

Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers - Type I Summary Audit Report

March 2010

West Lothian Council Housing Needs Service

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1 INTRODUCTION AND AUDIT OUTCOME

West Lothian Council Housing Needs Service is a Local Authority housing advice and homelessness service that covers the whole of the West Lothian area.

The remit of the service is:

- To provide information, advice and assistance to anyone wishing to access housing in West Lothian
- To provide a homeless service, and a homelessness prevention service in West Lothian

1.1 AUDIT OUTCOME

The on-site audit visit took place on 17th February 2010.

Following the audit visit, it was concluded that the advice service provided by West Lothian Council Housing Needs Service meets the requirements of the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers (the Standards).

West Lothian Council Housing Needs Service is accredited to the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers in the topics and for the types of service shown below until March 2014.

Housing topics accredited

| TOPIC | Applied for | Accredited |
|--|-------------|------------|
| 2.1 Rent Arrears | | |
| 2.2 Mortgages/Secured Loans | | |
| 2.3 Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit | | |
| 2.4 Disrepair in Rented Housing | | |
| 2.5 Housing Options | | |
| 2.6 Discrimination in Housing | | |
| 2.7 Eviction | | |
| 2.8 Anti Social Behaviour | | |
| 2.9 Harassment and Illegal Eviction (includes race discrimination) | | |
| 2.10 Homelessness | | |
| 2.11 Relationship Breakdown | | |

| | | |
|------------------------------------|--|--|
| 2.12 Rent: Private Sector | | |
| 2.13 Security of Tenure | | |
| 2.14 Statutory Tenancy rights | | |
| 2.15 Repair and Improvement Grants | | |

2 AUDIT FINDINGS

2.1 STRENGTHS

Staff showed a great deal of commitment and breadth of knowledge in all Areas of Law. All staff members are trained to Homepoint Type 2 and their work remit surpasses signposting and includes some casework and advocacy. The Auditor felt that the agency may be underselling itself by applying for Type I accreditation as it was evident to the auditor that there is a considerable amount of Type II casework being undertaken. It is suggested that the agency may consider applying for Type II accreditation at a later date.

The auditor was given a demonstration of the Academy Housing System which records all data relating to service activity. This appears to be a very comprehensive system which links well with the housing application and allocations process. The agency are currently developing an integrated housing needs and support assessment form which will feed into this system.

2.2 AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- a) The agency must ensure that a separate and adequate information resources budget is maintained. (Standard 4.2)

3 GOOD PRACTICE

5.1 Tenant Led Inspections

The agency carried out a series of tenant led inspections which involved a group of existing and previous service users carrying out a series of inspections of the homelessness service, including advice and support services, and also of the temporary accommodation provided. The findings of this exercise fed into the agency's Customer Services Commitments Document.

This proved a very worthwhile exercise and the Auditor considers this is worthy of note as a good example of user involvement and obtaining service user feedback of service provision.