

REPORT TO: Cabinet

MEETING DATE: 12 June 2012

BY: Executive Director (Services for Communities)

SUBJECT: Housing Information and Advice Strategy 2012-17

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The Housing Information and Advice Strategy sets out East Lothian Council's approach to developing a planned, joined up approach to good quality, continuously improving, consistent housing information and advice.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to approve the Housing Information and Advice Strategy 2012-17.

3 BACKGROUND

The Need for a Housing Information and Advice Strategy

- 3.1 The Council has a statutory duty to provide housing information and advice and recognises that this advice enables service users to make well informed housing decisions as well as helping to improve their financial, welfare and other social issues.
- 3.2 It is acknowledged that there is scope to improve further the housing advice and information provided both by the Council and other partner organisations.
- 3.3 Developing a planned, joined up approach to good quality, continuously improving, consistent housing information and advice is viewed as a strategic priority.
- 3.4 The East Lothian Single Outcome Agreement 2011 aims to "ensure that people in housing need have access to an appropriate type, tenure and standard of housing and are prevented from becoming homeless".

- 3.5 The East Lothian Local Housing Strategy 2012-17 aims to “increase housing supply and improve access to appropriate housing including affordable housing”. This will be done in part by improving the provision of housing information and advice.

The aims of the Advice Strategy

- 3.6 The Housing Information and Advice Strategy 2012-17 has five strategic outcomes, these are:
- To ensure that accurate, up to date, comprehensive and good quality housing advice and information is tailored to meet the needs and preferences of all service users.
 - To promote public awareness of housing advice and information services.
 - To maximise choice by providing advice on housing options.
 - To achieve agreed quality standards for providing housing advice and information that comply with the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice providers.
 - To improve joint working arrangements between advice and information providers in East Lothian.

The proposals for improving Advice and Information delivery

- 3.7 The Council will set up an electronic, web-based, Housing Information and Advice manual which will ensure that staff can provide informed, consistent and accurate advice to local citizens. Staff will be trained to maximise their skills in providing such advice.
- 3.8 The Council will establish a comprehensive, “one stop”, web-based Housing Options Guide to allow local residents to investigate their housing options. This will also be available for use by other Council staff, housing association staff, and other local housing advice providers.
- 3.9 The Council and partner providers will ensure that appropriate systems are put in place to maintain and continuously improve the delivery of housing advice.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Implementation of this strategy will significantly improve the quality of housing information and advice given to East Lothian residents and others.

- 4.2 Joint working arrangements with partner agencies in the statutory and voluntary sectors, for providing comprehensive advice, will be improved.
- 4.3 The strategy will help the Council to meet its obligations under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, the Single Outcome Agreement 2011-12 and the East Lothian Local Housing Strategy 2012-2017.

5 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 This report is not applicable to the well being of equalities groups and an Equalities Impact Assessment is not required. Implications arising from the various actions identified in support of the Strategy will be addressed as they are implemented.
- 5.2 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out on the Strategy and is available at:
http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/downloads/download/1128/equality_impact_assessment-community_services_department

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Financial – A software package is to be procured to deliver the housing advice and information database. The financial resource for this purchase has been already been identified in the service budget.
- 6.2 Personnel – None.
- 6.3 Other – None.

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 Appendix 1 - Housing Information and Advice Strategy 2012-17.
- 7.2 East Lothian Local Housing Strategy 2012-17 available at www.eastlothian.gov.uk/lhs

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East Lothian Council

**HOUSING INFORMATION AND ADVICE
STRATEGY 2012-17**

May 2012

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Appendix 1 – Electronic questionnaire issued to advice and information providers (gap analysis exercise).

1. Strategic Aims and Outcomes

East Lothian Council recognises that the provision of housing advice and information plays an important role in enabling service users make the best housing decisions for their circumstances, as well as improving their financial, welfare and other social issues.

It is acknowledged that there is scope to further improve the housing advice and information provided both by the Council and other partner organisations. Developing a planned, joined-up approach to good quality, continuously improving, consistent housing advice and information is viewed as a strategic priority.

The East Lothian Single Outcome Agreement 20111 aims to 'ensure that people in housing need have access to an appropriate type, tenure and standard of housing and are prevented from becoming homeless'. This will be delivered through a range of short term outcomes.

The East Lothian Local Housing Strategy (LHS) 2012-17², seeks to 'increase housing supply and improve access to appropriate housing including affordable housing'. This will be achieved by developing and implementing a comprehensive Housing Advice and Information Strategy for the period 2012-17 that achieves the following five strategic outcomes:

- 1. Ensure that accurate, up to date, comprehensive and good quality housing advice and information is tailored to meet the needs and preferences of all service users.**
- 2. Promote public awareness of housing advice and information services.**
- 3. Maximise choice by providing advice on housing options.**
- 4. Achieve agreed quality standards for providing housing advice and information that comply with the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers.**
- 5. Improve joint working arrangements between advice and information providers in East Lothian.**

This strategy incorporates the following inter-linked strategic areas included in the East Lothian LHS 2012-17:

- Housing supply access and affordability;
- Good quality and energy efficient homes;
- Reducing and preventing homelessness;
- Particular needs and housing support (including older people, people with physical disabilities, people with learning disabilities, people with mental

¹ <http://www.eastlothiancommunityplanning.org.uk/>

² <http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/lhs>

health issues or having a drug and /or alcohol problem). This section also includes Gypsy/Travellers; and

- Reducing fuel poverty.

This strategy was developed by a Housing Advice and Information Project Team of Council staff representing the Homelessness, Community Housing, Service Development and Housing Strategy services. The Project Team provide a link between external agencies and Council departments providing housing advice and information and to ensure consistency between the Housing Advice and Information Strategy and other operational functions within East Lothian Council.

2. Local and National Legislative and Policy Context

This strategy reflects legislation, links into other key strategies, good practice guidelines and guidance as well as national and local research.

2.1 National Standards for Information and Advice

The National Standards for Information and Advice (first produced by Homepoint in 1995) were compiled with the assistance of advice providers in the voluntary and statutory sectors. The Standards are a framework for the development of effective and efficient services and were compiled in recognition of the fact that people choose to access information and advice from various sources. Information and advice is defined by a range of activities which are broken down into three Types of intervention. The Standards include specific competencies for housing information and advice.

To become accredited under the National Standards an agency must be able to demonstrate that it meets the quality level defined by the standards and provide an efficient and effective service.

A range of staff at East Lothian Council are currently trained to meet advisor competences on housing topics however the Council is not an accredited information and advice provider. A number of partner organisations are accredited information and advice providers or are working towards accreditation.

2.2 Performance Standards

Local authorities are subject to regulation and inspection by the Scottish Housing Regulator against a range of performance standards. These standards emphasise the importance of providing accurate and accessible advice and information services.

Guiding Standard GS3.2, states: 'We provide or secure effective information and advice in line with the national standards for housing information and advice services'. Activity Standard AS4.6, states: 'local authority landlords should arrange free and effective information and advice services for homeless or potentially homeless people based on the national standards for housing information and advice services'.

2.3 Housing Supply, Access and Affordability

A key policy objective set out in Homes Fit for the 21st Century³ is to make better use of existing housing stock by giving people better information and advice about the housing options open to them, including providing housing 'health checks' at key life stages for people who feel that their home no longer suits them.

³ Homes Fit for the 21st Century, The Scottish Government's Strategy and Action Plan for Housing in the Next Decade: 2011-20

Across East Lothian there is an acute shortage of affordable housing. This means the provision of housing advice and information is of critical importance.

Some initial development work was undertaken during 2010 by the Council's Service Development Team⁴ that focuses on improving the housing options advice and information delivered by front line housing staff.

The Council is also currently investigating the feasibility of simplifying access to and providing comprehensive information regarding affordable housing for rent in East Lothian.

2.4 Private Sector Housing

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 (parts 1 & 2) introduces measures to improve the condition and management of private sector housing. Part 2 of the Act requires local authorities to have a Scheme of Assistance in place to assist homeowners, private landlords and private tenants to repair, maintain, improve and adapt their properties.

The Council's Private Sector Housing Team takes the lead in co-ordinating the provision of information, advice, practical and financial assistance to homeowners, private landlords and private tenants.

In 2010 the Council commissioned a private sector stock condition survey to gather accurate information on the physical condition of the private sector housing stock. The findings of this survey will inform the Council's approach to the provision of advice and information to home owners, private landlords and private tenants.

The national landlord registration system⁵ and licensing of houses in multiple occupation were introduced in April 2006 and October 2000 respectively⁶. Advice and information is available from staff and from the Council website on this. The Council actively promotes the national landlord accreditation scheme and holds regular Landlord Forums.

The Private Rented Housing (Scotland) Act 2011 seeks to introduce a requirement for private landlords to provide a tenant with a Tenant Information Pack. It is anticipated that the pack will include a copy of the Tenancy Agreement, details on the tenant's rights to refer matters to the Private Rented Housing Panel, an inventory, information regarding deposits and landlord registration number.

The introduction of The Tenancy Deposit Schemes (Scotland) Regulations 2011 will aim to introduce a more professional way of dealing with tenancy deposits in the private rented sector.

⁴ Scoping paper for Housing Staff Advice Manual, November 2010. Proposal for unified provision of Housing Information and Advice – discussion paper, December 2010.

⁵ Antisocial Behavior etc (Scotland) Act 2004, Part 8.

⁶ The Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation) Order 2000.

2.5 Tenancy and property management

The Council has a legal duty to keep Council tenants informed regarding tenancy and property management issues, as per the Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement. The Council and Registered Social Landlord (RSL) websites contain a wide-range of useful advice and information and is also delivered 'on the ground' by relevant staff.

2.6 Homelessness

Local authorities have a duty under Section 2 of The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to ensure that advice and information about the prevention of homelessness and any services which may assist in the prevention of homelessness are available free of charge to any person in the authority's area. The general duty in Section 2 of the 2001 Act is accompanied by guidance which identifies that the local authority has responsibilities on three levels: as providers of information and advice (in accordance with quality standards outlined in the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers), as funders of such services and as a strategic body with responsibility for ensuring an appropriate range of services is available within the local authority area.

The Homeless Persons Advice and Assistance (Scotland) Regulations 2002 sets out the types of advice and assistance that local authorities must provide as a minimum to homeless applicants and applicants threatened with homelessness who are either in priority need or, if in priority need, have become homeless intentionally.

The Code of Guidance on Homelessness (2005) also emphasises that local authorities should be proactive in developing advice and information services and emphasises the importance of adopting an inter-agency approach.

The Homeless Persons (Provision of Non-permanent Accommodation) (Scotland) Regulations 2010 were made in pursuance of the power in section 32a of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, and came into force on 25 February 2010. This enables local authorities in certain circumstances and subject to certain tenancy conditions to discharge their duty to homelessness households by providing a tenancy in the private rented sector.

Given the current pressure on the Council to meet the 2012 homelessness target for the abolition of priority need⁷, and the severe shortage of affordable housing in East Lothian, it is widely agreed that there is a pressing need to improve housing options advice as a preventative tool to help households find suitable, realistic and sustainable housing solutions. This is an important element of the Council's Homelessness Strategy⁸ and a pilot housing options approach was introduced on 1 April 2011.

⁷ The Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003 gives all unintentionally homeless households the right to settled accommodation by December 2012. This gives local authorities a target of ending the 'priority need' test by December 2012.

⁸ East Lothian Homelessness Strategy 2009-14, Strategic Outcome 1, Objective 2.

2.7 Particular Needs and Housing Support

National health and social care policy has resulted in a 'shift in the balance of care' with a reduction of older people and adults with learning disabilities and mental health problems living in hospital and institutional settings and a consequential increase in people independently living at home, or in a community setting. This has implications for the provision and availability of housing advice and information.

In 2011 the Council commissioned a Particular Needs Housing and Housing Support Needs Assessment⁹ to provide evidence of the scale and nature of housing and housing support needs for a range of groups. The report made specific recommendations in relation to the provision on housing options advice to work with households to plan for future housing and support needs, particularly in relation to transitions to independent living and people with dementia.

2.7.1 Older People

The recent Wider Planning for an Ageing Population consultation exercise, 2010, focuses on delivering advice and information more effectively, the timing and targeting of information and potential delivery mechanisms (outcome 5).

Homes Fit for the 21st Century builds on this and committed to publishing a national strategy on housing for older people. The Strategy, Age, Home and Community: A Strategy for Housing for Scotland's Older People 2012-21, was published in November 2011. The Strategy recognises that high quality information and advice services will be vital to ensuring older people have access to the right housing and support and sets out specific actions in relation to information and advice including:

- Reviewing information and advice services and publicising information sources;
- Working with local authorities to pilot housing options approach for older people; and
- Encouraging accreditation under the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers.

There is a forecasted growth in the number of older people living in East Lothian. This will mean that there will be a need to evaluate the specific housing advice and information needs for older people.

The East Lothian Older People's Strategy 2011-20 aims to ensure that services meet the needs of East Lothian's growing and ageing population and enables older people to live independently, with support whenever necessary. The Strategy recognises the importance of facilitating the provision of appropriate housing advice and information.

Care and Repair East Lothian offers independent advice and assistance to help home owners or private tenants aged over 60, or disabled and over 50 regarding adaptations, improvements, repairs and / or smaller repairs.

⁹ Report to be published in summer 2012.

2.7.2 Physical Disability

The Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 places a general duty on local authorities to promote social welfare by making available advice, guidance and assistance on areas such as housing adaptations and equipment.

The Council also has a legal duty to assist disabled social tenants, homeowners and private tenants make their home suitable for their needs, as per part 2 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 Act.

The Scottish Government produced guidance regarding the Provision of Equipment and Adaptations in December 2009. Following this, government websites have been developed to provide a useful resource for users and carers to access information on equipment and adaptations. The Scottish Government has also produced a range of accessible information sources with detailed information on equipment and adaptation services.

The draft East Lothian Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment Joint Strategy 2012-20 provides a framework for the future development of services for people with a physical disability and / or sensory impairment and their carers. The draft Strategy sets out a requirement for affordable, good quality housing which is accessible inside and out and offers choice. East Lothian Council is also developing an Equipment and Adaptations Partnership Agreement which aims to streamline the decision making process for adaptations while embedding housing options advice as part of the process and improving joint working between Adult Social Care and Housing.

See also Care and Repair East Lothian above.

2.7.3 Mental Health

The Mental Health (Care and Treatment)(Scotland) Act 2003 places a duty on local authorities in relation to the provision of accommodation, support services, advocacy and the promotion of well being and social development for people who use mental health services or have a learning disability or dementia.

The Council commissioned research about the accommodation and housing support needs and preferences of people with mental health problems in October 2003¹⁰ which recommended 'increasing knowledge of housing allocation procedures'.

However, the provision of advice and information in relation to the common housing issues facing people with mental health remains underdeveloped. For example, there is minimal tailored advice and information regarding: housing support services; finding suitable accommodation; funding for housing support; and financial assistance available via the Council's housing options web page.

¹⁰ Meeting the housing support and accommodation needs and preferences of people with mental health problems. Scottish Development Centre for Mental Health, October 2003.

A Sense of Belonging: Joint Mental Health and Wellbeing draft Strategy 2011-16 sets out the vision to improve mental health and wellbeing services across Lothian over the next 5 years. However there is no mention of housing advice and information provision.

2.7.4 Learning Disability

The same as you? national review of services for people with learning disabilities was published in 2000. It set out a 10-year programme of change that would support those with learning disabilities lead a full life, giving choice about where they live and what they do, be able to use local services wherever possible and special services if they need them and be included, better understood and supported by the communities in which they live.

The provision of advice and information in relation to the common issues facing people with learning disability remains underdeveloped. There is minimal tailored advice and information regarding housing options and support services available via the Council's housing options web page.

2.7.5 Drug and Alcohol

The Midlothian and East Lothian Drug and Alcohol Partnership Drug and Alcohol Strategy, 2010-13, sets out a range of priorities that link closely with the provision of housing advice and information including: supporting service users take control of their lives; providing information and support about options available; and working to mitigate the effects of homelessness.

2.7.6 Gypsy/Travellers

East and Midlothian Gypsy/Traveller Site Management Policies and Practice Working Group has developed useful sources of information and advice in line with the recommendations of an independent housing needs research conducted in 2008.

2.7.7 Looked After Young People

Corporate parenting means the formal and local partnerships needed between all local authority departments and services, and associated agencies, who are responsible for working together to meet the needs of Looked After children and young people, and care leavers.

The East Lothian Corporate Parenting Policy (2010) has nine objectives including:

'To maximise opportunities for looked after children, young people and care leavers, in terms of further education, training, employment and living accommodation.'

The importance of preventing looked after young people from entering the homeless route, of which the provision of information and advice is a key element particularly in relation to forward planning.

2.8 Fuel Poverty, Climate Change and Energy Efficiency

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, section 89 (5) (b) requires councils to develop local housing strategies that ensure “so far as reasonably practicable that persons do not live in fuel poverty.” The Fuel Poverty Statement published by the Scottish Government in 2002 set 2016 as the target date to eradicate fuel poverty as far as is reasonably practicable.

The Council promotes energy efficiency across all tenures and provides energy efficiency, money / debt advice and information via the East Lothian Energy Advice Centre (ELEAC) service, Warm and Well Project and CABs.

This strategy will promote effective links between fuel poverty advice and housing advice.

2.9 Welfare and Money Advice

The Coalition Government’s 21st Century Welfare publication and Welfare Reform Bill 2011 introduces significant changes to the welfare and housing benefit system. The Council’s impact assessment concludes that the proposed reforms will result in an increased demand for welfare rights, benefits, money debt advice, energy advice, information and support.

The ‘credit crunch’ has meant that more people are getting into debt and having difficulties with financing their housing. This has led to increased enquiries to specialist services in relation to welfare rights, benefits and money debt advice.

This strategy will promote effective links between housing advice, financial inclusion and money advice.

2.10 Promoting Equality

A comprehensive housing advice and information service is viewed as a key resource in the promotion of equality and the elimination of all forms of unlawful or unfair discrimination. An Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) was undertaken in June 2011. This identifies some service user groups face barriers accessing housing advice and information, although most people are able to access housing advice and information with the right level of support to do so. The strategy reflects these issues.

3. Shaping the Strategy Action Plan

In order to inform the development of the strategy action plan, it has been necessary to:

- Establish a sound understanding of the current provision of housing advice and information throughout East Lothian, including how this is delivered, and by whom;
- Identify any gaps and deficits in available housing advice and information;
- Undertake an assessment of the likely future advice and information required;
- Identify any gaps or weaknesses in current provision of housing advice and information, taking into account upcoming changes to the law, guidance, good practice, local research, development work and service user needs; and
- Identify what (if any) referral arrangements are in place between all housing advice and information providers.

An electronic questionnaire was issued to 53 known information and advice providers based throughout East Lothian in July 2011. A copy of the questionnaire is provided for information at Appendix 1 (still to be attached).

A summary of the 32 responses received is provided below:

- Housing advice and information is provided to a wide range of service user groups in East Lothian.
- A broad range of topics are covered that fit around the National Standards for Housing Information and Advice Providers. There is a high level of type 1 and 2 provision and a few type 3 accredited providers.
- Information and advice is provided in a range of ways. This is predominantly done through face to face contact.
- 66% of respondents have formal arrangements in place with other local advice and information providers to either take or make referrals.
- 50% of respondents confirmed existing referral arrangements could be improved.
- Some other gaps and weaknesses were identified regarding the provision of housing advice and information and these are addressed in the strategy action plan provided in section 5.

A consultation event for particular needs groups was held in November 2011 in relation to the East Lothian Draft LHS, facilitated by East Lothian Community Care Forum. The following points were raised in relation to housing advice and information:

- Provide consistent and helpful housing options advice and information.
- The Council and registered social landlords should improve information about how to access affordable rented housing (both mainstream and adapted), explain how allocations decisions are made, and provide clarity on room size eligibility and lettings activity / trends.
- Increase awareness regarding housing support, telecare services, aids and adaptations.
- Develop a central hub for information, advice and signposting on housing.

As a result of the work in developing this Strategy the following issues have been identified as key to the successful delivery of housing information and advice in East Lothian:

- East Lothian has a range of different services providing housing advice and information and catering to a range of different needs.
- There is scope to further improve the consistency, co-ordination and delivery of housing advice and information.
- Partnership working is generally good. However, a key challenge for the future will be to continue to build on this to improve and deliver high quality housing advice and information.
- The council should establish a comprehensive 'one stop' web based housing options guide for use by Council, RSL, local advice providers and all service users.
- The council and other providers should ensure that appropriate systems are put in place to continuously improve the delivery of housing advice and information.

4. Action plan

The following action plan has been drafted to assist the Council fulfil the aims of the strategy and provide a guide to the main actions that need to be progressed and an indication of resources and staff input required to deliver the strategy.

Strategic outcome 1 - ensure provision of accurate, up to date, comprehensive and good quality housing advice and information is tailored to meet the needs and preferences of all service users.

Action	Completion Date	Responsibility / Lead	Comment	Resource Inputs
Develop a specification and project plan for a manual for staff and a web based housing options guide.	April 2012	Service Development Officer (SDO)	Consider system for updating the housing options guide and for monitoring outcomes of the housing options guide(s). Link to National Standards for Information and Advice Providers.	Staff time only
Procure web based housing manual and housing options guide.	August 2012	Housing Information and Advice Project Team	SDO to develop specification and work with IT to define technical requirements.	£12,000
Undertake development / implementation work.	September 2012	SDO, admin staff (to be identified) and software provider	Design and inputting information. Put in place systems for ongoing maintenance / updating.	Staff time plus software set up costs included above
Develop a housing options guide in other formats for service users who do not have internet access.	October / November 2012	SDO		£1,000
Undertake staff training on the housing options	November / December 2012	SDO	To include CHM's, CHO's, homeless officers, customer	Staff time only

guide.			service staff and partner agencies (where there is a demand).	
Launch manual and online housing options guide including other formats.	January 2013	Corporate Communication / Strategic Policy Officer (SPO).	Publish the housing manual and housing options guide on ELC website and using alternative formats.	Staff time plus budget

Strategic outcome 2 - promote public awareness of housing advice and information services.

Action	Completion Date	Responsibility / Lead	Comment	Resource Inputs
Develop a communication and marketing strategy.	January 2013	Corporate Communication / SPO.	Publicise the housing options guide and directory of advice and information providers to Council services, local advice and information providers and service users.	Staff time plus small budget

Strategic outcome 3 - maximise choice by providing advice on housing options.

Action	Completion Date	Responsibility / Lead	Comment	Resource Inputs
Undertake a review of housing options interview approach provided by the homelessness service.	August 2012	Homelessness Manager		Staff time
Roll out and deliver housing options interviews to all new / existing waiting list applicants.	August 2013	Housing Advice and Information Project Team	Develop detailed procedures / guidance for staff. Develop mechanisms for recording and evaluating outcomes.	Staff time
Develop specific housing options approach which focuses on planning for future housing and	August 2013	SPO / Adult Social Care / Children's Services	Recommendation from Housing and Housing Support Needs Assessment. Linked to the	Staff time

support needs of particular needs groups.			development of the Housing Options Guide and other areas of development in relation to housing options.	
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Strategic outcome 4 - achieve agreed quality standards for providing housing advice and information that comply with the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers.

Action	Completion Date	Responsibility / Lead	Comment	Resource Inputs
Review provision of up to date and appropriate reference materials to ensure that all Council staff involved in the provision of housing advice and information are given the tools required to carry this out to a high standard.	September 2012	SPO / SDO	Part of the set up process for the manual which will be reviewed on a regular basis as part of the software contract	See cost for set up plus cost of reference materials, online subscriptions etc and staff time
Develop a feedback mechanism to assess the advice and information needs of service users and tailor the service accordingly.	January 2013	SPO	Review June 2013.	Staff time
Develop systems to effectively record and monitor the provision, quality and accuracy of information and advice provided by Council staff.	January 2013	SPO / SDO	Link with the housing options guide development work. Review April 2013.	Staff time
Agree the scope of advice and information services to be provided and requirements for accreditation.	August 2013	SPO	Review the National Standards guidance and discuss with relevant Council services.	Staff time
Ensure Council	September -		Most staff already	Significant

staff adequately trained to meet the National Standards.	December 2013		trained to type 1 or 2 level. Ongoing requirement for training, discussion and feedback.	staff time and cost for training materials
Review and assess progress towards achieving accreditation.	January 2014	SPO	Produce action plan.	Staff time
Commission independent accreditation audit of housing advice and information service	April 2014	SPO		Cost for research
Encourage and support partner agencies to adopt the National Standards.	Ongoing	SPO	SPO develop proposal regarding approach used.	Staff time

Strategic outcome 5 - improve joint working arrangements between advice and information providers in East Lothian.

Action	Completion Date	Responsibility / Lead	Comment	Resource Inputs
Investigate establishing a multi-agency advice and information forum to share best practice.	September 2012	SPO	Link with development of Housing Options Guide	Staff time
Investigate demand for developing a joint training programme across all housing advice and information providers.	January 2013	SPO		TBC
Undertake a review of joint- working arrangements across partner agencies delivering housing advice and information, and make recommendations to improve practice if required.	April 2013	SPO	Follow-up on feedback provided by advice providers	Staff time

5. Monitoring and reviewing the strategy

It is important that the progress towards achieving the outcomes of this strategy is clearly measured and reported.

The Housing Advice and Information Project Team will be responsible for the overall monitoring of this strategy on a quarterly basis and will take forward any specific tasks that may arise and take into account changes to legislation, policy and practice.

There will be an annual progress report produced in June each year on the implementation of this strategy and to identify areas where further action require to be developed. This will be reported to the East Lothian Housing Partnership.

Appendix 1: Electronic questionnaire issued to advice and information providers

Organisation name

Lead officer

Address

Core service hours

Contact details

My dept / organisation provides housing advice and information to residents in East Lothian (Yes / No)

Indicate client group

Indicate the topics your dept / organisation provide on and to who (housing options, homelessness, rent / mortgage arrears, welfare benefits, HB and CT Benefit, mortgage / secured loans, money and debt advice, anti-social behaviour/neighbour disputes, discrimination, relationship breakdown, tenancy rights, repairs and maintenance, energy efficiency, aids and adaptations, tenancy support, white goods / furniture).

Any comments about advice and information your dept / organisation provides?

How is advice and information provided? (office based drop-in, office based – appointments, home visits / outreach surgeries, telephone advice line, website, other).

How would you describe the advice and information service that your dept / organisation provides? (display leaflets on topics, explain information but direct to other services for advice, actively advise and assist people to resolve their problem, we provide representation).

Does your dept / organisation have formal arrangements with other providers to take, or make, referrals?

If yes, please provide details.

Are there any dept / organisations you would like to improve referral arrangements with?

Please provide details.

Identify examples of good practice in the provision of housing advice and information.

Identify any existing and / or future gaps in the provision of housing advice and information.

Suggest possible actions that could be taken to address the gaps identified.