

# ***Good Practice Checklist for Homeless Women***

***Scottish Council for Single Homeless  
Wellgate House, 200 Cowgate, Edinburgh EH1 1NQ  
Tel: 0131 226 4382 Fax: 0131 225 4382  
Web Site: <http://www.scsch.org.uk>***

***SCOTTISH COUNCIL FOR  
SINGLE HOMELESS***

# Good Practice Checklist for Homeless Women

The Scottish Council for Single Homeless (SCSH) has produced this checklist for good practice in identifying and dealing sensitively with 'hidden' homeless women. SCSH research has shown that many homeless women do not describe themselves as such, that many choose to continue to live in unacceptable or even dangerous situations rather than approach services or simply fail to get beyond the reception desk. This checklist points to areas of good practice which will particularly benefit women, but most of which if implemented, will improve the service to all homeless people in the local area.

The Scottish Council for Single Homeless previously produced a general checklist on allocations policies for use by housing associations, co-operatives and local authorities. This new checklist is more specialised concentrating on the needs of women, whose specific needs are often not recognised.

The checklist is aimed at staff in all local authorities, housing associations and other housing providers, and should be used to check that current policies contain best practice, and when policies are being reviewed. Certain sections may be more relevant to councils than other providers.

The checklist begins with three key questions which are vital to the whole issue of 'hidden' homelessness.

## The fundamental questions

1. Have you asked: 'Are you homeless?' Have you used those exact words?
2. If the woman answers 'no', do you ask: 'do you feel safe where you are?'
3. Do you understand that 'homeless' does not have to mean out on the street, that homelessness can be hidden away?

*This can include hidden ;*

- *in a 'care of' address,*
- *in an unsafe family relationship, in a privately rented flat with little or no security,*
- *where a woman is frightened to stay where she is because she is being harassed because of her colour, sexuality etc.*

## How to use the checklist

Tick the box in the 'yes' column if the local authority, housing association (or other housing provider) meets the good practice recommendations, tick the 'no' column if it does not. If you have ticked some 'don't knows' find out what the policies are. Then take action to make both the 'don't knows' and the 'noes' into areas of good practice.

## General Good Practice

***Almost all of the points made here are good practice for all applicants, but are of particular importance to women. Many of them are contained in The Scottish Office Code of Guidance on the operation of the homelessness legislation. If best practice is adhered to, the following will happen:***

	Yes	No	Don't know
Women presenting as homeless or threatened with homelessness are referred to a homeless persons' officer for a <b>private assessment interview</b> .	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
No personal and embarrassing questions are asked at the reception desk.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Notices</b> are displayed informing women that they can request an interviewer of the same sex, that a friend or support worker can accompany them to the interview, and that they may hand in a private letter explaining why they have become homeless.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
These three points are all reinforced verbally.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The <b>interview room</b> is adequately sound proofed and seating arranged so that the woman being interviewed is not visible to other people in the waiting area.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Personal details on application forms are treated in the strictest confidence. Staff access is limited to those who are currently working towards the woman's rehousing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Personal details are never given out, including to people claiming to be family members, close friends or partners..</b> This is made clear <i>in advance</i> to the woman. <i>Violent partners, for example, might approach the council trying to locate their partner</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Training</b> on homelessness is provided for all levels and sections of housing staff. Regular refresher training courses are held. <i>Training should aim to raise awareness in how to recognise potentially homeless applicants with particular attention being given to what is in the Code of Guidance and the legal definition and interpretation of vulnerability, local connection, racial harassment and domestic abuse. Training could include, for example, women's aid representatives on domestic abuse issues.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No	Don't Know
All callers who present as homeless, whether personally or by phone, are <b>recorded</b> . <i>The form should record gender and ethnic background and be analysed regularly to highlight areas where there may be problems in access to services.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Information leaflets and posters</b> on homelessness, the 24 hour emergency service and the applicant's entitlements are openly available in the general reception area. These include information on the Matrimonial Homes (Family Protection)(Scotland) Act.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
As well as publicising the local authority's legal obligations leaflets detail <b>appeals and complaints procedures</b> . They contain addresses of other advice agencies such as the Citizens Advice Bureaux, independent housing aid centres, women's aid, local support groups and telephone helpline numbers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
All leaflets and posters are available in a <b>variety of languages</b> , and all are written in plain language. Information about the availability of trained interpreters is also readily available.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff are trained in <b>disability awareness</b> . Information is available on tape and in Braille for people with visual impairment, and appropriate aids should be available for people with other physical or sensory disabilities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff always reinforce written documentation <b>verbally</b> . Many people find written forms and information difficult to understand.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**The reception area**

	Yes	No	Don't Know
The reception area is user friendly for both public and staff.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There is adequate sound proofing and privacy for the public.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The reception area is clean with clearly signposted public telephones, toilets and lifts (where appropriate).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There is easy access to all relevant parts of the building for people with disabilities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Yes No Don't

			Know
The public's views are checked regularly e.g. by conducting exit polls or satisfaction surveys.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Senior staff occasionally work alongside front line staff to get first hand experience of any difficulties.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reception staff are trained to ensure there is no initial screening out of homeless applicants.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There is a notice in the waiting area stating that help is available in filling out forms.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Areas are child friendly with toys, comics etc. readily available.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### **The application form**

	Yes	No	Don't Know
The application form is written in plain language.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Notes are provided with it defining housing jargon words like 'apartment', 'tenement', 'furnished tenancy' or 'supported accommodation'.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The form includes the question: 'Are you homeless or threatened with homelessness?'	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Notes are provided explaining what homelessness is i.e. not simply about rooflessness.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There is sufficient space for a brief housing history.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The form states clearly what kind of supporting medical evidence might be required.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The form states clearly the importance of informing the housing department of changes in circumstance and gives examples.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The form explains that help is available in a private interview to fill out the form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The form asks specifically whether the applicant has suffered harassment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff automatically give verbal information about everything which is written down, in case people have difficulty reading.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## **The Interview**

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Allocations staff/interviewing staff have a clear understanding of the homelessness legislation, the Code of Guidance and the council's policy and procedures.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Homeless or potentially homeless people are always referred for a homeless assessment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Women who have stayed at a 'care of' address at any time in the past 18 months are given a private assessment interview.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Applications are scrutinised for any indication of risk, such as a violent relationship or harassment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
All applicants are told they can be interviewed by someone of the same sex if they prefer. In small offices, if a woman (or man) is not always available it is made clear that arrangements can be made quickly for a person of the desired gender to be available.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## **Non presentation**

### **- thinking about why some women don't come forward**

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Women are made aware of their rights under the homeless persons' legislation, the Matrimonial Homes Act and, for example, the Children (Scotland) Act	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information is easily available about, for example, local policies on domestic violence, sexual abuse, and harassment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information is available via leaflets and posters (and other media) in health centres, post offices, hostels, community centres, bus and rail stations and other services which women regularly use.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Links with health initiatives, such as well woman clinics, are used to disseminate housing information.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information makes clear that women can bring a friend and ask for an interviewer of the same sex.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information is sensitive to the needs of women from minority ethnic groups.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## **The Appeals Procedure**

	Yes	No	Don't Know
There is an appeals procedure at every stage which is easily accessible and understood.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There are people who are independent on the appeal group (i.e. not only officials from the department).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There are clear policy guidelines on e.g. domestic violence, rape, harassment, racial and sexual abuse and sexual assault, and how these should be interpreted by homelessness officers or generic workers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There is a clearly established chain of command of senior staff members who can be consulted by front line interviewing staff who need clarification on policy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local advice agencies and voluntary bodies dealing with housing are made aware of the provision and workings of the appeals procedure.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There is a nominated member of staff to deal with problems relating to the private rented sector.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## **Presenting as homeless to outside agencies (e.g. drop in or day centres, rights offices, CABx, community centres, GPs, health centres, careers and education establishments)**

	Yes	No	Don't know
There is a properly established referral system between the local authority and other statutory or voluntary agencies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There are regular consultation meetings to monitor and progress problems and make improvements.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
All relevant voluntary agencies are asked to keep an accurate record of homelessness enquiries (including personal callers, letters and telephone calls). A pro forma could be developed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gender and ethnic background of inquirers are monitored.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## **Temporary Accommodation**

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>
Single women (both 'priority' and non priority) are offered a choice of a range of accommodation - not just hostels or specialist accommodation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hostels or other forms of institutional care are only used for the minimum time required to secure more suitable alternatives, in order to minimise institutionalisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
All hostels used through referrals by the local authority conform to agreed physical and management standards.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
All hostels used for referrals operate in line with the Housing Code of Practice (Race Relations).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Temporary accommodation is available which is accessible for example to wheelchair users.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
All hostels used by the local authority keep an accurate record of homelessness inquiries (personal callers, letters, telephone calls).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
All temporary accommodation monitors inquiries by gender and ethnic origin.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There is an up to date list of hostels and other suitable temporary accommodation available for women in the area.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The list includes details of house rules, length of stay permitted, cost, disabled access, rules on visitors, sleeping arrangements, cooking and laundry facilities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## **Minority Ethnic Communities**

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
Women from minority ethnic communities are not only offered accommodation in projects specifically set up for them (where they exist), but offered a choice of options.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The authority ensures that it is not only women from minority ethnic groups who are asked about their immigration status.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There is a clear written policy on racial equality and racial harassment with clear guidelines on how to implement the policy.			

Yes       No       Don't know

Staff are given training on raising awareness of racial issues and harassment, and on the council's policy.

          

Legal action is taken against the perpetrators of racial harassment.

          

There is access to professional interpreting services where necessary or requested. Children of applicants or other family members are not normally used as interpreters. The confidentiality of the interview is stressed.

          

**Women leaving institutions (e.g. residential care, hospitals, prisons)**

**Yes      No      Don't Know**

Women in hospital or prison are made aware that they can submit a housing application whilst still resident there.

          

There is forward planning between hospitals or prisons and the housing and social work department to arrange accommodation for women being discharged.

          

Housing workers visit institutions regularly, such as children's homes, prisons and hospitals.

          

There is a nominated staff member with whom institutions liaise and who also co-ordinates outreach work.

          

There is co-ordination between all relevant agencies including Benefits Agency, social work, housing, community health workers, where appropriate, and relevant voluntary organisations

          

**Young Women**

**Yes      No      Don't know**

Young homeless women aged 16 or 17 are considered to be 'in priority need'

          

Young homeless women aged 18 and over are given individual consideration as to whether they are vulnerable due to their age

          

Young women leaving being 'looked after' are always provided with accommodation (and support if required).

          

**Yes      No      Don't**

know

Women do not have to undergo several assessments one after the other. Community care, Children (Scotland) Act and homelessness assessments are combined where possible.

Women up to age 21 who were looked after or in care on their 16th birthday are automatically 'in priority need.' (This is now a legal requirement)

If a young woman in priority need is found to be intentionally homeless, a Children Act assessment is undertaken to discover if the council has a duty to house her.

## **Sexuality**

Yes No Don't know

The rights of lesbian women are taken into account in policies on allocations, transfers, protection from harassment and access to all services.

Domestic abuse policies and action on harassment include lesbian women.

Training for staff includes implementing these policies in a sensitive manner.

A woman partner in a lesbian relationship is able to succeed to a tenancy in the same way as a partner in a heterosexual relationship.

## **The Emergency Service**

Yes No Don't know

Information on the 24 hour emergency service is widely available and publicised in a broad range of services which women are likely to use regularly (libraries, GP waiting rooms, post offices, supermarkets, local press, community centres, health centres).

Women sleeping rough are allowed to submit a housing application and/or use a support agency as a 'care of' address.

There is co-ordination and joint training with social work, police, health workers and voluntary sector workers.

Women who are at risk are able to use another address (e.g. the housing department) in circumstances where it would be inappropriate to send information to their home address.

**Yes**      **No**      **Don't know**

          

### **Miscellaneous**

When a woman discloses abuse the perpetrator is never contacted to corroborate

**Yes**      **No**      **Don't know**

          

If a woman miscarries having been 'in priority need' she does not lose the priority need status

          

It is never a condition that a woman exercises rights under the Matrimonial Homes (Family Protection) (Scotland) Act

          

Women suffering or in fear of violence are considered to be in priority need, whether or not they have children

          

If you have any comments on the checklist or suggestions for improvements to it please send them to Scottish Council for Single Homeless (SCSH), Women's Checklist, Wellgate House, 200 Cowgate, Edinburgh EH1 1NQ or e mail [robert@scsh.org.uk](mailto:robert@scsh.org.uk)

Please send us examples of good practice towards women by your authority. Further copies of this checklist are available on request.

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