FirstStop Quality Standards Framework

1. Introduction

Housing and care options advice and information services provide advice and information in relation to housing, care and related finance. A service definition is available at Appendix A. This requires a broad knowledge and understanding of housing, care and related financial options, locally and nationally, as well as knowledge of and use of information and advice sources including the EAC website.

This framework is a tool to monitor the quality of local and national housing and care options advice and information services. It can be a resource for self-assessment and external accreditation. It can be used for all types of interaction with customers - face to face, telephone, email and letter though it is primarily produced with face to face advice and casework in mind.

The framework is necessary to demonstrate to people who use the services, to funders and to other partners EAC/First Stop’s commitment to a quality service. It links well to other quality frameworks reflecting them in relation to organisational processes and procedures but also offers a distinctive approach by setting out and assessing what makes for a good quality housing and care options advice and information service.

2. The ingredients for a quality housing and care options information and advice service

There are a number of elements or domains that link together to provide a quality service. This includes good customer relationships and feedback mechanisms, the provision of accurate information and advice, good information and policies to support advisers and accurate record keeping.

The domains are: -

- 3.1 Advisers engage with customers in an appropriate manner – Engaging with customers
- 3.2 Customers are satisfied with the service provided and are helped to achieve their outcomes – Feedback from customers
- 3.3 Advice and information is appropriate and accurate (information is available to advisers to support this) – Accurate/appropriate information and advice
- 3.4 The correct action is taken including signposting/referral – Correct action taken
- 3.5 Policies and procedures, including service standards, are set up and followed – Policies, procedures and service standards for delivery
- 3.6 Accurate records are kept – Records
Organisations linked to national bodies such as Age UK and Foundations can be ‘passported’ from accreditation through Domain 3.1 and 3.6 given their own quality frameworks. However all local housing and care options advice and information services will be expected to meet the expectations in Domain 3.2 to 3.5 since these define the specific nature of the service.

The following section sets out the framework for assessing these domains and identifies evidence sources. *Appendix B provides the tools to undertake this assessment.*

3. The quality standards framework

3.1 Engaging with customers

Advisers should

- treat all customers with respect, understanding their specific needs and circumstances to tailor the response with a non-judgemental approach
- are familiar with the Equal Opportunities/Diversity Policy and understand how a customer’s circumstances might make access and communication difficult so respond appropriately
- give customers time to explain their situation and build trust and confidence
- ask appropriate questions to gain all the relevant information to assess needs and respond to requirements
- enable customers to explore and evaluate options and make informed choices
- reassure customers of their attention and empathy
- where appropriate, assure customers of confidentiality and privacy
- encourage customers to provide feedback on their experiences of the service

*Evidence*

Advisers understanding of these
Feedback from customers
Sitting in on casework sessions
Call monitoring where appropriate
Mystery shopping

3.2 Feedback from customers

A set of outcomes have been developed which would be expected for all customers. These should be explored with a sample of customers (minimum of 10% of closed cases) The aim should be to capture and record what the customer understood in relation to the service on offer and the impact of what was provided.

- **Confidence** - Has the service provided made the customer feel more confident in making informed decisions and choices in respect of their future housing and care options?
• **Knowledge** - Has the support given improved the customer’s knowledge of their housing and care options?

• **Understanding** - Has the service helped the customer to understand the housing and care options available and were they given a realistic assessment of their likely success in pursuing each option?

• **Independence** - Has the support given helped the customer feel more independent and generally improved their quality of life?

• **Aspirations** - Was the service helpful in enabling the customer to achieve their aspirations? Has the service helped them achieve what they wanted in terms of housing and care options?

• **Good decisions** - As a result of the service provided did the customer feel better able to make good decisions about their housing and care options?

• **Awareness** - As a result of the service provided does the customer feel more aware of what choices they can realistically make about their future housing and care options?

• **Satisfaction** - Was the customer satisfied with the support offered?

**Evidence**

*Policy and procedure for obtaining evidence of customer satisfaction*

*Records of customer feedback with regular reports to the organisation’s Director and Board including any changes implemented in response*

### 3.3 Accurate/appropriate information and advice

The housing and care options advice and information services provide advice and information in relation to housing, care and income. This requires a broad knowledge and understanding of housing, care and related financial options, locally and nationally, as well as knowledge of and use of information and advice sources including the EAC website. Advisers also need to know when to refer to more specialist services.

Advisers should

• Correctly identify what the customer wants

• Obtain sufficient information about the customer’s circumstances to enable information/advice to be given on the main/presenting issue and offer other options where appropriate. This would include consideration of their financial situation including income, capital and entitlements, health and care needs, mobility issues, existing home circumstances including tenure, accessibility and state of home and other relevant issues – such as family and friends, access to local services and social networks
- Obtain sufficient detail of all issues to enable information/advice to be given or signposting/referral made
- Provide a holistic approach covering housing, care, support and finance options
- Correctly discussed the customer’s rights and entitlements including housing and care related financial options and entitlements and made an appropriate referral so that people know how to claim, having explained how the customer’s circumstances might meet these and advising on any relevant deadlines
- Inform and explore the likely options for the customer and the prospects for achieving them, including realistic expectations of achieving them (including affordability.)
- Provide advice on all the options available to the customer including, where relevant, the pros and cons of each option. This would include a discussion of staying put or moving, any practical help required, access to care and support and financial services, issues of security and safety, repairs and maintenance of the home, access within and outside the home, moving options and implications¹
- Where relevant, give correct advice on any deadlines necessary to meet in order to pursue an option
- Correctly assessed whether further action is needed and by whom
- Offer an option to all customers to return for further advice and information

**Evidence**
- Customer records
- Accuracy of information on which advice is based
- Understanding and use of scripting – and other tools
- Up to date fact sheets/information sources covering all aspects of the service and a system for regular review
- Knowledge, use of and understanding of EAC website

### 3.4 Correct action taken

Advisers should

- Take action which is correct and appropriate to resolve the main or presenting problem and any other issues raised by the customer
- Record what the customer wants to achieve, any action s/he has already taken setting out a suitable pathway with a realistic view of the options including an appraisal of affordability
- If the adviser is unable to provide the relevant level of detailed advice required, but has provided some advice on the matter, they should make a signpost or referral to another appropriate source of help.

¹ A checklist has been developed to assess this (Appendix B3)
SIGNPOSTING - Where the adviser has identified that they cannot meet some of the client’s needs the client is helped to gain access to another source of help. The most appropriate source of further information or advice is identified and details of the relevant organisation or agency are given to the client in the most appropriate format – in writing or verbally.

REFERRAL - Where there is a need for another service to meet the client’s needs, as with sign-posting as described above, but where the adviser actively makes contact with an appropriate service, by telephone or in writing, to assist the client in accessing the support they need; this could include, for example, arranging an appointment for the client to meet an adviser in a partner organisation.

This would in the first instance be to another EAC / FirstStop resource where there is an appropriate service e.g. the web-site, an on-line tool, the shopping cart, a national or local partner. The whole range of potential EAC / FirstStop interactions should be considered as appropriate.

- Where a referral has been made, given the customer adequate information about what level of help to expect and how to prepare for the session with the organisation referred to

Evidence
Customer records
Referrals data

3.5 Policies, procedures and service standards for delivery

Local housing and care options advice services will have a set of policies and procedures to support the service.

Services should

- Operate a case management and recording system which includes relevant information to monitor the use of the service and respond effectively to further enquiries from customers
- Keep its information resources up to date including local and national organisations for signposting and referring relevant, for housing and care options advice and related issues such as finance and statutory rights.
- Have clear processed for signposting and referral to other appropriate national/local service providers, for example, referring to national FirstStop
- Provide advisers with access to technical advice guidance, training and support (which includes at least one person responsible for supervising advisors who is competent to do so and who is accessible to them)
- Publish service standards which set out the standards customers should expect

2 First Stop has published national service standards - see web reference to add
• Routinely check the day to day information and advice given by advisers, correcting or amending incomplete or incorrect advice provided at regular intervals
• Operate an internal ‘quality of information and advice’ assessment procedure for all enquiries based on the use of the First Stop checklist ³ and act on the findings
• Have professional indemnity insurance covering advice and information services

**Evidence**
Policy and procedures including on confidentiality, complaints and safeguarding
Written policy on signposting/referral
Up to date fact sheets and information sources covering all aspects of the information and advice service and a system for reviewing them regularly
Written procedures for producing timely up to date information about changes in rights, statutory entitlements and policy in relation to housing and care options
Arrangements for supervision and support for advisers
Staff training and development plans

### 3.6 Records

Advisers should

• Create and securely keep customer records
• Put key information on the customer record system ensuring that this recording does not detract from the interaction with the customer
• Ensure secure retention of and disposal of customer records.

**Evidence**
A well understood appropriate customer record system with simple guidance on completion

³ Appendix B3
FirstStop Local Partners

Service Definition - Housing and Care Options Advice Service

1 Overall aim

To support older people and their families to make informed choices about, and thereby exercise control over, their housing and related care and support options.

2 General

The service will provide free, independent, impartial information, advice and support, delivered both directly and through working with both local and national partners.

The advice, information and support will include the following core elements:

- Staying put
- Moving
- Finance including housing and care related welfare benefits and equity release as well as housing-related debt
- Other local relevant services which enable older people to continue to live independently.

3 Quality Assurance

i) Local FirstStop partners should have, or be working towards, a recognised quality accreditation both in terms of organisational effectiveness and the delivery of advice.

ii) Local FirstStop partners will be responsive to the needs and views of older people and actively seek to involve older people in service development and, where appropriate, in service delivery. Local FirstStop partners will actively seek feedback, both positive and negative, from users of their service and will use such feedback to continually monitor and develop the service.

4 Objectives

i) Information

- to provide information about older people’s housing & care options and sources of related advice and information for older people, volunteers, professionals and other interested parties

ii) Advice

- to provide comprehensive person-centred housing and care information and advice in response to individuals seeking advice about
their housing & care options, and the related financial implications of those choices

iii) Practical support and assistance
- to provide person-centred, individually tailored practical support and assistance to enable users of the service, as far as is practical, to implement their chosen housing & care option

iv) Partnership
- to deliver the above by working in partnership with EAC FirstStop
- to work with EAC FirstStop to develop information on local services which may support older people to implement their chosen housing & care option
- to develop partnerships with other relevant organisations and agencies including local housing and social service authorities, the health sector, and voluntary and community sector organisations, as well as national partners such as Independent Age, Age UK and Foundations in order to facilitate the delivery of a local comprehensive housing and care options advice service.

5 Service Delivery

The model of provision is based on a three level analysis of service user need/assistance (set out in the diagram below).

Level 1 - Information
This will usually be delivered on a 1: many basis to a local group or at a local event. Information may also be provided on a 1:1 basis by e-mail, letter or phone call. As well as providing older people with general information about their housing & care options, awareness would be raised concerning the
availability of the FirstStop website and telephone helpline and the local advice service.

**Level 2 – Advice**
One-to-one, single contact / intervention or provision of information and advice. These lighter-touch cases would be delivered primarily over the phone or at an advice surgery. They may also be delivered by letter or e-mail. They will typically involve some discussion of personal situation and tailored information provision about the enquirer’s housing and care options.

**Level 3 – Casework**
Individually tailored in-depth casework involving 1:1 advice, advocacy and practical assistance to enable the person, as far is practical, to achieve their chosen housing and care outcome. Likely to involve 2< interactions and working in partnership with other agencies to achieve the desired outcome.

**Relationship to the FirstStop national service**
There is an expectation that partnership projects will make referrals to FirstStop Advice and that conversely, FirstStop Advice will refer people who need one to one assistance to local partners.

**6 Anticipated outcomes**

The outcomes delivered by housing and care options advice services, working together with other partners both locally and nationally, are likely to include:

i) older people will be enabled to retain their independence in later life through making informed decisions about their accommodation and care arrangements.

ii) older people will be enabled to maintain good health and avoid accommodation-related acute health problems (eg. falls); will be enabled to delay or avoid unnecessary care home admission; will be enabled to avoid unnecessary delay in returning home after a period of hospitalisation.

iii) older people who wish to do so will be supported to downsize to more suitable accommodation.

iv) older people who wish to do so will be enabled to release equity safely and financially efficiently through down-sizing or through equity-release products.

iv) more effective use will be made of the supply of family-sized accommodation through supporting older people who wish to do so to move to more appropriately sized accommodation.

v) older people will have access to expert advice and services to adapt and repair their homes, improving their safety and quality of life, which will also contribute to the maintenance of the housing stock and to the local economy through increased expenditure on building work.
vi) older people will have access to information about local services and networks which will enable them to remain independent and active in their local community

vii) increased awareness and understanding about housing and care options in later life and where appropriate the training of older people to provide peer-to-peer information will encourage active citizenship and enable greater self reliance.

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Quality Standards Framework for First Stop local partners

Tools for self-assessment

Self-assessment

Self-assessment covers two areas

- individual advice work including the giving of information and casework (regular management quality audits are expected)
- the organisation (the completion of an organisational assessment annually)

Individual advice – adviser review – this should take place every six months on a half days work for each adviser. A manager should undertake these assessments by sitting in on advice sessions, listening to phone calls and checking case records. A proforma for this is included at Appendix B.1 and a checklist for undertaking assessment at Appendix B.3

Organisation – organisation review – this should be done annually with evidence provided (details of – and access to – key documents). A proforma for this is included at Appendix B.2
## Adviser review – one to one with a sample of adviser's casework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adviser (name)</th>
<th>Date of interaction</th>
<th>Case reference</th>
<th>Form completed by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

1. Were policies and procedures generally followed
   - Yes/No
   - Equal opportunities considered
     - Yes/No/
   - Confidentiality explained
     - Yes/No/NA
   - Feedback requested
     - Yes/No
   - Comments

2. Did the adviser engage with the customer appropriately?
   - Yes/No
   - (Section 3.1 Quality Standards)
   - Comments

3. Was the Information and Advice given appropriate and accurate?
   - Yes/No
   - (Section 3.3 Quality Standards – use checklist at Appendix B3)
   - Comments

4. Appropriate actions taken?
   - Yes/No
   - (Section 3.4 Quality Standards – use checklist at Appendix B3)
   - Comments

5. Is the information recorded in the customer record accurately
   - Yes/No
   - (Section 3.6 Quality Standards)
   - Comments

Any other comments

Advisor comments
## Organisation Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Org name</th>
<th>Date of review</th>
<th>General comment</th>
<th>Form completed by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Case management and recording system in place</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comments and evidence submitted</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Up to date resources and systems in place to update</strong></td>
<td>Yes/No/Partial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comments and evidence submitted</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process for signposting/referral in place and used</strong></td>
<td>Yes/No/Partial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comments and evidence submitted</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Service standards in place and updated regularly</strong></td>
<td>Yes/No/Partial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comments and evidence submitted</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regular checking system for advisers in place</strong></td>
<td>Yes/No/Partial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comments and evidence submitted</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal quality info/advice audits in place</strong></td>
<td>Yes/No/Partial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comments and evidence submitted</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(summary of three monthly audits of advisers casework expected)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has feedback been sought from customers on a regular basis?</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments and evidence submitted – copies of customer feedback reports and action</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is there professional indemnity insurance covering the service?</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation comments</th>
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</table>
Checklist to assess that advisers have provided a holistic service – Housing, care and finance advice and information
(See Sections 3 and 4 of adviser review pro forma)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adviser name</th>
<th>Date of interaction</th>
<th>Case reference</th>
<th>Form completed by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. Issues that need to be clarified/considered in relation to the customer’s circumstances and wants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Addressed?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clear of tenure and security (no risk of homelessness)</td>
<td>Yes/No/NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking to stay put/ move</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well networked and happy in neighbourhood/ family/friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing in current location/home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any long term conditions/disability/health /care issues and worries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>about home situation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility and mobility issues home/ neighbourhood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing home and garden where appropriate – e.g. disrepair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care and support needed/sought (hands on care/practical support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any financial worries/expected costs/debts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income and capital available now – and in future</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General incomings and outgoings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request/offer to review finances/ increase income</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request/offer help in managing money</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comment

2. Staying at home (preferred or only current option)

Options addressed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Addressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Repairs and adaptations</td>
<td>Yes/No/NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decorating, gardening and practical jobs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security and safety</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology/telecare options</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heating and insulation help</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help at home, care at home, family and other support/links</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links to/access to local activities and services</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Equity release</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Home share</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of HOOP tool</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Comment**

### 3. Moving

**Options addressed**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Addressed?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussed push and pull factors – Hoop tool</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream (downsizing or relocate)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist housing (rent/buy)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care home including care home funding issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other - including specialist housing and/or care for people with dementia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pros and cons including financial implications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interim arrangements while planning to move</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help with moving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comment**

### 4. Care options

**Options addressed**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Addressed?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Care at home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day care</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Care in a care home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person centred care and direct payments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Care assessment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Care funding</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Support for family carers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mental capacity issues addressed</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Mental capacity issues addressed**

| **Comment** |
Support options – practical help

Comment

## 5. Financial options

### Options addressed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Addressed?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General benefits and entitlement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing benefits including council tax benefits</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Benefits/help with funding care</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other options – travel concessions, TV license concessions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax code correct?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Have savings/investments and need an investment review/access to</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>independent financial advice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget management – use of Money Made Clear tools?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy issues and ‘deals’</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Comment