

West Lothian Council - Housing, Customer & Building Services

Housing Support Service

West Lothian Council
West Lothian Civic Centre
Howden South Road
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Telephone: 01506 775000

Type of inspection:
Announced (short notice)

Completed on:
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Service provided by:
West Lothian Council

Service provider number:
SP2003002601

Service no:
CS2004073877

About the service

West Lothian Council - Housing and Building Services provides short term support to people with the aim of helping them to sustain their tenancy and prevent homelessness.

Support is provided by four teams of Tenancy Sustainability Officers (TSO). Three teams of TSOs support people living at Blackburn Homelessness Unit, Strathbrock Family Unit and Newlands Young Persons Unit. These teams also provide support to some people in the local community. The TSOs who are part of the community support team support people who live in their own homes or in temporary accommodation throughout West Lothian. This includes young people who have been in care, people who have served a custodial sentence and refugee families.

One of the aims of the services says that 'Housing Support services are practical services that assist people to maintain independent living in the community'.

At the time of this inspection approximately 180 people were using the service.

What people told us

Before the inspection we asked the service to distribute 60 questionnaires to people who were supported. We received 20 completed questionnaires and we followed this up with telephone calls to four of these individuals. We also spoke with seven people who were supported.

Many of the people we had contact with expressed their satisfaction about the support they received from their TSOs. Written comments included:

"I have had great support since moving to supported accommodation."

"All of the staff are friendly and welcoming and someone is always around. I would also like to say that the staff here go out of their way to help and support people. I have the upmost respect and gratitude for the staff. They do a grand job here at Strathbrock Family Unit."

"All the staff are great. you can speak to anyone, not just your appointed one. They go above and beyond to help you with any problem you have."

"They can really care about me. Nothing but kind and nice. Told me how I will get on and what timescales to expect."

During the course of the inspection people told us how they were supported to make sure they were receiving the right benefits, get furniture for their new tenancies, attend appointments and make links with other agencies. Some referred to the importance at having somebody to talk to when they needed this and explained how this had helped them to change their behaviours and how they felt about themselves.

Where people were less satisfied this was largely due to the amount of time it was taking to be offered their own tenancy. A few people objected to the restrictions that were in place in group living accommodation. People who were living in the supported units commented on the lack of free wifi.

Self assessment

We no longer ask the Provider to submit a self-assessment.

From this inspection we graded this service as:

Quality of care and support	5 - Very Good
Quality of staffing	not assessed
Quality of management and leadership	5 - Very Good

What the service does well

The service is working with other agencies to identify people who are at risk of homelessness at an earlier stage. This enables preventative measures to be addressed with the aim of promoting people's wellbeing and their success in maintaining their tenancy. People are able to voice their need for support at an early stage when presenting to West Lothian Council as being homeless or at risk of being homeless. This information is shared with TSOs so that people receive support as early as possible.

People are encouraged to take an active part in identifying and recording their support needs when they first need support and at regular intervals thereafter. This helps people to recognise what they have achieved during the time that they are supported. People told us that their relationships with TSOs help them to gain confidence in their skills and to regain control of their lives. People commented that they felt that the TSOs believed in their abilities and worked hard to advocate on their behalf. TSOs worked in partnership with people by offering support in ways and at a pace that suited them. The support is based on respect for peoples' choices.

TSOs are knowledgeable about the complexities that people need to work through when they become homeless. They share this with people and support them well through this process. People benefit from the TSOs' knowledge of local services that might be helpful to them, these include agencies that offer practical as well as emotional assistance. TSOs also have close links with other staff within West Lothian Council so that they can check and at times influence decisions that are made about peoples' housing need. This means that people are very well supported during this period of their lives.

The management team have a shared vision of how the service should develop to improve the support that people receive now and to reduce future homelessness, for instance by making contact with people who were at risk of losing their tenancies. By comparing this service with that of other local authorities they have found that within West Lothian Council the number of people who return to being homeless is less than elsewhere. The service use the views of TSOs and people who use the service or who have left to make positive changes.

What the service could do better

To help evaluate how people benefit from the support they receive the service could make use of an assessment tool as a way of assessing peoples' wellbeing. This can help people to have better insight into their strengths and achievements. It can also aid alternative communication when written English is not somebody's main way of communicating. An example would be the 'outcome star' which is used as a visual tool to support assessments and achievements.

The service could refer to the Health and Social Care Standards - My support, my life to consider how they work with other agencies to ensure that people are in the right place to experience the support that they need and want.

Requirements

Number of requirements: 0

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 0

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at www.careinspectorate.com.

What the service has done to meet any requirements we made at or since the last inspection

Previous requirements

There are no outstanding requirements.

What the service has done to meet any recommendations we made at or since the last inspection

Previous recommendations

Recommendation 1

The service should ensure that goals, outcomes and risks are recorded clearly and in ways that help people understand how it is planned to work with and manage them. People should be involved in determining the risks in their lives and ways to manage these, with or without support, wherever possible.

National Care Standards, Housing Support Services, standard 3 - Management and staffing arrangements and Standard 4 - Housing support planning.

This recommendation was made on 6 June 2017.

Action taken on previous recommendation

During this inspection we found that people were given a number of opportunities to discuss and agree their support. These were reviewed at regular intervals to ensure that they remained current and took account of changes to peoples' circumstances. These were recorded and were available to both staff and the person they referred to. Risks to people's wellbeing and the actions that could be taken to minimise these were also discussed, recorded and shared. This meant that people were involved in the decisions about the support they received. We were satisfied with the action taken to address this recommendation.

Recommendation 2

The service should ensure that all staff receive regular support and supervision to ensure they are able to manage their work effectively.

National Care Standards, Housing Support Services, standard 3 - Management and staffing arrangements.

This recommendation was made on 6 June 2017.

Action taken on previous recommendation

During this inspection we found that staff received regular support and supervision. They met their line managers to discuss the support they offered people. They also had separate meetings to reflect on their role, practice and professional development. Staff stated that they found their line managers knowledgeable and supportive. They felt confident in their role. We were satisfied that staff received the necessary the support and supervision.

Inspection and grading history

Date	Type	Gradings
6 Jun 2017	Announced (short notice)	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership
		5 - Very good Not assessed 4 - Good Not assessed
30 May 2016	Announced (short notice)	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership
		4 - Good Not assessed 4 - Good Not assessed
6 Jun 2014	Announced (short notice)	Care and support Environment Staffing
		4 - Good Not assessed 4 - Good

Date	Type	Gradings	
		Management and leadership	4 - Good
1 Jul 2013	Announced (short notice)	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	3 - Adequate Not assessed 4 - Good 3 - Adequate
16 Sep 2011	Unannounced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	6 - Excellent Not assessed 5 - Very good Not assessed
14 Oct 2008	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	5 - Very good Not assessed 5 - Very good 5 - Very good

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