reference materials and journals (paper and/or online) relevant to the service they provide, including: Shelter; OIC; Rights net; gov.uk for UC; legislation website; first tier tribunal for Scotland; journals; etc.
- 3.4.3 The 'Useful Contacts' list sets out the scope for staff to source other advice functions in the community. It has also been shown that OICHS attend meetings for strategic groups, etc. including: Orkney CAB, Employability Orkney, OHAL, Voluntary

Action Orkney, NHS, Women's Aid Orkney, Orkney Blide Trust, Orkney Alcohol Counselling & Advisory Service, COPFS, etc. and North & Islands Housing Options Hub which demonstrates a good knowledge of other relevant service providers in their locality.

The 'Homelessness and Advice Service Referral Procedure' document sets out the process for referrals into and out of OICHS. OICHS also has a suite of service level agreements with organisations that are funded by OIC.

- 3.4.4 OICHS utilise the Case Management system Northgate supported by an Access Database and outlook, where client data is held on both systems and diary entries are recorded in outlook. Audit testing has shown that OICHS has an effective and efficient case management system which meets the criteria set in the standard.
- 3.4.5 The 'Procedure for Housing Options' document sets out the procedures, covering the outset of the case, progressing and closing the case, that are consistently applied by advisers.
- 3.4.6 OICHS has arrangements for case files to be reviewed which are set out in procedure documents which set out the case advice review procedures, by a supervisor, or other adviser under the control of the supervisor, who has not been involved in the day to day conduct of the case.
- 3.4.7 OICHS gathers the relevant client data as set out in the standards other than income due to the conflict relating to allocations by the council under the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 section 20 (2) vii.

The 'Homelessness and Advice Service Delivery Plan 2018/19 to 2020/21' document collates the data on the number of cases by type and topic.

- 3.4.8 Overall the controls governing the standards for providing the service are satisfactory.

## 3.5 Standards around Competence

- 3.5.1 The 'Recruitment and Selection Policy and Appendices' and the 'Equal Opportunities Policy Statement' documents set out the equal opportunities procedures which are effectively applied to its employment practises.
- 3.5.2 Job Descriptions and Person specifications are available for the staff providing the housing advice function. Staff are supervised regularly through one to ones and receive annual Employee Review and Development appraisals. A training development plan is part of the Employee Review and Development process for staff. Staff attend monthly staff meetings. These systems support staff obtaining the required relevant skills and knowledge to meet users' needs. Training logs are maintained for all housing advice staff.

3.5.3 Induction records have been made available for two of the Housing Officers (Homelessness and Advice), two Housing Officer (Homelessness and Advice) records were not available as they had been employed too long with the council to have an induction record. Copies of the Employee Review and Development form documents were provided for staff although only the Team Leader (Housing and Homelessness) had a completed Personal Development Plan for the next 12 months.

Training logs have been provided for the staff providing the housing advice and it can be seen that the annotated hours of training meets the requirements under the standards, however the evidence that was provided did not fully evidence the duration of all formal training referred in the training logs.

3.5.4 Testing has shown that advisers have the skills and knowledge to provide advice to the public, including the relevant core competences listed in the SNSIAP. Testing was carried out to evidence that the competencies for advisers and agencies was available with regards to: 2.3 - Universal Credit for housing costs and Housing Benefit; 2.7 - Eviction; 2.8 - Anti-Social Behaviour; 2.11 - Relationship breakdown; and 2.13 - Security of Tenure. OICHS has also obtained the required compliance score as part of the Peer Review Process. In addition the organisational controls, processes and procedures, supported by the staff’s development and training programmes provides further assurance that those delivering the service have the skills and knowledge to provide advice to the public.

3.5.5 As stated in section 3.5.4 OICHS has obtained the required compliance score as part of the Peer Review Process. OICHS has demonstrated that advisers meet the requirements of Section 2 of the Standards for the relevant area of law.

OICHS staff meet the required hours of advice work as a Type II advice provider.

Supervision has been considered and reported under section 3.4.6 as detailed above.

3.5.6 See section 3.5.4 as detailed above.

The supervisors undertake no less than twelve hours per week of information and advice related work.

3.5.7 As discussed in section 3.4.3 and in addition staff have the opportunity to attend the: Advice Information Sub Group, Homelessness Strategy Sub Group, etc.

Standard	Issue	Recommendation	Implementation		Status
			Completion Date	Owner	
5.3	The documents provided to support the training did not	It is recommended that documentary evidence is	November 2019	Frances Troup	

	fully evidence the duration of all formal training referred to in the training logs.	retained to verify all formal training, which should detail the length of training undertaken.			
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3.5.8 Overall for the controls governing the standards around competence are satisfactory.

### 3.6 Resourcing Standards

3.6.1 OICHS can demonstrate that they have taken action to ensure premises are accessible in accordance with the requirements of the standards and meet the needs of service users.

The Customer Satisfaction survey relating to the advice function is provided to users on an ongoing basis to seek feedback on the premises.

3.6.2 The 'Homelessness and Advice Service Delivery Plan 2018/19 to 2020/21' document sets out staff resourcing to ensure adequate staff are available to deliver the service now and monitors demands on staff time to inform future planning. OICHS also maintains a Housing Service Area Recovery Plan which considers the loss of staff and manages absence through a Sickness Absence Policy and Procedure document.

3.6.3 Section 3.1.3 provides the processes relating to OICHS's financial planning and as part of these processes the standards application requirements are included with the service's annual budget.

3.6.4 Overall the controls governing the resourcing standards are satisfactory.

## 4. APPENDICES

There are no appendices to this report.