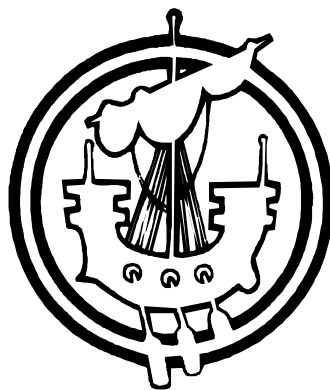


**COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN
SIAR**

**OUTER HEBRIDES
LOCAL HOUSING STRATEGY
2010 -2015**



Consultative Draft

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Index	Page
1. INTRODUCTION	3
WHAT IS THE LOCAL HOUSING STRATEGY?	3
WHAT ARE THE LOCAL HOUSING OUTCOMES WE WISH TO ACHIEVE IN THE LONG TERM?	3
WHAT DOES THIS CONSULTATIVE HOUSING STRATEGY COVER?	6
HOW DID WE DEVELOP THIS CONSULTATION DOCUMENT?	7
WHAT DO WE PLAN TO DO NEXT?.....	7
HOW IS THE CONSULTATIVE DRAFT HOUSING STRATEGY ORGANISED?	9
2. ENSURING AN ADEQUATE SUPPLY OF HOUSING	10
WHAT CHALLENGES DO WE FACE?	10
WHAT ARE WE ALREADY DOING?	11
WHAT ARE OUR PRIORITY OBJECTIVES FOR THE NEXT 5 YEARS?.....	12
WHAT WILL WE DO TO DELIVER THESE PRIORITIES?.....	12
WHAT ELSE WILL WE DO?	13
3. ENSURING HOUSEHOLDS LIVE IN GOOD QUALITY WARM HOUSING	14
WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES WE FACE?	14
WHAT ARE WE ALREADY DOING?	15
WHAT ARE OUR OBJECTIVES FOR THE NEXT 5 YEARS?	16
WHAT WILL WE DO TO DELIVER THESE PRIORITIES?.....	16
4. IMPROVING HOUSING OUTCOMES FOR THOSE IN NEED OF SUPPORT.....	18
WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES WE FACE AND WHAT ARE WE CURRENTLY DOING?	18
<i>Older people</i>	18
<i>Homeless households and others vulnerable to social exclusion</i>	18
WHAT ARE OUR PRIORITY OBJECTIVES FOR THE NEXT 5 YEARS?.....	19
WHAT WILL WE DO TO DELIVER THESE PRIORITIES?.....	20
WHAT ELSE WILL WE DO?	20
5. BETTER INTEGRATED AND CUSTOMER FOCUSED SERVICES	21
WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES WE FACE?	21
WHAT ARE WE ALREADY DOING?	21
WHAT ARE OUR PRIORITY OBJECTIVES FOR THE NEXT 5 YEARS?.....	22
WHAT WILL WE DO TO DELIVER THESE PRIORITIES?.....	22
WHAT ELSE WILL WE DO?	23
6. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING HOUSING OUTCOMES	24
APPENDIX 1: COMMON TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS	25

1. INTRODUCTION

What is the Local Housing Strategy?

The 5 year Local Housing Strategy sets out priorities for action by the Comhairle and its partners as they work together to use all available resources and expertise to improve housing outcomes for residents of the Outer Hebrides.

Our five-year plan for housing must take account of national and local priorities as well as our statutory housing duties. Our Local Housing Strategy therefore:-

- Sets out the housing contribution to the Outer Hebrides' Community Planning Partnership long-term ambition to create a stable and more diverse population and improve the social, economic and environmental well-being of the people of the Outer Hebrides
- Takes account of Scottish Government policies and targets to increase housing supply, to reduce fuel poverty, to reduce homelessness and to deliver better quality and thermal efficient housing.
- Reflects the Comhairle's statutory responsibilities for unfit and sub-standard private sector homes; for housing homeless people and achieving the abolition of priority need by 2012; for registering private landlords and for ensuring housing services are fair and non discriminatory.

In particular, our strategy takes account of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 which has fundamentally changed the framework of powers for addressing unsatisfactory conditions in private housing, and adaptations for people with a disability.

The Comhairle's previous Housing Strategy expired at the end of 2009. This consultative draft was approved in November 2009 with the dual purpose of providing an interim strategy, and is therefore titled 2010–2015. The final revised LHS document is targeted for completion by the end of 2010, and will cover the five year period 2011–2016.

What are the local housing outcomes we wish to achieve in the long term?

The housing strategy will be a success in the long term if:-

1. There is an adequate supply of housing to meet affordable housing need and sustain the population
2. Households live in good quality warm housing that minimises the risk of fuel poverty
3. Older people and other vulnerable adults are able to access integrated support services to live independently in their own permanent home
4. Minimal numbers of people present as or are found to be homeless
5. There is a well managed and customer focused approach to the delivery of housing services, including the provision of information and advice

Figure 1: Alignment of Local Housing Strategy and Outer Hebrides Community Planning Local Outcomes. (Figure 1 shows how these long-term outcomes are aligned with the outcomes of the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership (OHCPP) which form the core of the Single Outcome Agreement between the OHCPP and Scottish Government.)

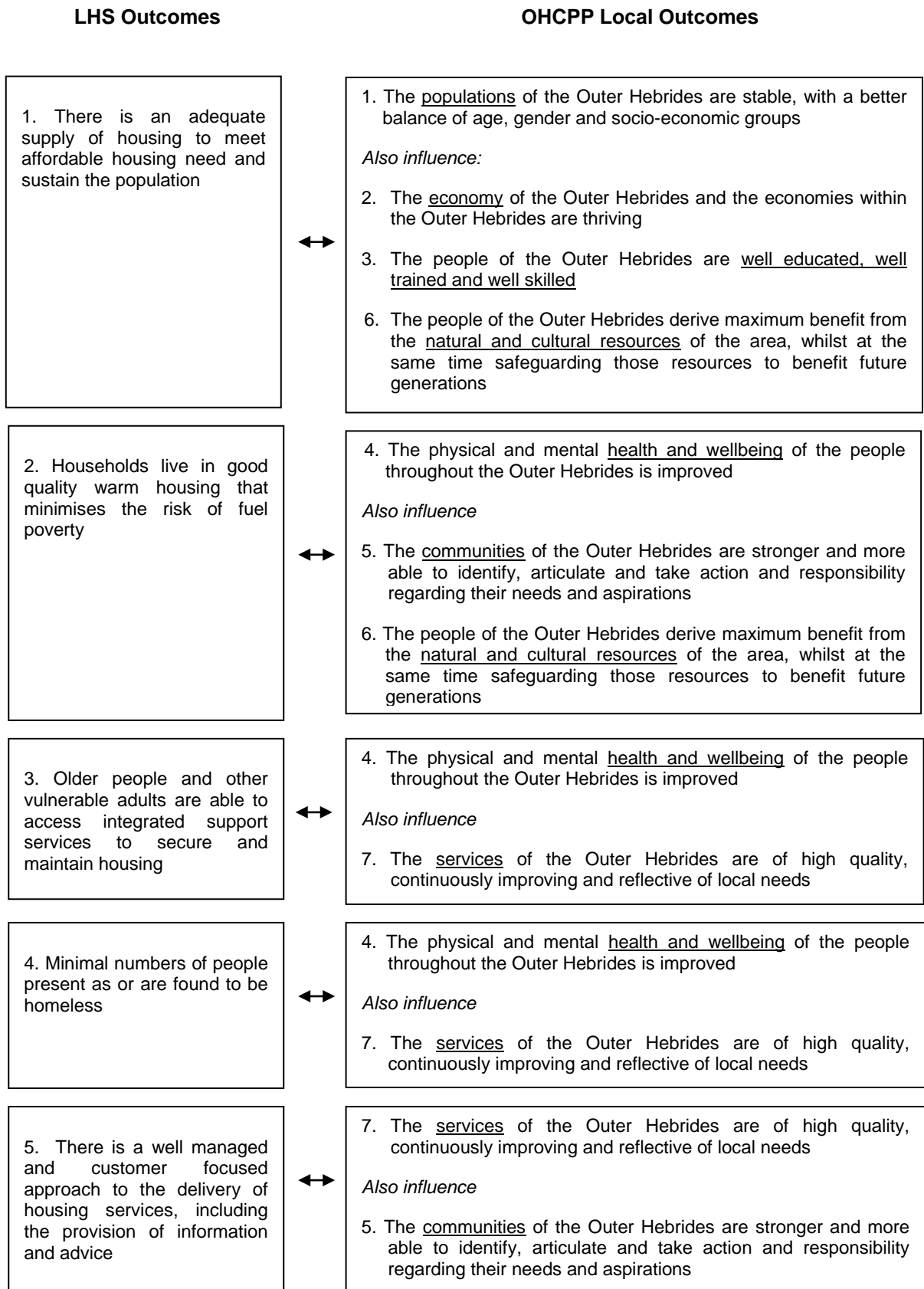
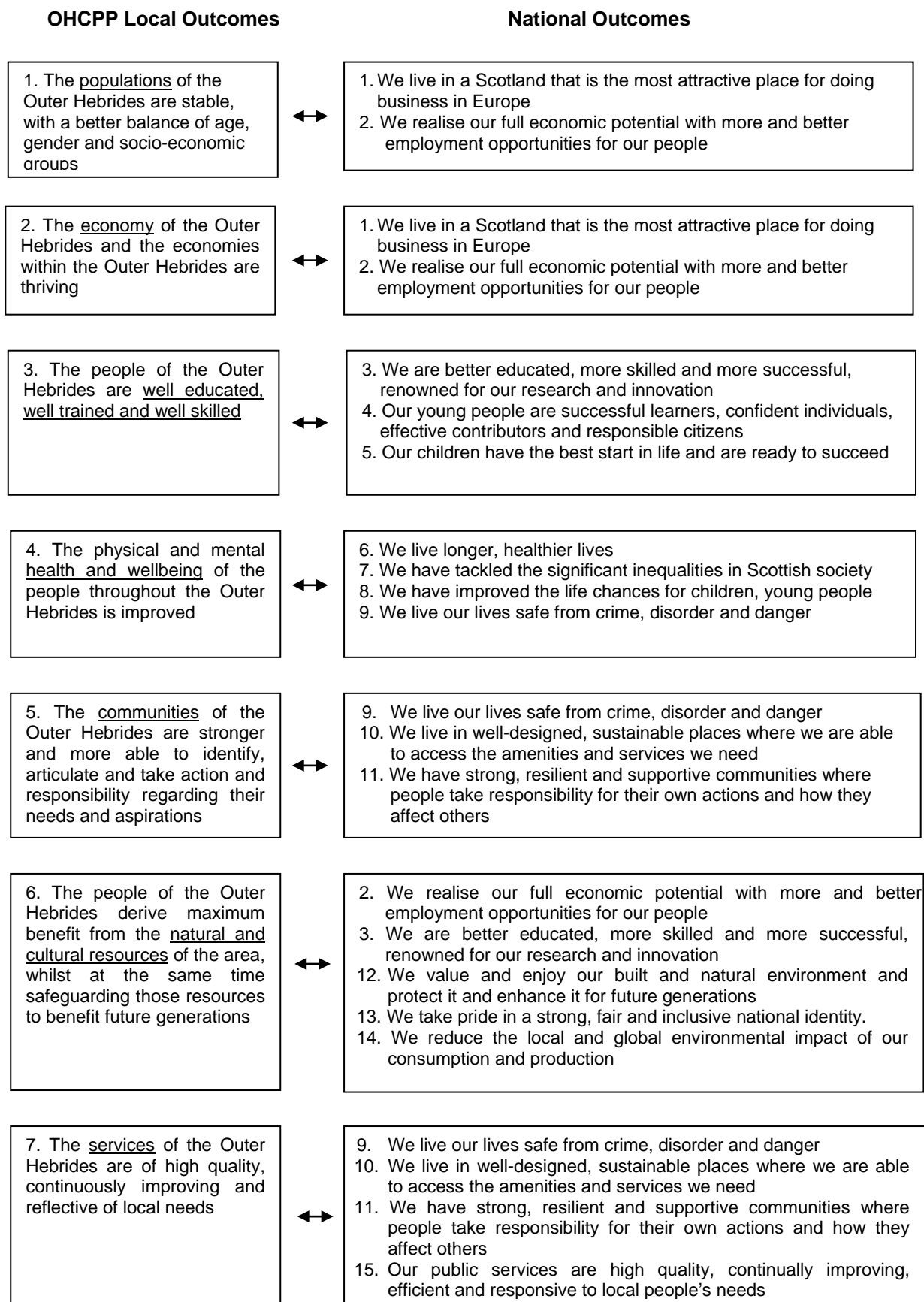


Figure 2: Outer Hebrides Community Planning Outcomes and National Outcomes (Figure 2 shows how the Community Planning Partnership's local outcomes are aligned to each of the 15 National Outcomes which form the vision that the Scottish Government and all of Scotland's local authorities are working towards.)



What does this consultative housing strategy cover?

The 5 long term housing outcomes set the direction of travel for the Local Housing Strategy. However, if we are to improve the housing outcomes of residents, we must be clear what objectives we want to deliver in the next 3 to 5 years.

This consultative document therefore provides a succinct summary of what we believe are the key housing issues for the Outer Hebrides and:-

- Our proposed objectives to 2015, which are summarised in table 1.1 below.
- The priority actions that the Comhairle and our housing partners plan to undertake to achieve these objectives.
- The reasons for choosing these priority actions and what we are already doing to make progress against our LHS objectives.

TABLE 1.1 Priority objectives for the 2010 - 2015

- 300 new affordable houses are completed by 2015, of which 5% are fully adapted for wheelchair users
- A further 50 affordable supply are provided through use of existing private sector stock
- Lift at least 800 older and other vulnerable households out of fuel poverty by 2014/15
- Assist 1,500 older and other vulnerable households to live in properties free from serious disrepair and which meet the tolerable standard by 2015
- Shorten the average time homeless households have to wait prior to being offered permanent accommodation from 130 to 90 working days by 2015
- Ensure 1,200 older people, disabled people and/or vulnerable adults are being supported to live independently in permanent settled accommodation by 2015
- At least 85% of residents are satisfied with the housing related services they access and use by 2015
- Put in place an holistic information and advice network for the Outer Hebrides by 2012

We plan to evolve and refine this consultative LHS over the next 12 months. The planned actions set out in this consultative document therefore tend to focus on the next 2 to 3 years in order not to pre-empt the outcomes of these consultations.

The numbers of priority actions set out in the Action Plan that will accompany the finalised LHS 2011-15 will depend on the level of resources available from the Scottish Government and other sources.

How did we develop this consultation document?

The ongoing monitoring and development of the LHS is overseen by a multi-agency Officers Group and a Member/Officer Working Group.

The development process relating to the replacement of the LHS 2004-2009 began in December 2008 with a Housing Conference attended by key local stakeholders and by local and national politicians. This conference was essentially a 'scene setting' exercise when the national housing priorities were considered and the manner in which they impacted on the Outer Hebrides was discussed.

In January 2009, Newhaven Research were commissioned to provide consultancy support for the LHS development process, and since then significant progress has been made.

Newhaven Research undertook an independent review of the LHS 2004-2009, the outcomes of which have identified successes achieved in the delivery of that strategy and the challenges which remain.

They also updated the Comhairle's Housing Need and Demand Assessment to ensure that the new strategy is based on validated statistical information and a comprehensive understanding of the current workings of the Outer Hebrides Housing system.

The information resulting from these two major research pieces informed the content of an Options Appraisal Seminar held in early November 2009. Attended by Comhairle Elected Members, officers, and partner agencies the seminar was extremely constructive and the very useful discussions have enabled the preparation of a seminar report which provides further information on the perception of current issues affecting the provision of housing and related services throughout the Islands.

The evidence base gathered from the LHS Review document, the Housing Needs and Demand Assessment, and the Options Appraisal have directed the approach to, and strategic direction of this consultative draft of the Local Housing Strategy 2011-2015. The strategic priorities suggested can be readily validated, and we believe they present an accurate summary of the challenges which the next LHS should address.

What do we plan to do next?

The Comhairle and our partners believe that our housing strategy will be most effective if it is informed by and is responsive to the views of:-

- Residents – we are committed to involving the residents of the Outer Hebrides as much as possible in the consultation on this draft strategy. We will liaise with the Comhairle's Community Co-ordinators to identify opportunities to speak to local communities and get first hand information as to their concerns, ideas and aspirations in relation to housing issues in their own area. For those who prefer to have individual contact the consultation papers will be available on line, or hard copies can be provided on request.
- Partners – the LHS Officers Group currently comprises Comhairle staff and representatives of our key partner agencies – Hebridean Housing Partnership; Tighean Innse Gall, NHS Western Isles and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Colleagues from the Scottish Government Housing Investment Division based in Inverness provide ongoing assistance on Strategy development matters and regularly attend the Officers Group meetings in an advisory capacity. We continue to seek ongoing representation from private sector housing interests e.g. landlords and construction industry.

We intend that our partners will consult as appropriate within their own organisations, facilitated by the Comhairle if required. This will ensure that our respective agendas and priorities are as supportive and aligned as possible, maximising the use of all potential resources and sharing expertise.

- Other public, private and voluntary stakeholders – we propose to establish contacts with numerous other organisations and service providers who have not previously been involved in Housing planning, for example, the local construction industry; the new community landlords, the Scottish Crofting Federation, voluntary organisations involved in the provision of support services to vulnerable client groups, and in the provision of housing or housing related information and advice. We are also keen to make contact with private sector landlords, the owners of second or holiday homes, and those who have long term empty properties.

The public utility companies will also be invited to contribute to the consultation.

The examples of potential consultees simply serve to demonstrate the range of discussion we hope to achieve, and do not constitute an exhaustive list.

We are therefore preparing a communications programme that will allow residents, other public, private and voluntary organisations to make their views known, and to comment on the content and proposals contained within this consultative Strategy. This consultation process will take place over the summer months. To facilitate this process, this consultative LHS will be put on the Comhairle's website.

During the period to the end of summer 2010 we also plan to undertake further work to address gaps in the evidence base, especially regarding unmet housing needs and demands at a more localised level and amongst specific sections of the community.

The Scottish Government require that the submission of the Local Housing Strategy is linked to the submission dates of the Local Development Plan (LDP) and that the LHS and Main Issues Report that underpins the LDP are prepared in tandem. Consistent with this expectation, we intend to prepare the LHS 2011-16 taking account of new evidence and feedback from consultation both on this document and the Main Issues Report in autumn 2010.

We aim to finalise the LHS 2011-16 for publication and submission to the Scottish Government at the end of 2010, taking account of the appropriate stages of LDP preparation.

The finalised LHS 2011-16 will include an Action Plan that will detail the priority actions that have been set, and a timetable for delivery. This will provide one benchmark against which to judge progress. The other benchmark we propose to implement is a set of high-level strategic indicators. These will be designed to provide a clear and simple picture of progress in achieving better housing outcomes for residents whilst keeping the amount of data required to a minimum. Our initial proposals for these high level indicators are set out at the end of this document.

How is the Consultative Draft Housing Strategy organised?

We appreciate that it is often difficult to find the time to read large strategy documents that contain a mass of detail. We have sought to make this document concise and easy to read. It therefore provides a succinct explanation of the reasons for choosing our proposed objectives and priority actions. It also indicates other possible actions we wish to investigate further prior to finalising our LHS 2011-16.

Your views on the Local Housing Strategy are important and we hope that you will contribute to the consultation.

This consultation document can be made available on request in large print, Braille or other languages.

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2. ENSURING AN ADEQUATE SUPPLY OF HOUSING

What challenges do we face?

Meeting the housing needs and demands of existing and future households living or wishing to relocate to the Outer Hebrides is a major challenge:

- An extra 1,450 homes could be required to accommodate household growth in the Outer Hebrides by 2030/31, including 760 by 2018. The new GROS household projections due to be published in 2010 may revise this figure upwards.
- Anywhere from 600 to 700 homes could be required to address the backlog of concealed households and those living in insecure accommodation,(including homeless people living in temporary accommodation), and to replace dwellings that may be demolished, closed or converted into second homes.

The Scottish Government is looking for a significant increase in the supply of housing to meet need and demand across Scotland. Similarly, one of the main outcomes of the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership is to stabilise the population and secure a better population balance in terms of age and gender mix. The OHCPP ambitions to stabilise the population may require household growth to exceed GROS projections, but the actual rate is difficult to predict with any certainty.

On balance, we provisionally judge it will be necessary to increase the supply of housing across all tenures by a minimum of 2,200 new homes by 2030/31. This provisional estimate will be refined to take account of additional evidence secured in the coming months, including evidence from the Comhairle's ongoing Housing Land Audit. The revised housing supply target will underpin both the LHS 2011-16 and the Local Development Plan 2011.

Over the period to 2031, the numbers of older households represented by someone aged at least 60 years are expected to increase by 57% to 7,200. Unless there is a change in the age mix of the Outer Hebrides population in the coming decade, over half of all households will be older households from 2024/25 onwards. This is one reason why we need to increase the share of new private and social housing that can be easily and cost-effectively adapted as people age and their housing requirements change.

Currently, wider economic conditions present a particular challenge for increasing housing supply across all tenures. Although house prices have fallen, the decline in house sales and the continuing restricted availability of private finance for home purchase and for housing development means that access to owner occupation for younger families and other households is now more out of reach than in the period prior to the recession.

Social rented housing is a vital community resource. It provides affordable and secure homes for individuals and families that cannot access homeownership and private renting or for whom these tenure options are not appropriate. Increasing the numbers of social rented housing units therefore remains central to our ambition of ensuring that there is sufficient housing to accommodate families and other households in lower paid employment or unable to secure employment.

The numbers of new social housing properties that it will be possible to build over the next 5 years will be heavily dependent on the availability of public funding.

The implications of recently announced cuts to government funding in the wake of the general election have yet to be fully analysed but the Centre for Public Policy for Regions has suggested that the Scottish budget could be between 7% and 13% lower in real terms by 2014. We cannot therefore assume there will be sufficient funding to resolve housing need by building new social rented housing and other forms of affordable housing alone. We therefore need to work together to find:

- Ways to make the most effective and efficient use of public funds to build new affordable housing that is of a type, design and tenure mix that is responsive to current conditions but is also sensitive to the changing requirements of households and is sensitive to local environments.
- Ways to ensure that the increase in the supply of housing in all tenures is sited in locations that will support the OHCPP agenda to ensure communities retain sufficient population to support schools, health facilities and other community services and therefore ensure households can access the amenities and services they need.
- Ways to make better use of the existing housing stock in all tenures to address housing need.

What are we already doing?

Some 300 new affordable homes have been built since 2004, primarily through the efforts of HHP and TIG working with local builders. This has been facilitated by the Comhairle and an increase in the level of funding we have secured from the Scottish Government, the establishment of the ACTISH fund, and the adoption of the Local Plan in 2008, which includes a range of sites suitable for housing development as well as an affordable housing policy.

For a site of 16 units or more, the Comhairle will require the developer to provide an element of affordable housing (25% minimum) unless otherwise specified for the proposal sites identified in the Local Plan. For developments of 15 units or less the Planning Authority will determine the proportion of affordable housing in relation to LHS priorities, and where relevant in consultation with the appropriate Registered Social Landlord.

The numbers of privately constructed units have also expanded. A large proportion of the 600 new units completed in the past 5 years have been single developments assisted through the Croft House Grant Scheme (CHGS) and its predecessor, the Crofters Building Grant and Loan Scheme (CBGLS). Community owned estates have a potentially huge contribution to make. The Comhairle will work with them to identify methods which will encourage them to play a fuller role in the provision of affordable housing, than current systems and bureaucratic processes allow.

In terms of making more effective use of existing stock, HHP have introduced new void management and repair arrangements and made changes to its allocation policy that have begun to reduce average relet times. In 2008/09 around 50% of HHP dwellings were relet within 35 days (5 weeks) compared to 22% in 2006/7. However, progress in relation to the development of serviced plots by the Comhairle, and efforts to bring private sector empty homes back into use has been limited.

What are our priority objectives for the next 5 years?

Over the next 5 years we plan to sustain efforts to secure a significant increase in the supply of housing to meet housing needs and demand, and in particular affordable housing. Our two objectives will therefore be to work towards ensuring:

- 300 new affordable houses are completed by 2015, of which 5% are fully adapted for wheelchair users.
- A further 50 affordable supply provided through using existing private sector assets e.g. currently empty properties, second or holiday homes

What will we do to deliver these priorities?

To deliver these two objectives:

- The Comhairle will oversee an investment programme that links together Scottish Government and local funding sources to complete an average 50 new affordable homes each year to 2015/16. We plan to meet this target primarily through the provision of new social rented housing. However the mix and spatial distribution will be determined in the coming months through consideration of the outcomes of the updated Housing Need and Demand Assessment and Local Housing System Analysis; continuing discussion and agreement with HHP, TIG and the Scottish Government, and will be reviewed annually to inform the Strategic Housing Investment Plan.
- The Comhairle, on completion of the Housing Land Audit, will review whether there is a requirement to develop a residential land bank, in conjunction with partner agencies.
- The Comhairle, HHP and TIG will continue to ensure that housing investment is used to secure related employment and training opportunities and will improve our capacity to measure and report on the numbers of apprenticeships and other training and employment opportunities created.
- HHP and Trust HA will each continue to take steps to reduce the time taken to repair and/or re-let their respective vacated social rented housing stock.
- The Comhairle will continue to facilitate access to the private rented sector through the provision of rent deposits to homeless and potentially homeless people. Further work will be undertaken to see if this policy could be adjusted to be more sensitive to local conditions.
- HHP will review the potential merits and feasibility of introducing incentives to encourage households to move to smaller homes in an attempt to reduce the number of under occupied properties and increase the available supply of larger family houses
- The LDP will identify sites suitable for housing development to meet the short term projected demand.

What else will we do?

To guide continued development of our housing strategy and to support the OHCPP longer-term outcomes, the Comhairle will:

- Work with community owned estates to identify how they could be assisted to play a fuller role in the provision of housing.
- Identify methods of engaging with property owners to establish what incentives or other measures would ensure greater use of empty or under-utilised dwellings to meet housing need.
- Work with local stakeholders to strengthen the evidence base on the wider needs of rural communities, the operation of the private rented sector, the factors that motivate private landlords, and empty homes.
- Invite other rural local authorities to jointly ask the Scottish Government's Centre for Housing Market Analysis to provide additional guidance on how to assess housing needs and demand in a rural setting, including the assessment of the needs of specific household groups in a rural setting.
- Work with our partners to ensure effective performance management systems are in place to monitor how well we are delivering against our priorities.

3. ENSURING HOUSEHOLDS LIVE IN GOOD QUALITY WARM HOUSING

What are the challenges we face?

Although increasing supply remains vital, most households a decade from now will live in homes that exist today. Improving the housing outcomes for most residents will therefore depend on securing improvements in the quality of the existing housing stock.

Housing is an important determinant of a person's quality of life and wellbeing. Research indicates that poor quality housing can have an adverse effect on children's health and psychological well-being. Poor housing can also contribute towards higher winter mortality rates among older people, higher rates of avoidable accidents within the home and can exacerbate various chronic health conditions

Too many houses in the Outer Hebrides are in poor condition and/or are cold due to poor heating and insulation and therefore do not meet the needs of current residents, let alone future generations. The 2004-07 Scottish House Condition Survey indicates:-

- At least 1 in 20 households in the Outer Hebrides live in properties that are in serious disrepair and/or are below the tolerable standard.
- Around 50% of resident households are estimated to be fuel poor compared to 22% of households living in other areas of Scotland. This means that half of all households would have to spend more than 10% of their income on fuel in order to heat their home to a satisfactory standard. Older householders are particularly vulnerable to fuel poverty.

Fuel poverty results from a combination of low household income, unaffordable energy costs, inadequate thermal insulation and inefficient and uneconomic heating systems. The very high rates of fuel poverty in the Outer Hebrides reflect:-

- Poorer climate conditions, higher use of solid fuel fires and higher local fuel prices. (This last being out-with the control of the Comhairle and the cause of frequent fluctuations in Fuel Poverty levels).
- The high proportion of low income households, which is linked to the high rate of older households in receipt of the guaranteed part of Pension Credit. Over 27% of the 4,900 older households in the Outer Hebrides receive this benefit.
- The high proportion of the Outer Hebrides household population that live in dwellings which fail the energy efficiency component of the SHQS (80%) compared to Scotland as a whole (55%).

Improving the quality of the existing housing stock and tackling the growing numbers of households living in fuel poverty will therefore make a vital contribution towards the OHCPP ambitions to improve the physical and mental health and wellbeing of the population.

Assisting property owners to maintain and improve the quality of their dwellings will also support wider national and local ambitions to safeguard the built heritage, reduce carbon emissions in order to tackle climate change, and enable residents to better articulate and take responsibility for meeting their own needs and aspirations.

Improving the quality of private sector accommodation, which is home to more than 8 out of 10 households in the Outer Hebrides, is of particular concern because:

- Many homeowners are on low incomes and find it difficult to do the repairs their homes need. Over 2 out of every 5 homeowners in the Outer Hebrides are pensioner households, reflecting the fact that over 80% of all pensioner households own their home. Ward level rates of receipt of the guaranteed part of Pension Credit support local knowledge that many owners are reliant on this state benefit.
- Owners of houses which are in crofting tenure are not able to offer the type of security which a commercial lender would normally expect to be available. This therefore is likely to be an issue when these owners are seeking funding for repairs and improvements to their home.
- Many 'amateur' private landlords are believed to rent to family members and friends at low rents and lack sufficient income to repair and improve these rented dwellings.

What are we already doing?

The Comhairle and its partners have continued to work to address disrepair and fuel poverty. Since 2004 over 1,000 private homes have benefited from a new heating system, improved insulation and/or draught proofing through the Warm Deal Fund and the Central Heating Programme. Likewise the OHCPP 'Claim It!' campaign assisted some 250 households claim £1m additional income from state benefits.

In the period of the current LHS the Comhairle has approved over 1,650 housing grants to households living in private housing to assist them improve or adapt their house. This includes almost 300 grants to assist older and other vulnerable households bring their homes up to the tolerable standard. Only 8 other Scottish local authorities have approved higher numbers of grants over this period. Nonetheless, a reduction in resources has led to a substantial downturn in the numbers of households we have been able to grant assist to improve their home in recent years.

The Scottish Government has introduced a new framework for private housing. This is based on the principle that property owners have primary responsibility for maintaining their property, but vulnerable residents should be assisted to find a suitable solution through the provision of advice or financial assistance, including affordable loans.

In response to this new framework and consistent with the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 Act, the Comhairle has prepared a Scheme of Assistance that sets out what assistance we will provide to property owners to improve and repair their properties.

In broad terms, to meet the SHQS a house must be:

- Above the tolerable standard which is the absolute minimum standard that a house must meet
- Free from serious disrepair such as major roof, dampness or structural problems
- Energy efficient so it must have effective insulation and central heating
- Provided with kitchen and bathroom fittings that are in a good and safe condition
- Safe and secure, for example it must have a smoke detector and safe electrical and gas systems.

Over 2,200 households in the Outer Hebrides live in social rented housing. The Scottish Government has set a target to bring all social housing up to the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by 2015.

Over the past 5 years good progress has been made towards this national target. In 2009, around 73% of social rented housing had attained this standard, which exceeded the LHS 2004-9 target of 70%.

Looking ahead, Hebridean Housing Partnership and Trust HA will continue to take steps to ensure the necessary investment is made to bring their homes up to the standard, in the required timescale.

What are our objectives for the next 5 years?

Our two objectives for the next 5 years will therefore be to:

- Lift at least 800 older and other vulnerable households out of fuel poverty by 2014/15
- Assist 1,500 older and other vulnerable households live in properties free from serious disrepair and which meet the Tolerable Standard by 2015

What will we do to deliver these priorities?

To deliver these two objectives:

- The Comhairle implemented the new Scheme of Assistance on 1 April 2010, which includes arrangements to ensure householders of all ages are aware of the options and choices potentially available. In line with the aims of the new legislation our Scheme of Assistance puts a greater emphasis on a wider range of practical, technical and financial assistance.
- The Comhairle will continue to provide financial support to the Care and Repair Service, which is operated by Tighean Innse Gall, and will maintain performance monitoring arrangements to ensure Best Value is being achieved. This invaluable service provides advice on practical and financial matters to homeowners aged 60 or over or people with a disability, in relation to repairing, insulating or adapting their home. The Comhairle also provides assistance to the Small Repairs Scheme and Home Safety Project.
- HHP and Trust HA will complete their improvement programmes to ensure their housing stock meets the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by 2015.
- Taigh Blath, TEAS and the Comhairle will continue to work with energy companies, that have a legal obligation to promote home energy efficiency schemes, to seek to obtain maximum benefit for residents of the Outer Hebrides.
- The Comhairle will work to develop public awareness to influence property owners' maintenance and energy efficiency behaviour in partnership with e.g. Energy Action Scotland, Taigh Blath and TEAS. Our Scheme of Assistance details how energy efficiency measures will be encouraged and prioritised.

What else will we do?

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 has introduced new powers that Council's can use to seek to improve private sector housing but many of these are untried. The Comhairle wishes to ensure that these powers are implemented in a manner that is sensitive to the local context and will monitor the effectiveness of the Scheme of Assistance in liaison with a range of stakeholders, including owner-occupiers and private landlords.

Over the coming months we therefore plan to:

- Consider in response to consultation and monitoring outcomes what further actions may be necessary to deal with houses that do not meet the Tolerable Standard
- Make contact with registered private landlords to find out how we could strengthen our engagement with this group and encourage them to improve management and maintenance standards and comply with the new 'Repairing Standard'.
- Explore what practical steps could be taken to expand the use of appropriate renewable energy sources. This will include maximising the potential benefits of national incentives to encourage households improve the thermal efficiency and environment performance of their existing homes.
- Put in place arrangements to review the Scheme of Assistance one year after its introduction to allow us to assess if it is necessary to adapt the policy to respond to unexpected circumstances and gaps in services.

At present there are no plans to identify and designate any area of the Outer Hebrides as a housing renewal area. This is not considered to be favourable or appropriate due to the dispersed nature and type of housing stock throughout the Outer Hebrides.

4. IMPROVING HOUSING OUTCOMES FOR THOSE IN NEED OF SUPPORT

What are the challenges we face and what are we currently doing?

Older people

Few older people want or need a different kind of home from the general population and almost all wish to live independently in their own home as long as possible. However some require some practical support or adaptations to their home to assist them live independently. Estimates from the recent review of extra care housing suggest that somewhere between 1,100 and 1,300 older people may be frail or have some form of disability that requires some degree of support and care, of which:-

- Between 700 and 800 older people may require low to moderate support and care, including the provision of adaptations.
- Between 400 and 600 older people may have a severe disability that necessitates intensive care and support, including those that require a move to a care home.

The Comhairle, NHS Western Isles and other local partners have a strong commitment to enabling older adults to live in their own homes. Latest estimates indicate over 800 older people have access to various care services and/or the Faire Careline Service. Consequently, around 128 per 1000 older people living in the Outer Hebrides receive a home care service of some form compared to 70 per 1,000 older people nationally. A significant proportion of our Private Sector Housing Grant allocation has historically been used to fund adaptations and other services that assist older people remain in their own home.

As noted earlier, the rise in the numbers of older people over the next decade and beyond especially people aged 75 and over will increase demand for free personal and nursing care as well as various housing support services.

A major challenge that the Comhairle and its partners must address is therefore to find ways of providing more cost-effective and integrated services for older people to enable them to remain in their own homes that are in good condition, offer affordable warmth and have the necessary adaptations.

Homeless households and others vulnerable to social exclusion

Over the past decade there has been a rise in homelessness in the Outer Hebrides as elsewhere in Scotland and much of Europe. There has been a slight fall in the numbers of people applying as homeless in the Outer Hebrides and Scotland in the last year or so but the Comhairle continues to receive over 250 applications each year for assistance under the homelessness legislation.

The reasons for the increase in homelessness are complex but Comhairle records show that relationship breakdown (including friends and family no longer willing to accommodate) and to a lesser extent eviction due to rent or mortgage arrears tend to be the most frequently reported 'immediate' causes of homelessness. Another local factor appears to be restricted availability of social lettings and the lack of alternative housing options. Last year over 2 out of 5 homeless applicants were already on the waiting list for social rented housing.

We have been actively working towards the Scottish Government's homelessness objective to abolish priority need by 2012. The proportion of households assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness and accorded priority status has increased from 54% to 77% in the past 6 years.

The Scottish Housing Regulator has praised the quality of the work of the Homeless Support Team and its role in preventing repeat homelessness. There have been several other positive developments. This includes the development of the Foyer scheme and the development of the delivery of an improved information and advice service in conjunction with CAB. More recently, the number of cases with whom contact is lost or where the application is withdrawn has fallen to 11%.

Nonetheless, the Comhairle still faces a considerable challenge to end the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation and to meet the 2012 national target.

Increasing the supply of affordable housing will increase the housing opportunities of those that become homeless and should assist to reduce reliance on temporary accommodation in the longer term.

However, homelessness is not necessarily purely a housing problem. A proportion of homeless applicants have complex health and social support needs that are expressed through a need to secure a home. Homelessness can also impact on the costs of other public services. For example, it can increase the demand for health services. Likewise, it can also increase the need for support to children of homeless families whose schooling and educational development is often disrupted.

Long term sustainable reduction in the numbers of homeless households will require further efforts to ensure homelessness activities are better co-ordinated with health and social care activities to prevent homelessness occurring in the first place.

More generally, the Social Work Inspection Agency and others have pointed to the urgency of reconfiguring services in order to better target and respond to the needs of vulnerable adults of all ages. In terms of housing outcomes, there are particular concerns that:

- The housing needs of adults with learning difficulties and complex needs who are cared for by older carers who may be unable to care for them for much longer are not being planned for. Just 10% of adults with learning disabilities living in the Outer Hebrides have their own tenancies, which is considerably lower than the Scottish average of 33%.
- There are insufficient resettlement and support services to assist adults with mental health and other complex needs remain settled in their present accommodation, which adds to the risks of them becoming homeless (and of repeat homelessness).

What are our priority objectives for the next 5 years?

Greater progress towards improving the housing outcomes of older households, homeless households and other households that are vulnerable to social exclusion will make a vital contribution towards the OHCPP long-term outcome to improve physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Over the next 5 years we plan to sustain efforts to improve housing outcomes for these groups of households by working in partnership with other local agencies to:

- Shorten the average time homeless households have to wait prior to being offered permanent accommodation from 130 to 90 working days by 2015.

- Ensure 1,200 older people, disabled people and/or vulnerable adults are being supported to live independently in permanent settled accommodation by 2015.

What will we do to deliver these priorities?

To deliver these two objectives:-

- The Comhairle will use ACTISH funds and Strategic Housing Reserves to provide a Supported Temporary Accommodation Unit in Stornoway by 2013.
- The Comhairle will work with local partners to comply with the outstanding requirements identified in the Scottish Housing Regulators Action Plan. It will also prepare and implement a revised Homeless Service Strategy that will ensure partners work more effectively together to prevent and respond to homelessness, including youth homelessness.
- The Comhairle and HHP will develop a homelessness duty protocol to ensure the right balance is struck between meeting needs of homeless applicants and those of other households.
- The Comhairle and partners will work together to improve data collection and management systems to enable better monitoring of access to and take up of homelessness services, including the provision of information and advice.
- The Comhairle will take steps to ensure the Single Shared Assessment process involves a full assessment of housing needs, (including the need for housing support and adaptations) by the end of 2010.
- The Comhairle will continue to provide assistance to older and disabled households living in private housing to ensure residents have freedom of movement into and around their home and access to personal facilities within it.
- The Comhairle will complete the ongoing sheltered housing reconfiguration programme.
- The Comhairle and NHS Outer Hebrides will agree the ongoing funding required to maintain the Outer Hebrides Home Safety Project. This is managed by Tighean Innse Gall and seeks to help disabled and other vulnerable people minimise the risk of accidents and hospitalisation.

What else will we do?

To guide continued development of our housing strategy the Comhairle will:-

- Work with local stakeholders to increase our understanding of the needs of particular household groups.
- Work with the Community Health and Social Care Partnership (CHaSCP) to better articulate our community care priorities and the specific contribution the housing strategy can make.
- Work with HHP and Scottish Government to establish the resources required to permit housing adaptations for tenants that involve major capital expenditure.

5. BETTER INTEGRATED AND CUSTOMER FOCUSED SERVICES

What are the challenges we face?

Our planned consultation programme and plans to improve our evidence base will help us to address gaps in our knowledge on the housing needs and aspirations of fragile communities and other sections of the population such as minority households and other 'hard to reach' households.

However, it is also important to ensure the housing services are responsive to changing customer expectations. Consistent with the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership aim to ensure services are of high quality, continuously improving and reflective of local needs, we need to work together to:-

- Develop better arrangements for monitoring customer views of the quality and satisfaction with housing services delivered by the Comhairle and its partners
- Ensure consumers' views are translated into practical improvements in the way services are delivered.

If customers are to benefit from the housing services the Comhairle and our partners offer, we need to make it as easy as possible for people to get information about our services and be able to tell us when things go wrong, so we have an opportunity to put things right.

The provision of information and advice is a vital tool in providing consumers with the information and education they need to make their own housing and financial decisions with confidence, to have the necessary skills to manage their finances effectively and resolve their problems well before a situation reaches crisis point. In particular:-

- Information and advice about the range of available housing options alongside income maximisation and debt counselling that is readily accessible has an important role in preventing homelessness.
- Good quality advice and information may encourage owners to invest in repair and maintenance rather than allowing their home to slip into disrepair before taking action. Investing in information and advice should therefore help to reduce the incidence of serious disrepair and reduce the consumer and public sector costs of dealing with disrepair.
- Information and advice on how to reduce fuel bills and make homes warmer can assist reduce energy consumption and reduce the risk of fuel poverty.

What are we already doing?

The provision of information and advice are already explicit components of the existing Homelessness Strategy and the Fuel Poverty Strategy. The Comhairle also intends to seek accreditation under the Scottish Government's 'Homepoint' Scheme (which promotes national standards in information and advice services) in relation to its duties under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006.

The Comhairle publicises its homeless and other services through different media including leaflets, posters and the Comhairle's website. Formal arrangements have been established with CAB and the Western Isles Foyer to provide Advice and

Information to people at risk of homelessness. HHP, TIG and other partners also issue housing information that is accessible for customers.

The Scottish Housing Regulator has praised the information and advice provided by the Homeless Team. However the Regulator also identified scope to improve aspects of the delivery of the information and advice services provided to homeless people.

The Scottish Housing Regulator also identified a need to improve monitoring of customer views on the quality of housing services delivered to HHP tenants and homeless service users. We believe this recommendation is also applicable to other housing services, including those which focus on the Private Sector.

The continuing recession will add to the challenges in supporting people to cope with financial pressures, not least because of rising unemployment and fuel poverty. The availability of up to date, comprehensive information and advice on the housing aspects of their lives will be crucial.

The Comhairle has therefore already made a commitment to review its approach to the provision of homeless and other housing information and advice as part of the LHS 2011-16, including better monitoring.

What are our priority objectives for the next 5 years?

To put the customer at the heart of everything we do in terms of organising the way we deliver services our objectives will be to ensure:-

- At least 85% of residents are satisfied with housing related services they access and use by 2015
- Put in place an holistic information and advice network for the Outer Hebrides by 2012

What will we do to deliver these priorities?

To deliver these two objectives:-

- The Comhairle and our local partners will develop a plan of action to develop a more strategic and joined up approach to the provision of housing information and advice and work towards the Scottish Government's Homepoint National Standards for the provision of information and advice.
- The Comhairle and our local partners will put in place or further enhance existing customer surveys and feedback forms to ensure their service users voice is heard and acted upon in developing homeless priorities.
- The Comhairle will ensure that feedback from service users is embedded into the annual LHS reports that are issued to the relevant committees of the Comhairle.
- The Comhairle and our local partners will publish annual performance management standards, including customer feedback on our websites
- The Comhairle will incorporate questions into a proposed Outer Hebrides annual customer survey to gauge residents' awareness and use of a range of alternative housing services.

What else will we do?

To guide continued development of our housing strategy the Comhairle will:-

- Look to work with CHaSP to develop a series of focus groups with adults with learning difficulties and their families, including older carers, to consider appropriate support and housing packages likely to be required if family care begins to break down.
- Invite the OHCPP to investigate the use of peer interviews amongst hard to reach groups such as single men and younger adults. The intention would be to develop training to enable members of communities to conduct interviews or hold focus groups within their own communities and to make sense of and report on the data collected.
- Draw up an equalities profile of residents to enable us to better targeting of information and services.

6. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING HOUSING OUTCOMES

In order to improve our ongoing LHS process, we want to ensure we have access to routinely updated information to inform and guide our ongoing housing related investment and intervention decisions. The Action Plan included in the LHS 2011-16 will provide us with a tool to measure and report on the performance of the Comhairle and our partners in delivering against our priority actions.

We also intend to put in place a set of outcome indicators that reflect the longer-term housing outcomes our LHS objectives are striving towards. The proposed indicators are as follows:-

- Completions by tenure per 1,000 households
- Number of long term empty dwellings per 1,000 households
- Entry price house price to 25th percentile gross household income affordability ratio
- Number of new applicants (i.e. including homeless applicants but excluding internal transfer) that applied for social housing during the year per 1,000 households
- Social rented pressure ratios (number of applicants per let) inclusive and exclusive of transfer applicants and lettings, if possible broken down by dwelling size
- The numbers of households living in the Outer Hebrides estimated to be in fuel poverty (only updated every 3 to 4 years through the SHCS)
- Number and proportion of social rented housing that has attained the SHQS
- Numbers and proportion of private housing with an NHER rating of 5 or more (only updated every 3 to 4 years through the SHCS)
- Number of homeless applications, the percent assessed in priority need and the number of homeless living in temporary accommodation
- Net additional households in receipt of a housing support service

Although these indicators do not cover all aspects of housing activity or all possible housing outcomes, they have been selected because:

- They are aligned with our proposed LHS objectives and outcomes and provide information on housing system changes that will allow us to interpret and provide a narrative account of our performance in delivering the LHS 2011-16 Action Plan.
- For the most part they can be measured annually using existing and readily administrative data sources.

The Comhairle has introduced a new electronic management performance system, called Interplan. This will be used corporately as a monitoring and reporting tool for Key Performance Indicators (KPI's), Actions and Tasks.

The Objectives and the Actions of the LHS will be fed into Interplan, which will allow for a more systematic monitoring and review of the Comhairle's LHS.

Appendix 1: Common terms and abbreviations

Term and/or Abbreviation	Summary Description
ACTISH	The local acronym for Additional Council Tax Income from second and holiday homes.
Affordable Housing Investment Programme (AHIP)	This is the name given to the Scottish Government's housing investment programme that disburses funds to RSLs, private developers and individuals to progress new-build and refurbishment programmes.
Care & Repair	A scheme for older people and people with disabilities living in private housing which assists them through the provision of information and advice with regard to repairs and improvements and adaptations to their homes.
CHaSCP	Community Health and Social Care Partnership between Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and NHS Western Isles.
CHGS	CHGS is a grant only scheme which assists crofters to build or improve their home on the croft. It is administered by the Crofters Commission on behalf of Scottish Ministers
Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)	A free confidential service that helps people with solutions to a wide range of problems including housing.
Comhairle	Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar (formerly called Outer Hebrides Council)
Community Care	Services delivered in the community to vulnerable individuals such as older people, people with disabilities and people that are or at risk of becoming homeless.
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)	Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. This body speaks on behalf of Scottish local government and is the employers' association on behalf of all Scottish councils.
Fragile Communities	This term is often used to refer to remote, rural communities that are lacking in economic and social opportunities and are consequently experiencing population loss.
Faire Careline	A twenty four hour - seven day community alarm service run by the Comhairle, providing an automatic link between the user's home and a Control Centre in Stornoway.
FOYER	Stornoway based project to help young people aged 16-25 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
Fuel Poverty	Households, in order to maintain a satisfactory heating regime, would be required to spend more than 10% of their income (including Housing Benefit and Income Support for Mortgage Interest) on all household fuel use.
GROS	General Registers of Scotland – provides demographic information at national and council area levels.
Hebridean Housing Partnership (HHP)	Hebridean Housing Partnership is a community owned not for profit housing association that now owns and is responsible for the management and maintenance of former public sector rented stock.
Housing Land Audit	This monitors the number of housing completions, the progress of sites through the planning process, the availability of effective sites and the supply of land for future housing provision.
Housing Renewal Area (HRA)	An area which the local authority has named as such because there is a relatively large number of houses below standard or because the way the houses look or the state of repair of the houses is having a negative impact on the area.
Joint Future	A Scottish Government initiative to improve partnership working and

	service delivery in Community Care by Local Authorities and Health Boards through shared agendas and pooled budget.
KPI	Key Performance Indicators (usually statutory) - providing a service monitoring mechanism.
Landlord Registration Scheme	Anyone who owns living accommodation which they rent to others (e.g. a private landlord) is required under Part 8 of the Antisocial Behaviour etc. (Scotland) Act 2004 to apply for registration with the council. The council decides whether the private landlord is a fit and proper person before registering them.
Local Development Plan (LDP)	Every local authority is required to produce one or more LDP setting out policies and proposals for the use of land in their area.
Local Housing Strategy (LHS)	The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires councils to undertake an assessment of all housing needs and conditions, and to produce strategies to tackle the housing problems in their areas.
Main Issues Report (MIR)	The MIR is an early stage in the preparation of LDPs. It highlights the significant new issues to be addressed in the LDP.
National Home Energy Rating (NHER)	This is measure designed to assess the energy rating per dwelling on a scale of 0 (poor) to 10 (excellent). It is based on the total energy costs per square metre of floor area required to achieve a standard heating regime.
Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership (OHCPP)	This is a grouping of local agencies tasked with developing a strategy to improve the social, environmental, and economic well-being of the community. Since the introduction of the Concordat with the Scottish Government in 2007, the OHCPP is responsible for the development and monitoring of the Single Outcome Agreement, which provides the framework within which the partnership working will be progressed.
Private Sector Housing Grant (PSHG)	Funding allocated by the Scottish Government to allow the Comhairle to assist households improve, repair or adapt their homes. From 2010 this budget will no longer be a separate ring fenced pot of money but will be included as part of the overall revenue-funding package the Scottish Government allocates to the Comhairle.
Priority Need	Priority need is currently assessed as part of a homeless application; however it will be abolished in 2012. The Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 (as amended by Housing (Scotland) Act 2001) lists the type of circumstances where homeless persons would be considered as having a priority need for housing.
Respite Care	It is short-term care for those who require family members or others to look after them. Its aim is to give the carers a short break whilst avoiding the need to place those they care for permanently a facility which is not their home.
Scheme of Assistance (SoA)	A system of help introduced in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 which is provided by local authorities. Assistance can be provided through grants, loans, practical help and advice/information
SHCS	Scottish House Condition Survey
Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)	A standard set by Scottish Government which all social rented housing must meet by 2015 in terms of repairs and amenities/facilities within properties.
Section 11	Introduced in the Homelessness (Scotland) Act 2003 and commenced on the 1st April 2009. It requires landlords (social and private) and creditors to tell local authorities when they raise proceedings repossess a property or serve certain notices relating to a mortgage.
Single Shared Assessment	Single Shared Assessment – part of the Joint Future Agenda, aimed at minimising the number of professional assessments required to

	develop a complex care package and thereby reducing stress on clients. Information gathered by Lead Assessor will be shared with other agencies as appropriate
Stakeholder	An individual or group that affects or can be affected by the actions of the strategy.
Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP)	A document that details investment priorities for affordable housing provision and in particular the number and location of units for which funding from the Scottish Government's Affordable Housing Investment Programme is sought.
Tighean Innse Gall (TIG)	This is the Outer Hebrides Housing Agency and it runs a number of services, including the Care and Repair Scheme on behalf of the Comhairle.
Tolerable Standard	The standard which housing is measured against to ensure they are fit to live in. Housing that falls below this standard is known as Below Tolerable Standard (BTS)