

housing strategy and services

ANNUAL REPORT 2013-14

Housing Strategy | Homelessness Services | Welfare Benefit Service | Employment Support Service

HOUSING STRATEGY & SERVICES
CHIEF EXECUTIVES



CONTENTS

HOUSING STRATEGY AND SERVICES

FOREWORD	3		
1. HOUSING STRATEGY	5	3. WELFARE BENEFITS SERVICE	27
Affordable Housing Delivery	6	Facts and Figures	28
Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP)	7	Welfare Benefits Officer (Mental Health)	28
Local Housing Strategy (LHS)	7	Criminal Justice Welfare Benefits Officer	29
On-lending to Registered Social Landlords (RSLs)	8	The Borders Macmillan Welfare Benefits Partnership	30
Housing (Scotland) Bill 2013	8	Future Planning Guidance	31
The opening of Dovecot	9	Childcare Partnership	31
Stock Transfer	10	PACE (Partnership Action for Continuing Employment)	32
Housing Needs & Demand Assessment - SESPlan2	11	Training and Awareness Raising	32
Key strategies & reports	12	Welfare Reform – A Welfare Benefits Officer perspective	33
Empty Homes	14	Customer Feedback	34
Home Energy Advice Service	14	4. EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT SERVICE	35
Home Energy Efficiency Programs for Scotland (HEEPS)	16	Key Statistics	36
Scheme of Assistance	17	Service Development	36
Private Landlord Registration	19	Strategic Delivery	36
		Case Studies	37
2. HOMELINESS SERVICES	21		
Who we are	21		
Statutory Homelessness Assessment and Provision of Accommodation	22		
Financial Inclusion	22		
Housing Support Service	23		
Deposit Guarantee Scheme	23		
Homeless Prevention Team	24		
Domestic Abuse	25		
The Mediation Service	25		
Peer Mentoring “Insight”	26		
Lodgings for Young People	26		

HOUSING STRATEGY AND SERVICES FOREWORD



I am delighted to introduce the Housing Strategy and Services Annual Report for 2013/14. This report is structured to reflect our four main service areas and outlines some of our latest key successes and achievements. As the fragile economic climate and era of austerity continues, we are reminded of the important social and economic role we play in the Scottish Borders. As part of the statutory housing authority, our main focus is ensuring that the Council meets its statutory duties regarding access to, and the provision of, affordable housing and the prevention of homelessness.

This has been an eventful year for our services, with the newly evolved Employment Support Service (ESS) being incorporated into the Group in April 2013. The ESS provides a vital service to the community by offering assistance to those

furthest away from the labour market, with a focus on youth unemployment and supported employment for disadvantaged people – both of which are Council priorities. The Team has been welcomed into the Group and a solid working partnership has been forged between all four services.

This year also marks the 10th anniversary of the stock transfer between SBC and Scottish Borders Housing Association (SBHA). As evidenced in this report, the collaboration between the Council and SBHA has been very fruitful throughout the last decade, with the Housing Strategy Team and Homelessness Service playing a particularly important role in the continuance of this important relationship.

A special mention must be given to the Welfare Benefits Service, who have successfully delivered

on all key targets this year, despite complex changes to the benefit system under the Welfare Reform Act 2012. The WBS Team have devoted a significant amount of time to the training and awareness raising of key benefit changes – these training sessions have been delivered to key internal and external partners and has significantly contributed to aim three of the corporate Tackling Poverty and Achieving Social Justice Strategy: 'Improve access to information and advice to help maximise incomes.'

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the hard work and efforts by all staff in continuing to provide excellent services to our customers.

Cathie Fancy, Group Manager
Housing Strategy and Services



HOUSING STRATEGY AND SERVICES

1. HOUSING STRATEGY



AFFORDABLE HOUSING DELIVERY

2013/14 was year 2 of a 3 year affordable housing programme agreed with Scottish Government. Whilst completions fell short of the 100 house annual target this year, overall the programme will deliver more than the 300 house target by year 3.

The Council is always keen to support ways of providing additional affordable housing; aside from the use of the Developer Contributions secured through the Council's Affordable Housing Policy to assist projects at Easter Langlee in Galashiels and Abbotsford Grove in Kelso, financial assistance was also secured through the Second Homes/Council Tax Budget to assist affordable housing projects in Hawick, Galashiels and Eyemouth. The Council also commissioned external consultants to consider wider funding options, whom concluded that it would only be viable for the Council to provide new supply affordable housing via the National Housing Trust-Local Authority Variant. A final business case has been developed and was reported to Council in December - this indicated that it may be possible for the Council to provide up to 200 homes for mid market rent through this initiative. Officers have been following this proposal up with site owners and developers in order to test the viability of potential projects identified through this business case.

The Council supported Scottish Borders Housing Association's (SBHA) request to Scottish Ministers to waive a financial claw-back applying to capital receipts arising from Right to Buy House sales; this has secured funding to be used in lieu of grants, in order to accelerate the construction of 8 new build homes on the site of the former Deanfield sheltered housing development in Hawick.

Key areas of delivery 2012-13:

- Eildon Housing Association completed 20 new build homes for social rent in Galashiels and acquired 4 homes for social rent at Chris Paterson Place, Galashiels and two homes at Farrier Court in Kelso.
- Scottish Borders Housing Association completed 9 homes for social rent through the re-modelling of Myreslaw Court in Hawick, and 3 new build homes for mid market rent in Earlston.
- Tweed Homes completed 25 new build homes for mid market rent at James Hogg Court Innerleithen, as part of the Council's National Housing Trust Limited Liability Partnership.
- 4 homes were purchased assisted by Scottish Government's Open Market Shared Equity scheme.
- 5 homes were purchased assisted by Scottish Government's New Supply Shared Equity scheme.
- Eildon Housing Association won "Rural development of the year" at the Scottish Homes Awards for their development in Ednam Road in Stichill.

STRATEGIC HOUSING INVESTMENT PLAN (SHIP)

The SHIP 2013-18, which was submitted to Scottish Ministers in October, sets out agreed and prioritised affordable housing projects for Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to develop within a five year rolling plan horizon. The current SHIP identified 339 new affordable homes for anticipated completion from 2013 to 2018, and proposed new housing projects at Galashiels, Newtown St Boswells, Duns, Denholm, Hawick, Peebles, Stow and Cardrona.

The SHIP 2013-18 involved more work and more time to complete than previous reports. This was due to the Scottish Government announcing an increase in the amount of grant available per unit, changes to the timing of grant payments, and additional grants to resource eligible projects; all of which have been made available under the Affordable Housing Supply Programme. These changes were welcomed by the Council and local RSLs, as they have contributed to greater certainty in project delivery.

Meetings have commenced in order to identify and prioritise new projects to inform the next SHIP (2014-19), which will also introduce potential new affordable housing projects which are currently being considered for delivery via the Council's National Housing Trust - Local Authority Variant initiative.

LOCAL HOUSING STRATEGY (LHS)

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, places a legal duty on every local authority to produce a Local Housing Strategy (LHS). The Scottish Borders Local Housing Strategy 2012-17 provides the strategic direction to tackle housing need and demand and to inform the future investment in housing and related services across the Scottish Borders area.

The second year of the LHS had now been implemented and we have seen some significant progress in achieving this vision, and delivering on the strategic priorities:

1. The supply of new housing meets the needs of the community.
2. People have better access to good quality energy efficient homes.
3. People are less likely to become homeless and those affected by homelessness have improved access to settled accommodation.

4. More people with particular needs and/or requiring support are able to live independently in their own home.

The LHS includes a wide range of actions which cover all tenures; owner occupied and private rented housing as well as social housing, which will help achieve the identified outcomes. The actions range from preventing and tackling homelessness, delivering new affordable housing of the right type and in the right place,



The Local Strategy's Vision for the Scottish Borders is that:

'every person in the Scottish Borders has a home which is secure, affordable, in good condition, energy efficient, where they can live independently and be part of a vibrant community'.

providing housing for older people and people with disabilities and other particular needs, to reducing fuel poverty and improving housing conditions.

ON-LENDING TO REGISTERED SOCIAL LANDLORDS

In response to the challenging financial climate and lending market, locally based Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) asked the Council to provide loan finance to help alleviate the financial constraints and thus provide more certainty in the delivery of affordable housing projects identified in the Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP). After much work and consideration in 2012/13, the Council decided to support this request and a business case was developed and submitted to Scottish Ministers in April 2013 to support the Council's request for consent to on-lend.

Council Officers have pursued this further and the proposal was discussed between the Scottish Government and Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), which led to the development of a policy framework through a consultative approach. Draft Guidance has been issued by Scottish Government to the Council's Chief Finance Officers;

it is anticipated that the final Guidance will be issued early in 2014/15. It is thought that providing that Councils comply with the contents of the Guidance, they will be empowered to self certify their lending arrangements without the need for Ministerial consent.

HOUSING (SCOTLAND) BILL 2013

The Bill was introduced to Scottish Parliament in November 2013, with the Stage One debate due to take place in April 2014. The Bill makes specifications which are intended to enhance housing conditions, retain social housing and safeguard social and private tenants.

Proposals in the Bill include:

- Ending all Right to Buy entitlements;
- Amending the process for the allocation of social housing;
- Allowing for third party reporting to the Private Rented Housing Panel;
- Introducing a regulatory framework for all Letting Agents;

- Amending site licensing for mobile home sites with permanent residents;
- Amending local authority powers to enforce repairs and maintenance in private homes;
- Repealing defective designation provisions in the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987.

The Housing Strategy Team are closely monitoring the progress of the Bill, and plans are underway to ensure a robust and joined-up response to the legislative changes.

THE OPENING OF DOVECOT

Dovecot Court extra care housing development in Peebles was officially opened by the Housing Minister on Wednesday 27th January 2014. Dovecot Court, which is owned by Eildon Housing Association, was supported by a £2.85million grant from the Scottish Government, funding of £1.75million from Eildon Housing Association and a £900,000 contribution from SBC.

Scottish Borders Council also provides a 24 hour care and support service for tenants which is aimed at supporting individuals to remain as independent as possible in their own homes. Tenants are also

supported by a Neighbourhood Links Service provided by the Red Cross, which assists individuals to engage in social activities both within Dovecot Court and the local community.





Stonefield before the regeneration project



Stonefield after the regeneration project

STOCK TRANSFER

This year marks the ten year anniversary of Scottish Borders Council transferring its housing stock to Scottish Borders Housing Association (SBHA). Despite initial teething problems, the stock transfer has forged a solid partnership between SBC and SBHA with the key aim of providing affordable housing and enabling community regeneration in the Scottish Borders, with partnership arrangements such as the Scottish Borders Housing Concordat evidencing both parties' commitment to these objectives.

Highlights of partnership working over the past ten years:

- **The regeneration of Stonefield (Hawick):** SBHA, Waverley Housing and SBC have worked together to negotiate the transfer of empty properties in the area to allow blocks to have separate housing provider ownership, thus allowing for regeneration programmes on a block-by-block basis. SBC have also provided 100% grant funding for the installation of gas mains to serve the estate.
- **Supported Tenancy Service:** SBC and SBHA are currently in discussions regarding the possibility of establishing a new supported tenancy service in Stonefield for people with a range of Learning Disabilities.
- **Mid-market Rent Schemes:** SBHA has provided three new-build family homes in Earlston; this has been partially funded through SBC's Affordable Housing Developer's Contributions.
- **Energy Efficiency:** SBHA identified a number of tenants in rural settlements whom it considered may potentially benefit from home energy information and advice. SBC's Home Energy Adviser, based in the Housing Strategy Team, carried out a number of home visits in and attended tenant meetings in response to this initiative.
- **Young Persons Protocol:** SBHA and the Council's Homelessness Service are currently working to develop a Young Persons Protocol.
- **Rent Arrears Protocol:** A joint Rent Arrears prevention protocol between SBHA and Scottish Borders Council was developed to reduce homelessness and improve tenancy sustainability. The redesign of the Homelessness Service in 2011 included the creation of a Financial Inclusion Officer post, who works closely with SBHA to prevent evictions, as specified in the Concordat.
- **Empty Properties:** SBC and SBHA have collaborated to bring a number of long term empty flats back into use at Wellfield in Hawick.
- **Stock remodelling:** SBC have grant funded SBHA to acquire a small number of flats and to facilitate demolition and stock remodelling.
- **Neighbourhood Improvement:** A neighbourhood Improvement Model was developed through partnership with local residents and Tenants, SBC's Safer Communities Team and Recycling Service and the police.

HOUSING NEED AND DEMAND ASSESSMENT 2

This is the second SESplan Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA2) covering the six Council areas of South East Scotland. HNDA2 has been prepared in consultation with the wider Housing Market Partnership to provide accurate and reliable data on housing need and demand to inform the second Strategic Development Plan (SDP2) and Main Issues Report (MIR).

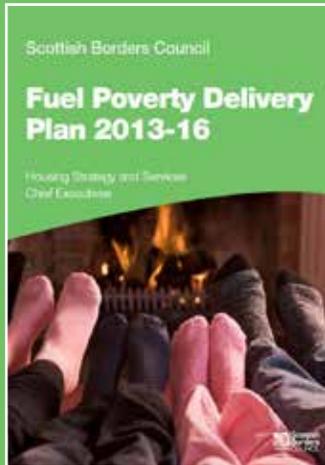
In accordance with Guidance, the SESplan HNDA2 seeks to:

- Enable local authorities to develop long-term strategic views of housing need and demand to inform Local Housing Strategies (LHSs) and Development Plans (DPs);
 - Enable local authorities to think spatially about the nature and influence of housing markets;
 - Provide robust evidence to inform policies aimed at providing the right mix of housing across the whole housing market - both market and affordable housing;
 - Provide evidence to inform policies about the level of affordable housing required, including the need for different types and sizes of affordable housing;
 - Support local authorities to develop a strategic approach to housing through consideration of housing need and demand in all housing sectors – owner occupied, private rented and affordable – and assessment of the key drivers and relationships within the housing market;
- Draw together the bulk of the evidence required for local authorities to appraise strategic housing options including housing supply targets, social housing allocation priorities, the role of intermediate housing products, stock renewal, conversion, demolition and transfer; and
 - Ensure the most appropriate and cost-effective use of public funds.

There have been delays in the revision of the first draft of the report which has consequently delayed the consultation period. It is anticipated that the document will go out for consultation in May/June 2014, with the Assessment achieving robust and credible status in August.

KEY STRATEGIES/REPORTS

Over the course of the year, the Housing Strategy Team has published a number of key reports, including:



FUEL POVERTY DELIVERY PLAN 2013-16

Fuel Poverty is a serious issue in the Scottish Borders and there is a lot of work being done within the Council and with partners to ensure this problem is addressed. The previous Fuel Poverty Implementation Plan was developed in 2009 and covered the period 2009-2014. In total there were 40 actions, and 90% of these were completed; this Delivery Plan focuses on actions to reduce the number of households living in fuel poverty.

The four key objectives of the Delivery Plan 2013-16 are:

- Continue to monitor fuel poverty in the Scottish Borders to improve targets.
- Provide good quality information and advice on fuel poverty and home energy efficiency.
- To facilitate fuel poverty programmes in private sector and housing association properties.
- Improve access to information and advice to help maximise incomes.

It is important that the council and its relevant partners continue to work together to ensure households are helped to become more energy efficient, to reduce fuel bills and to help those who are at risk or are living in fuel poverty.

TACKLING POVERTY AND ACHIEVING SOCIAL JUSTICE 2014-19

Poverty in the Borders is a widespread, multi-dimensional issue, affecting many parts of our communities. This makes it difficult to be clear about the best approach to tackling poverty. The Tackling Poverty and Achieving Social Justice Strategy has an overall purpose to help minimise the impact of poverty and financial exclusion on the residents of the Borders. Its objective is to ensure that people are equipped to cope with the challenges they currently face; including those of the economic recession and the welfare reforms.

The strategy underwent a robust consultation exercise and was developed via a multi-organisational approach to ensure that all aspects of poverty were encompassed in the report.

PRIORITY CLIENT GROUP DELIVERY PLAN

The Priority Client Group Delivery Plan considers how appropriate and good quality accommodation can help vulnerable groups live with a good quality of life, as independently as they choose, and contribute to improving health and wellbeing.

The Plan has been developed by researching local and national information and wherever possible working with organisations, groups, professionals and service users to develop the context against which the action plan is set. National and regional priorities are reflected in this strategy, but local factors drive the actions in order to achieve the best outcomes for priority client groups living in the Scottish Borders. Key stakeholders are currently being consulted.

FINANCE AND SERVICE PLAN 2013-15

The Finance and Service Plan provides information as to how the Housing Strategy and Services Group will ensure that all four services are aligning with outcomes specified in the corporate Single Outcome Agreement, chiefly Outcome 7 “*We have tackled the significant inequalities in Scottish Society*”.

The purpose of the Financial and Service Plan 2013-15 is to set out:

- Service Achievements over the period 2012-2013
- 2013/2014 Priorities
- Key Challenges
- Customer Focus and Engagement
- Training & Development resources





EMPTY HOMES

In 2011, Scottish Borders Council, along with six other Local Authorities in South East Scotland, submitted a proposal to the Scottish Government for funding towards two Empty Homes Officers. Consequently, in April 2012, the Empty Homes Officer commenced work with the Council two days a week, spending the remaining days working in Dumfries and Galloway and East Lothian. This one year post was extended, and the Officer now works at just two out of the five authorities participating in the Homes Again Project; Scottish Borders Council and Dumfries and Galloway Council.

The Empty Homes Officer continues to liaise closely with colleagues in SBC and locally active RSLs to ensure that owners are supported as extensively as possible. This year has seen an 8% reduction in the number of empty properties in the Scottish Borders, with 18 properties having been brought back into use through direct support from the officer, with a further 63 owners being supported through action plans developed through the project. The Empty Homes Officer has contacted 100% of owners who

have a property which has been identified as being empty for 6 months; these owners have been identified through Council Tax records.

In recognition of the hard work and success that the Empty Homes Officer has achieved in the Borders, Margaret Burgess MSP presented Fiona Todd with an award for 'Outstanding Individual' at the Empty Homes Conference.

HOME ENERGY ADVICE SERVICE

In January 2005, Scottish Borders Council appointed a part time Home Energy Advisor (HEA) to work in the Housing Strategy Team. The Home Energy Advice Service has had a very busy year, providing energy advice to households in the Scottish Borders through telephone enquires, home visits and presentations. The Service continues to meet the needs of households in the Scottish Borders and is working to successfully meet the aims and objectives set out in the Fuel Poverty Delivery Plan 2013-16.

As Table One demonstrates, the number of enquiries in this reporting period is slightly lower than numbers received in previous years; this can be attributed to the mild winter that the region experienced, along with greater promotion of Home Energy Scotland and relevant energy saving schemes

running this year, i.e. free cavity wall insulation and the Green Homes Cashback Scheme. As Home Energy Scotland has a centralised telephone number which is robustly advertised, members of the public can contact them directly, accounting for the reduction in the number of enquiries to the HEA.

TABLE ONE: SUMMARY OF ANNUAL ACTIVITY

YEAR	ENQUIRIES	HOME VISITS
2005/06	302	153
2006/07	519	175
2007/08	433	173
2008/09	721	173
2009/10	512	205
2010/11	352	206
2011/12	290	163
2012/13	331	153
2013/14	211	152

It should also be noted that the Advisor conducted 15 presentations in this reporting period, which reached a total audience of 175 people. This figure has not been encompassed into the total number of enquiries in Table One.

The case study below highlights the different areas of work the HEA carriers out and how valuable this is to those who are vulnerable to fuel poverty:

CASE STUDY: MR M

Mr M recently moved into a social rent property, which had an electric heating system. Mr M contacted the HEA after receiving a large electricity bill for his first period.

The HEA visited Mr M's property and surveyed all electrical appliances and their stated usage. From this, the HEA was able to ascertain that the recorded usage was very high. The Advisor checked the electricity meter and confirmed the tariff for the property. The HEA then liaised with the relevant RSL and the electricity supplier and established that errors had been made with Mr M's electricity usage. As a result, the HEA was able to reduce Mr M's bills by approximately 50%.

FACTS AND FIGURES

Measures Installed in the 2013/14 financial year

- 50 Virgin Loft Insulations were completed;
- 335 Loft Top Ups were completed;
- 246 Cavity Wall Insulations were completed;
- 15 Under Floor insulation installs were completed;
- 468 External Wall Insulations were installed;
- 70 Double Glazed Windows were installed;
- **Total Measures – 1,179**

Engagement

- 1120 households engaged through Home Energy Scotland
- 800 households assisted with insulation measures

Co2 reductions

- Reduction in CO2 emissions (tonnes) over lifetime of measures -8,326

HOME ENERGY EFFICIENCY PROGRAMS FOR SCOTLAND (HEEPS)

Scottish Borders Council successfully secured £1,614,437 of funding from the Scottish Government to fund the delivery of Energy Efficiency programmes in selected areas across the Borders. The 2013/14 project was delivered via partnership with Changeworks, Home Energy Scotland, and the appointed installers.

The Council has a track record of making successful bids in response to invitations from Scottish Government; specifically in relation to the Home Insulation Scheme (HIS) for Berwickshire and also the Universal Home Insulation Scheme (UHIS) for the Tweeddale area in 2010/11, the Central area in 2011/12 and full local authority area in 2012/13.

In 2013/14 the Scottish Government changed the funding from UHIS to Home Energy Efficiency Programmes for Scotland: Area Based Schemes (HEEPS: ABS). HEEPS: ABS funding has four main aims and local authorities must demonstrate that their proposed projects meet these aims:

- Reduce Fuel Poverty
- Maximise carbon savings
- Maximise Energy Companies Obligation (ECO) funding
- Support the local economy

The Council, in conjunction with Berwickshire and Scottish Borders Housing Associations and Waverley Housing, proposed a number of external wall insulation projects in Berwickshire, Galashiels and Kelso. The Council also proposed a loft and cavity wall insulation scheme targeting properties with hard to treat cavity walls (three storeys plus) and properties within the most deprived 15% of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation; we have until September 2014 to complete the works.

To ensure smooth delivery and quality workmanship, SBC has procured a framework of contractors to complete the works. Changeworks provide an independent quality assurance service to ensure that the work is completed to a high standard.

IMPROVING HOUSING FABRIC & LINKS TO HEALTH IMPROVEMENTS – RESEARCH

The research exploring the impact of housing insulation on the health and wellbeing of householders in the Scottish Borders area is being undertaken between January and October 2014. The work will comprise two sets of surveys, householder interviews and a literature review which will inform a final report due in October 2014.

SCHEME OF ASSISTANCE

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 was introduced to address issues of housing quality and condition in the private sector and changed the way local authorities can help homeowners and the private rented sector to carry out repairs, maintenance and improvements. The main aim of the legislation is to encourage owners to plan and care for their own properties and remove the requirement for local authorities to offer financial assistance to carry out any repairs or maintenance. The Act also places a mandatory duty on local authorities to provide assistance to households seeking to meet the needs of a disabled occupant. The Scheme of Assistance has two main parts: House Conditions and Disabled Adaptations.

Housing Strategy and Services take the lead role within the Council on the Scheme of Assistance. A suite of information and guidance leaflets regarding repair maintenance and adaptations is available on the corporate website and via the Private Sector Housing Grants Officer.

To help deliver the Council contracts, SBC has a contract with Borders Care & Repair who help

homeowners and private sector tenants aged 60 or over, and people of any age with disabilities. Borders Care & Repair are recognised in Scottish Government & Care & Repair Scotland's good practice guide for the provision of adaptations. They provide a free service to project manage all repairs, improvements and/or disabled adaptations to the home and a small repair and handyperson service.

TABLE TWO: MAJOR ADAPTATIONS

MAJOR ADAPTATIONS & ADVICE CASES (REPAIR /MAINTENANCE)		BUDGET	SPEND
Adaptation Cases (grant)	102	393k	390k
Advice cases (repair & maintenance)	35	Balance carried into 14/15	

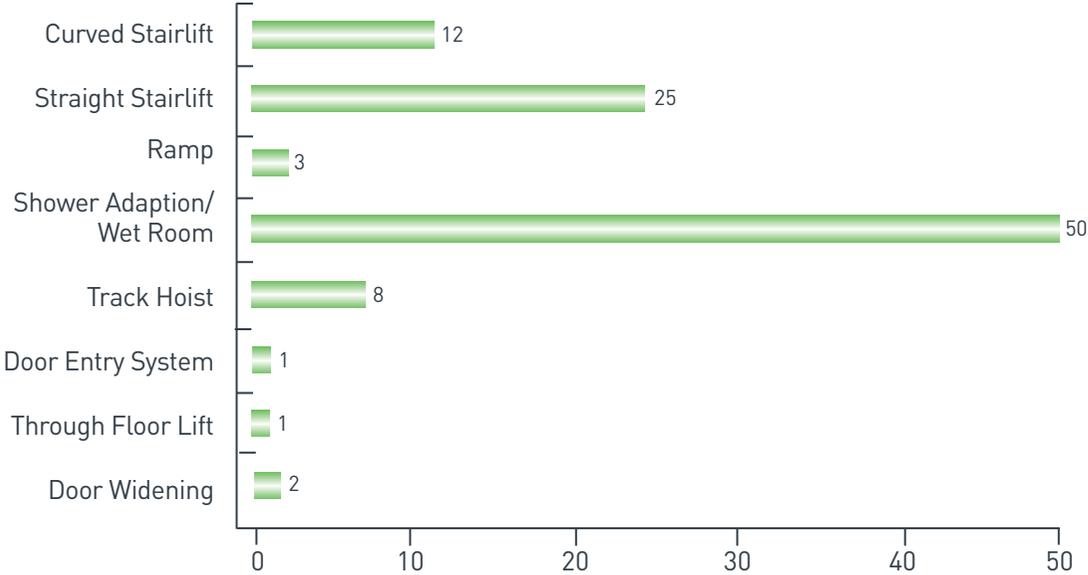
TABLE THREE: SMALL ADAPTATIONS

SMALL ADAPTATIONS		BUDGET	SPEND
Small Adaptations	249	45k	48,834.00
Small Repair	7	5k	1,109.00

FACTS AND FIGURES

The tables opposite show outcomes for the Scheme of Assistance service in 2013/14.

FIGURE ONE: COMPLETED ADAPTATIONS 13-14



PRIVATE LANDLORD REGISTRATION

Under the Antisocial Behaviour Etc. (Scotland) Act 2004, all private landlords and their agents are required to register with the local authority in which they let their property. The registration scheme came into force in April 2006 and Scottish Borders Council currently has 5644 approved registered Landlords and 8284 approved registered properties. As Table Four demonstrates, 2013-14 has been a particularly busy year for the Housing Strategy Team, this is because this financial year has been year one of the three year registration cycle, resulting in a high number of registrations which have been due for renewal.

TABLE FOUR: NUMBER OF APPROVED APPLICATIONS BY MONTH

MONTH	NUMBER OF APPROVED APPLICATIONS		
	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
April	92	92	343
May	102	78	119
June	116	55	239
July	70	96	244
August	149	65	196
September	141	84	197
October	141	102	252
November	114	83	200
December	74	45	91
January	67	63	131
February	91	74	116
March	88	164	121

Over the past year the Enforcement Officer has initiated action against 160 private landlords in relation to registration issues. The Enforcement Officer also deals with complaints relating to repairs issues and property standards and works closely with private landlords to ensure that properties always meet the Repairing Standard. Complaints regarding the management practices and conduct of landlords towards tenants are also part of the Enforcement Officers remit. The Enforcement Officer has dealt with 42 cases in relation to repairs issues and management practices this year.



ENGAGING WITH OUR LANDLORDS

Two Private Landlord Forums were held in this reporting period; both events took place at Ettrick Riverside Business Centre in Selkirk and included key note speakers from Social Work, TC Young Solicitors, Shelter Scotland, Energy Saving Trust, My Deposits Scotland and the Scottish Fire Rescue Service. The Forums were well received by all whom attended and the Housing Strategy Team was able to obtain useful feedback, which will be used to form the basis of future Forum agendas.

The Housing Strategy Team also issue regular newsletters to ensure that Landlords and Agents are kept abreast of any legislative changes. These newsletters are distributed to all registered Landlords and Agents via post and email, and are also available for download on the corporate website.



The Private Landlord Registration pages on the corporate website are constantly monitored and updated to ensure that robust and accurate information is available to members of the public. The Housing Strategy Team has included useful 'help sheets' which provide step-by-step information on the online registration system and several pages detailing important legislative changes such as the Tenancy Deposit Schemes and Tenant Information Packs have been drafted. The Private Landlord Registration webpages received a very high number of webpage 'hits' in this reporting period, with 2,769 page-views between 1st April 2013 to 1st April 2014.

HOUSING STRATEGY AND SERVICES

2. HOMLESSNESS SERVICES

WHO WE ARE

Located in Paton Street, Galashiels, Scottish Borders Council's Homelessness Service consists of a team of specially trained officers who are committed to preventing and tackling homelessness in the Scottish Borders.

Homelessness is a complex and extreme issue that often concerns vulnerable people, requiring involvement from a range of agencies including housing providers, health professionals, social work, education and the voluntary sector. Our key partners include NHS Borders, Shelter, Scottish Borders Housing Association, Waverley Housing, Berwickshire Housing Association and Eildon Housing Association. We also work closely with private sector landlords through our private landlords'

forum. We are committed to involving service users in the design and delivery of the Service.

The number of people contacting the Homelessness Service has remained broadly constant over the last 2 years. In 2013/14, 1015 people approached the Homelessness Service. 703 of these accessed the service through the prevention team and were involved in prevention activities. Of these cases, 347 went on to request or require a statutory homeless assessment. In total 565 people were assessed as statutorily homeless.

The primary reasons for homelessness have largely remained unchanged over the years and relate to parents or other family or friends no longer willing to accommodate the applicant; non-violent

relationship breakdown; and violent relationship breakdown.

In August, the Minister for Housing and Welfare, Margaret Burgess, visited a number of housing projects in the Scottish Borders, including the Homelessness Service's furnished accommodation at Maxmill Park in Kelso and accommodation for young people at Trinity House in Hawick.

2013/2014 was the last year of the contract between the Council and the private firm, Orchard and Shipman, for the management of properties leased from the private sector to provide accommodation for homeless people. From April 2014, the Homelessness Service will manage these properties directly.

The case study below demonstrates the valued approach in assisting and making a difference for some of our vulnerable clients in accessing their benefit entitlement:

CASE STUDY: MS A

Ms A had been placed in temporary homeless accommodation after fleeing domestic abuse. Ms A had been refused all benefits by the Department for Work and Pensions and Scottish Borders Council, due to previous fraud involvement. Ms A had a young child and no income to live on. The Officer assisted Ms A to appeal these decisions, resulting in her Housing Benefit being backdated and therefore clearing the rent arrears she has with Homelessness Services. Ms A was also awarded the following benefits:

- Backdated Housing Benefit of £2,593.12
 - Employment Support Allowance of £71.70 per week; equating to £3,728.40 per annum
 - Child Tax Credit of £62.80 per week; equating to £3,265.60 per annum
 - Child Benefit of £20.30 per week; equating to £1,055.60 per annum
 - Housing Benefit of £164.56 per week; equating to £8,557.12 per annum
 - Council Tax Benefit of £10.39 per week; equating to £540.28 per annum
- Total benefit awarded - £17,147.00**

STATUTORY HOMELESSNESS ASSESSMENT AND THE PROVISION OF ACCOMMODATION TO HOMELESS PEOPLE

The Homelessness Service's Assessment and Accommodation Team continues to work towards improving the standard of temporary accommodation for homeless applicants, and providing those whom require a statutory assessment the assistance to move onto settled permanent accommodation that is sustainable and meets the needs of the applicant and their family. The service achieves this through the close working relationship with Register Social Landlords, Social Work and Safer Communities partners.

In the past year, the Service has dealt with 679 assessments and assisted 537 applicants who were assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness unintentionally. The Service has also provided temporary accommodation to 379 applicants in the past year.

FINANCIAL INCLUSION

The Homelessness Service's Financial Inclusion Officer works with people who are homeless or potentially homeless to help them with money matters, including housing costs, welfare benefits and debt management.

In 2013/14, this Financial Inclusion service contributed directly to preventing 42 households from being evicted and achieved the following:

- Advice Only Total: £729,854.32
- Full Cases: £427,157.92
- Housing Benefit awarded: £229,055.92
- Backdated Housing Benefit Awarded: £39,356.70
- **Total financial gains following advice and assistance: £1,425,424.86**



HOUSING SUPPORT SERVICE

Homelessness Services Housing Support offers short term support to individuals to live independently within the local community. This support covers a wide range of activities that help people to secure and maintain accommodation whilst promoting their rights and responsibilities - both as an individual and tenant. Housing Support is offered to all users of the Homelessness Services and enables service-users to develop their support package to their preferences and circumstances.

A total number of 346 people contacted the Housing Support Service in 2013-14. There were 203 active cases in this reporting period; this refers to the number of service users whom had an allocated Housing Support Officer, although it should be noted that a proportion of these active cases were originally opened in the previous financial year.

75% of active cases in this reporting period were closed, with 25% being carried forward into the next financial year. The primary reason cited for case closure was the successful resettlement of the client (50%).

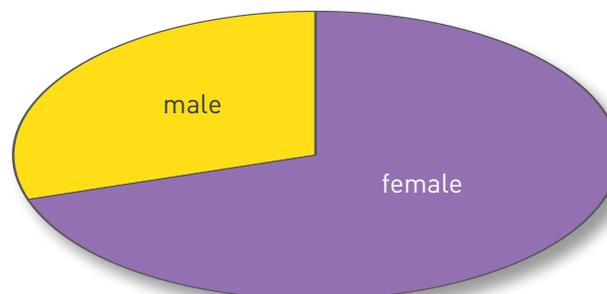
DEPOSIT GUARANTEE SCHEME

Scottish Borders Council's Deposit Guarantee Scheme (DGS) provides the guarantee of a deposit, payable to a private landlord, if any damage is incurred during the tenancy. The scheme allows people who could not otherwise afford to pay a deposit the chance to rent from a private landlord.

During 2013-2014 the scheme assisted 54 applicants to secure a privately rented tenancy. The age range of these applicants ranged from 16 years to 69 years, with an average age of 32 years.

As Figure Two opposite demonstrates, the majority of DGS applicants were female, with 69% of all applicants in 2013-14 being female, and 31% being male.

FIGURE TWO:
DGS APPLICATIONS BY GENDER



HOMELESS PREVENTION TEAM

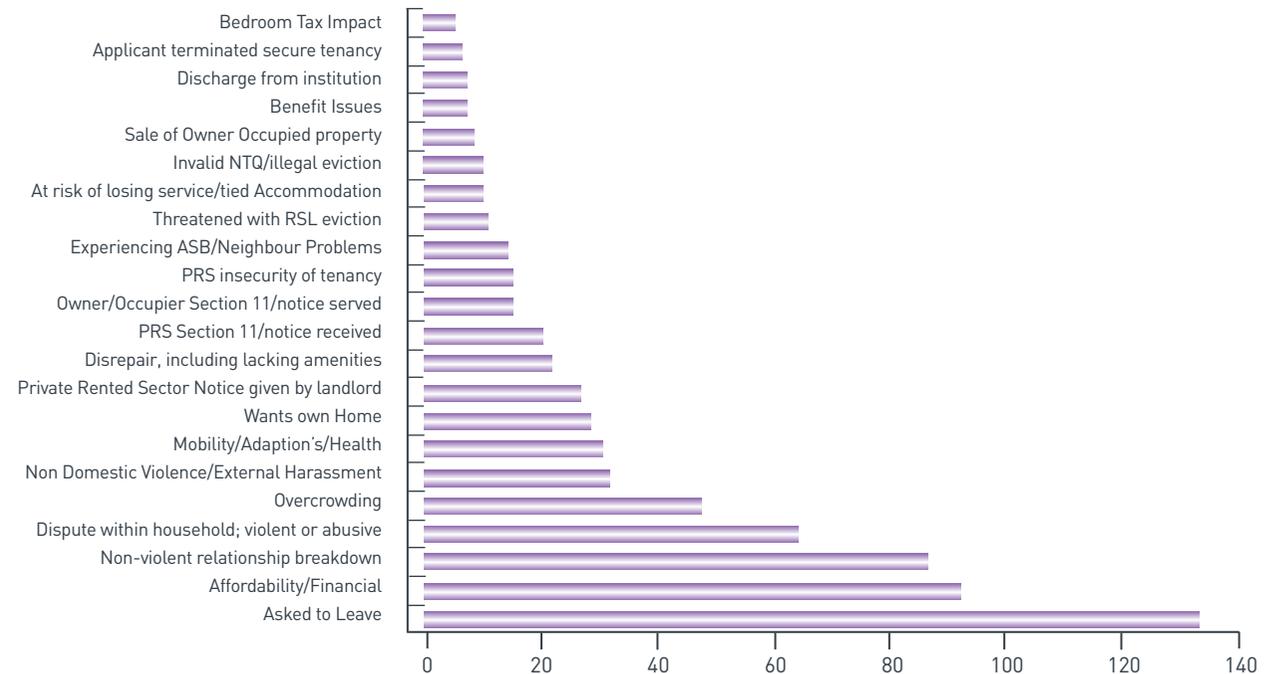
The Homelessness Prevention Team provides advice and assistance to homeless or potentially homeless households in a bid to prevent them from becoming homeless and, if necessary, to secure suitable and sustainable alternative accommodation for them.

The prevention team deal with all first point of contacts for any person who contacts the Homelessness Service for advice or assistance.

The Prevention team works with all age ranges above 16 years and the reasons households approach the prevention team is wide-ranging. Figure Three details reasons given during 2013 -2014:

During 2013-2014 the Prevention Team completed 687 housing options assessments with applicants that required further assistance following their initial contact.

FIGURE THREE: REASONS GIVEN FOR CONTACTING THE PREVENTION TEAM



As Figure Three shows, the most common reason given by service-users for contacting the Prevention Team was being asked to leave their current accommodation. Of the 687 households that were assisted by the prevention team, 333 went on to be assessed under the terms of the homeless legislation, either at their request or because their homelessness was not preventable and suitable permanent alternative accommodation could not be secure prior to the household becoming homeless.

DOMESTIC ABUSE

Approximately 10% of the people who contact the Homelessness Service for assistance do so because they are victims of abuse from a partner or ex-partner. The Homelessness Service's Homeless Prevention Officers (Domestic Violence) specialise in preventing homelessness for women and men who are at risk of becoming homeless due to issues of domestic violence. These officers work closely with the Domestic Abuse Advisory Service (DAAS), Borders Women's Aid and the Violence Against Women (VAW) Partnership, to ensure that women and men fleeing domestic violence are provided with robust help and support.

During 2013/2014, the Homelessness Service worked with the 4 local Registered Social Landlords and with the Safer Communities team to develop and implement a unified domestic abuse policy

aimed at ensuring a consistent, co-ordinated and responsive approach by Borders housing providers to addressing the housing needs of women and men who suffer domestic abuse

THE MEDIATION SERVICE

In this reporting period there was a total of 9 mediation referrals received, compared to 13 referrals during the previous year. None of these referrals completed the mediation process. Referrals came from a variety of sources with the majority (56%) coming from Homeless Prevention Officers. Other referrals were received from Private Sector Liaison Officer, Support Officer, Assessment Officer and 1 directly from school.

Of the referrals, 3 required no mediation involvement, 2 referrals failed due to both parties refusing to mediation, 2 resolved the situation following client visits to both parties, 1 was a

referral which was not considered appropriate for mediation involvement and 1 referral failed as 1 party refused following client visits.





PEER MENTORING – “INSIGHT”

Following on from a successful pilot period the peer mentoring scheme has recruited six further volunteer peer mentors who have completed the volunteer training program. This means that there are nine volunteers suitable to be matched for clients. The scheme has received eight referrals in total with 3 young people being matched to volunteers. Only one has completed the sessions, although the mentor has provided a significant improvement to the lifestyle of the young person who provided a high level of positive feedback on the scheme and the volunteer matched.

2 further volunteers were matched to clients, with the service being withdrawn due to changing circumstances with the young clients.

Activities for the three clients have included evening courses, meeting in a local café, hillwalking and Go Ape.

LODGINGS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (LFYP)

The Homelessness Service has been working with Scottish Churches Housing Action to develop a lodgings scheme for young people, with funding for the development of the project being provided by the Scottish Government’s Housing Options Hub.

Scottish Churches
Housing Action



no room for homelessness!

Following initial publicising of the scheme at the start of 2014, a number of households across the Scottish Borders have expressed interest in providing lodgings for young people.

It is hoped that the lodgings for young people scheme will be operational later in 2014.

Volunteer households will be required to participate in a training package and complete a Protecting Vulnerable Groups check prior to placements being agreed.

HOUSING STRATEGY AND SERVICES

3. WELFARE BENEFITS SERVICE

Scottish Borders Council's Welfare Benefits Service consists of a team of advisers specialising in matters relating to social security benefits and tax credits. Their aim is to maximise take up of these for citizens of the Scottish Borders. Maximising income is undertaken by a combination of advocacy and appeal representation, assistance with benefits form completion, awareness raising, training and telephone advice sessions. The service is currently in receipt of funding from Macmillan Cancer Care, Fairer Scotland Fund and the Child Care Partnership in respect of three projects. These externally funded projects have developed very successfully.

The work of the Welfare Benefits Service has contributed to aims one and three as stated in the Scottish Borders Council's Tackling Poverty and Achieving Social Justice Strategy:

Aim One - *'Reduce the number of households in the Scottish Borders currently in debt, or at risk of being in debt.'*

Aim Three - *'Improve access to information and advice to help maximise incomes.'*

FACTS AND FIGURES

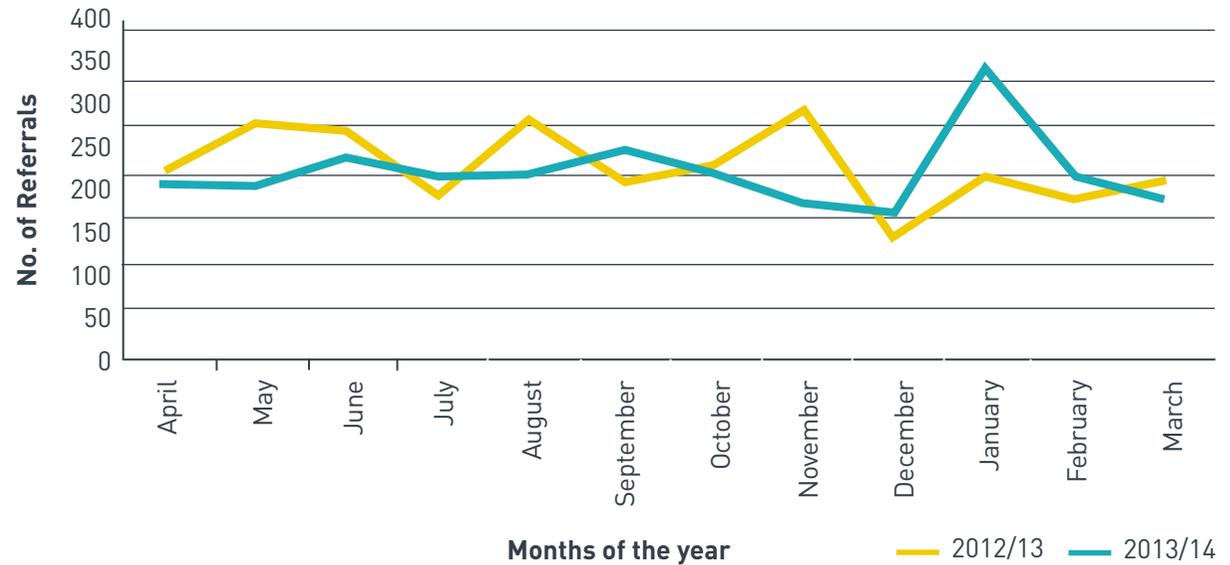
The statistics for this year have again shown significant financial income gains for those accessing the Welfare Benefits Service.

Over 6.1 million gains achieved by the service for customers

A total of over £6.1 million of gains were achieved for WBS service-users in this reporting period; this is 105% of the end of year target. The WBS dealt with 2,355 open cases in the 2013-14 financial period – which is 100% of the target met.

Figure Four demonstrates the number of referrals to the service throughout 2012-14. This trend closely mirrors the number of referrals in previous years, however, there were slightly less referrals this year than there were in 2012/13. This reduction can be attributed to the Citizens Advice Bureau taking on some of the more general advice enquiries and a change in the referral process for clients aged over 60, with Social Work staff now required to make direct referrals to the Department for Works Pensions Visiting Service for this age group.

FIGURE FOUR: REFERRAL TRENDS 2012-14



WELFARE BENEFITS OFFICER (MENTAL HEALTH)

This post is funded through the Fairer Scotland Fund initiative. Its purpose is to address increasing demand and to effectively tackle poverty for those affected by mental health issues. Between 2006 and 2012 the proportion of people claiming Incapacity Benefits for mental health or behaviour reasons increased by 3.7% in Scottish Borders compared to 1.4% for Scotland.

Welfare benefits assistance can be critical in contributing towards recovery from mental illness and preventing symptoms worsening by relieving anxiety and stress in relation to financial matters.

A specialist officer regularly working with those affected by mental health issues and with the health professionals in this field can maintain a greater knowledge of how certain conditions affect individuals

which allows better evidence to be obtained in support of claims and appeals.

Presentations on the benefits available to those with mental health problems and the effects of ongoing and forthcoming changes resulting from the Government's welfare reform programme are

made to mental health professionals and other agencies on an ongoing basis.

The annualised increased financial gains to clients accessing this service for the annual reporting period were £608,420 which exceeded the £600,000 target.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE WELFARE BENEFITS OFFICER

This temporary post, funded by Criminal Justice Team, has been established for an 18 month period from September 2013. The aim of this initiative is to assist ex-offenders, or people at risk of offending, cope with the significant changes to the benefits system brought about by welfare reform.

By allowing this particular client group direct access to support on benefits, housing, budgeting and employability issues, it should ensure a smooth transition and integration from custody back to the community thereby reducing 'the revolving door' theory. It is recognised that housing issues and lack of finances are commonly linked to offending and re-offending, and that in order to desist from crime, ex-offenders need to develop an established place in the community.

Strong links are being developed with key internal and outside agencies such as the Homelessness Service, Scottish Welfare Fund, Scottish Prison Service, and Jobcentreplus in order that a pathway which focuses on early intervention is established.

Work with the Borders Woman's Service has been initiated by the Criminal Justice Team and will focus mostly on female offenders in line with the current government agenda. This will be facilitated by workshops or drop in surgeries. A steering group has been established in order to ensure collaborative partnership working across the services using a whole systems approach that aims to address social justice.

Since the start of the project, £128,233.82 of income gains have been achieved.

THE BORDERS MACMILLAN WELFARE BENEFITS PARTNERSHIP

The Borders Macmillan Welfare Benefits Partnership is a joint initiative between the Welfare Benefits Service, Macmillan Cancer Support, NHS Borders Macmillan Centre and the DWP Visiting Service. This project is funded jointly by Macmillan Cancer Support and Scottish Borders Council for the period May 2013 to April 2016.

One of the main aims of the project is to maximise the income of people affected by cancer and in the period 1 May 2013 - 31 March 2014 £1.645 million annualised gains were achieved. Over this period, the partnership dealt with 636 referrals and there are 116 with ongoing action. The referrals came from a variety of sources with 43% from Borders Macmillan Centre, 25% through self referral and 14% from other Health and Social Work professionals and the remainder being mainly from family. The close working relationship between partners has assisted in a greater understanding of the impact of cancer on customers and has also helped to obtain relevant benefits quickly. 97%

of customers responding to a satisfaction survey felt that the help provided had made a positive difference in their life and 68% felt less stressed.

The partnership plans to build on knowledge and awareness of cancer related issues amongst partners and stakeholders thus widening the knowledge and skills base across the borders of those dealing with benefit issues. A number of awareness sessions have been held in relation to Macmillan Grants with the result that CAB and DWP Visiting Service are now assisting customers make claims to this fund.





David Borrowman of Solicitors for Older People Scotland (SOPS) at the Future Planning Guidance launch.

FUTURE PLANNING GUIDANCE

This pilot provides guidance on making a Will, Power of Attorney and planning for a funeral and is aimed at older people affected by cancer. It currently runs in conjunction with the Borders Macmillan Welfare Benefits Partnership.

The initiative is funded through the Change Fund and contributes to the Reshaping Care priorities of Having Choice and Control, Keeping Healthy and Supporting Carers. It helps to ensure that older people who are being faced with a life changing and/or life limiting illness know what options are available, allowing them to make informed decisions as they look towards the end of life.

A very successful launch of the project was held in November 2013 and since then work has been ongoing to engage with stakeholders and partners to highlight the service. It is acknowledged that given the sensitivity of the subject this project may take time to develop.

Linking into the existing Macmillan Welfare Benefits Partnership it ensures people experience an improved service from a single location with the intention of improving communication in respect of future planning issues.



CHILDCARE PARTNERSHIP

Funding by the Childcare Partnership of a part time Welfare Benefits Assistant post, has been effective in promoting the take up of Tax Credits including child care costs. For this financial year annualised income gains to customers have amounted to £320,000 which was attributable to 92 cases.

The referral sources are widespread across the Scottish Borders and come from health and social care workers, child care providers as well as directly from members of the public. A number of Tax Credit surgeries were held with the worker noting that parents were presenting with an increasing number of complex cases, particularly in relation to HMRC compliance enquiries.

Although the Childcare Partnership ended in February 2014, funding will continue through Early Years for 2014/2015.



PACE (PARTNERSHIP ACTION FOR CONTINUING EMPLOYMENT)

PACE is the Scottish Government's national response to redundancy situations. Although managed by Skills Development Scotland (SDS) at a national level, PACE facilitates local level response teams providing tailored help and support for individuals at risk of, or experiencing, redundancy.

The Welfare Benefits Service is a member of the response team and has participated at a number of events throughout the year including the closure of Baxters in Selkirk where 12 people were assisted.

TRAINING AND AWARENESS RAISING

Over the course of the year, members of the Welfare Benefits Service have delivered a combination of 66 training and awareness raising sessions. A significant number of these have been general awareness sessions on changes to the Social Security system as a result of the Welfare Reform Act 2012. They have also included specific training sessions on Personal Independence Payment, Universal Credit, Tax Credits and Macmillan Grants.

Recipients of these sessions have included:

Community mental health teams, Social Work locality teams, Macmillan Nursing staff, Violence Against Women Partnership, Area Forums, Child Health Network, Burnfoot Community School, Bumps 2 Babies, CAB, Addaction, Big River, BCAT, 16+ Team, Carers Forum, Coldstream Health Centre, School Nurses, New Horizon Borders and Momentum.

Work has also been ongoing with training and development to introduce two elearning packages on Welfare Reform. One is specifically aimed at social care and health staff with the other more aimed at Customer Services. A wider training programme is being developed for 2014/2015.

WELFARE REFORM – A WELFARE BENEFITS OFFICER PERSPECTIVE

This has proved to be quite a challenging year in relation to the role of Welfare Benefits Officer with officers often finding the resolution of cases increasingly complex and time consuming.

Keeping up to date with the new legislation around welfare reform as well as the ongoing changes to timelines for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and Universal Credit (UC) has made it difficult to give continuity when advising and delivering awareness sessions.

Delays with the assessment of new Personal Independence Payment claims have resulted in an increase in enquiries from customers who have been waiting a number of months either for a medical assessment or for a decision following the assessment. Although any award is backdated to the claim date, this means that there is no additional income to the claimant at a time when it is often really needed to meet additional care needs.

From 13th January 2014, the Borders Area was included in the roll out of Disability Living Allowance re-assessments where certain Disability Living Allowance (DLA) claimants are invited to claim PIP and includes those with a change of circumstances. Where an existing DLA claimant's condition has deteriorated and they would have normally asked for a review of their current award, they must either make a claim to PIP, with a new set of rules and qualifying criteria or stay on their existing DLA award. Although officers advise customers on the differences between the benefits and the risks involved, it is ultimately the customer or their appointee who must make that decision.

Risks may include a decrease in award or no entitlement, or the option of staying on the existing DLA award which is inappropriate to their changing health. Once a PIP claim is lodged there is no going back to DLA regardless of the PIP decision. Naturally, claimants are very wary of initiating that change and officers need to be cautious when offering advice.

Mandatory reconsiderations; The introduction of mandatory reconsiderations for all benefits before they are considered for Appeal appears to have caused delay and confusion for some claimants. It is essential that the time limits are met from the point at which the claimant receives the decision notice, asks for a mandatory reconsideration, receives the reconsideration notice and then lodges their Appeal. As this is a new system for challenging decisions, many customers need help with the process. The DWP have also changed to several different mail handling sites in Wolverhampton which seems to be causing delays in exchanges of written correspondence.

Sanctions on Jobseekers Allowance for insufficient Job searching has caused problems for some claimants who were unaware of the sanction until their benefit was stopped. Unable to claim crisis grants they need to claim hardship payments whilst they are sanctioned or until a decision is made on reconsideration. This often results in



SOME COMMENTS FROM CUSTOMERS:

"It has made a great difference to my wellbeing. I was on the verge of suicide and that anxiety has been removed."

"If it wasn't for the service I wouldn't have had the strength self-belief or confidence to pursue the successful appeal."

"It took away the stress of financial worries which let me concentrate on getting better."

severe hardship to the claimant and a referral to the food bank which can take significant officer time to resolve. A number of awareness sessions on claimant commitment have been held in Scottish Borders for the WBS and their partners and delivered by Jobcentreplus.

The Welfare Benefits Service are committed to working closely with the JCP Partnership Managers and other partners and stakeholders to try to resolve some of the issues and difficulties which have arisen.

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

We aim to ensure that our service is customer-focussed, efficient and accessible to everyone living in Scottish Borders. Most customers using the Welfare Benefits Service are seen either at home, a local council office or in an NHS setting, although appointments can be made in other appropriate locations. A significant number of customers receive telephone advice, with some choosing to communicate by letter or email. Where appropriate, interpretation and translation services are used and information is offered in alternative formats.

In order to try to improve service delivery, customer survey forms are issued to customers when their case is closed. This year questions were introduced into the survey which allowed customers to reflect on whether or not the service had assisted in making changes which had improved the customers well being.

HAS THE HELP PROVIDED BY THE SERVICE MADE A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE IN YOUR LIFE?



HAS THE SERVICE ASSISTED IN MAKING CHANGES WHICH HAVE IMPROVED YOUR WELLBEING?

I feel healthier	8%
I make fewer visits to the doctor/other health professionals	6%
I feel less stressed or anxious	74%
No change	11%
Other	1%

HOUSING STRATEGY AND SERVICES

4. EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT SERVICE

The Scottish Borders has a working age population of around 71,000 people, of which 5000 (7%) claim Employment and Support Allowance/ Incapacity benefit or some other health related benefit. There are 1700 individuals claiming Job Seekers Allowance and, of these, 480 (28%) are under the age of 25.

In response to the above situation the council has established the Employment Support Service which will improve performance, provide corporate focus and mainstream the delivery of supported employment activity both within and out with the Council.

The new service:

- co-ordinates the efforts of staff currently located in different service areas in the field of supported employment;
- improves SBC performance in relation to supported employment, creating a workforce that is more representative of the population as a whole;
- equips and supports managers within SBC to deal with issues relating to supported employment;
- improves quality of life for those furthest from the labour market;
- maximises the support available to SBC for supported employment through Department of Work and Pensions and Scottish Government.

The ESS service delivers vocational training in the Borders for young people who require employability skills and provides work experience training through Skills Development Scotland's Employability Fund. ESS also delivers supported employment throughout the region for disadvantaged people who require support to access employment.



KEY STATISTICS 2013-14:

- **49** people are currently receiving the Supported Employment Service.
- **24** young people have been supported through the Employability Fund.
- **23** young people are enrolled in the vocational training pilot course.
- We currently support **32** paid jobs – 8hrs per week or more.
- 5 of the above jobs are with Scottish Borders Council.
- ESS have received **16** referrals in the year (this is lower than expected due to the transition of the service) and the average age of referral is 24.5 years.

SERVICE DEVELOPMENT

By mainstreaming supported employment in the council the aim has been to develop various types of apprenticeships, paid or voluntary work placement opportunities. These opportunities are designed to support those individuals furthest away from the labour market to become a part of a working environment where they receive valuable training, experience and an awareness of the world of work - a “stepping stone” to employment. It is equally important to offer the opportunity for training, work experience and personal development to unemployed young adults in the borders.

The ESS will continue to deliver the vocational training pilot which is currently underway in four hubs across the borders: Hawick, Galashiels, Eyemouth and Kelso. The pilot course will be evaluated and “lessons learned” will be actioned before implementing a second course in September.

An 8 week training course targeted at young homeless people will be run in May/June 2014 in conjunction with our partners from the Scottish Borders Housing Association and Borders College. Following a course evaluation, the training will be rolled-out to other partners across the Borders.

The development of our supported employment service will continue with the implementation of our Communications Strategy, in order to ensure that referral agencies across the region are able to refer appropriately.

ESS will continue to support the Work Opportunities Scheme within Scottish Borders Council with the aim to increase opportunities for young people to find work in the council and to enhance the chances of disadvantaged people becoming employees of the council.

STRATEGIC DELIVERY

In order to ensure that our services are targeted and responsive to the changing needs of our communities, a delivery plan has been drafted. This plan set outs the key strategic aims and objectives of the Service and also contains an action plan, which provides more detail of the outcomes SBC want to achieve and how partners will work together to help provide employment support.

The Employment Support Service is responsible for the monitoring and implementation of the delivery plan. The Employment Support Service will seek to ensure that partners are working together in a co-ordinated and coherent fashion by:

- Working together at a local and national level between partners and with central government.
- Ensuring that we make the best use of our existing resources and provide services in the most cost effective and efficient manner to meet the outcomes.

- Setting clear and challenging targets which will be monitored over time to determine the effectiveness of the plan.
- Ensuring that clear linkages exist to current partner activity and strategic plans to maximise the benefit of coordinated partner activity.
- Ensuring that current and future activity is coordinated to avoid unnecessary overlap and duplication and to ensure that complementary activity is undertaken.
- Producing an annual update on the attainment of specified targets and outcomes.

Examples of how the Employment Support Service can make a positive contribution to a service-user's personal and professional development:

CASE STUDY ONE: MR A

After leaving high school Mr A needed help to find work and he was referred to a Work Coach at Skills Development Scotland. Mr A was identified as having strong IT skills and an interest in cars. His work coach referred him to Scottish Borders Council's, Stage 3 Employability Fund Programme.

Mr A met up with the Employability Fund Co-ordinator at SBC and after a discussion about his skills and interests, identified a potential work placement at a local car parts company who were looking for an individual to work on a 12 week project to develop online sales.

The company had seen a marked increase in the number of online sales of car parts through their e-bay and Gumtree shops, but felt that they could do better. Mr A, as a result of on-going training and support, was able to improve the search engine results and increase online sales by 10% by the end of the placement. He was also able to work as part of a team and improve his communication skills as well as learning a lot about car parts.

Mr A was considered to be such a valuable, reliable member of the team that he was offered a position in January 2014 with the company. Mr A continues to learn on the job and the company commented that he is still developing, particularly relating to communicating with the customers. The company are extremely confident that they will be able to offer a level of support and training to Mr A to continue to develop his skills, abilities and experience which will in turn lead to a successful fulfilling career in this industry.



QUOTE FROM EMPLOYER:

"Ms L has been an absolute treasure to work with; I could do with cloning her. Also I would like to say that Ms L's support workers have been great with excellent communication at all times."

QUOTE FROM MS L:

"I am really enjoying my work at Channelkirk School. I am grateful for all the help I have had from the girls from the ESS. They are very nice to work with and they have learnt me a lot."

One of the roles of an Employment Support Worker (ESW) is to support the clients to overcome any barriers they have in learning their tasks to the employer's requirements. This enables the client to work independently. The support that the ESW's

can provide may vary and is structured to meet the needs of the individual. A task analysis is devised to break down tasks into manageable parts for the client to learn.

The case study below demonstrates how an ESW plays an important role in helping a client secure employment:

CASE STUDY TWO: MS L

Ms L applied for a part time cleaning post at Channelkirk, Oxtot with Scottish Borders Council (SBC). Good communication between the employer and the Employment Support Service (ESS) provided the employer with an insight to Ms L's support needs. Taking these into consideration they offered Ms L an informal interview in an environment which Ms L could feel relaxed and with support from an Employment Support Worker (ESW) from ESS. At the interview Ms L felt confident and interacted positively.

Ms L was successful and was offered a temporary contract. Ms L, her ESW, and the area supervisor, met at the school to carry out the induction training. This was tailored by the area supervisor and the ESW to meet Ms L's learning and understanding needs by giving clear and concise instruction along with clear demonstration of tasks.

Full support was provided at first and once Ms L had established her routine and tasks support started to be withdrawn. To support Ms L her ESW's prepared picture prompt cards which provided Ms L with a visual aid to maintain her established routine, and standards. This strategy was a useful tool as Ms L finds it difficult to read instructions.

Continuous communication between the area supervisor, ESW's, Ms L and the school ensures a good working relationship between all.

Ms L has now accepted a further 3 month contract.

HOUSING STRATEGY AND SERVICES

HOW TO CONTACT US

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

Council Headquarters
Newtown St Boswells
MELROSE
TD6 0SA
tel: Customer Services 0300 100 1800

HOUSING STRATEGY TEAM

Galashiels Area Office
Paton Street
GALASHIELS
TD1 3AS
email: housingenquiries@scotborders.gov.uk
tel: 01896 661392

HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

Galashiels Area Office
Paton Street
GALASHIELS
TD1 3AS
email: homelessnessservices@scotborders.gov.uk
tel: 01896 661385
Freephone: 0800 3761138

WELFARE BENEFITS SERVICE

Galashiels Area Office
Paton Street
GALASHIELS
TD1 3AS
email: wbs@scotborders.gov.uk
tel: 01896 661 394

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT SERVICE

Galashiels Area Office
Paton Street
GALASHIELS
TD1 3AS
tel: 01835 824000
email: EmplomentSupportSer@scotborders.gov.uk

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SOCIAL WORK

Council Headquarters | Newtown St Boswells | MELROSE | TD6 0SA
tel: 01835 825169 | email: housingenquiries@scotborders.gov.uk

