INTRODUCTION

The overall aim of Supporting People (SP) strategy is to commission housing support services that improve the quality of life and independence of vulnerable people and that are in line with service users’ needs and aspirations.

The Quality Assessment Framework (QAF) is a critical element of the Quality and Monitoring Toolkit, as outlined in Briefing Paper 1, ‘The Monitoring and Review of SP Services’. The QAF places significant emphasis on the accurate assessment of eligibility prior to the applicant being admitted to the service. On moving into the service, an assessment of need in respect of each individual is an important first step in ensuring that the service reflects each service users’ needs. A risk assessment should also be carried out at this initial stage.

This briefing paper focuses on the assessment and review of needs and risk in relation to the delivery of the housing support service rather than the delivery of accommodation.
Core objective 1 of the QAF prescribes that:

“The eligibility of service users are assessed on a consistent and comprehensive basis prior to a service being offered”

As an initial step to delivering an effective housing support service, it is important that the service ensures that it is the most appropriate for the applicant’s needs.

Where there is a key partner agency, this can be achieved through developing and documenting a clear agreement of eligibility criteria and referral processes. Where there is no partner agency, for example where services operate a self referral system, the referral process should be clearly documented so that both applicants to the service and staff know the appropriate procedures. The service should also develop, and train staff in the use of, an eligibility assessment tool. This will vary according to the specific needs of the client group and the support that the service can provide.

To ensure consistency and ensure fair access to services, it is important that the findings and outcome of all assessments are documented and filed.
NEEDS AND RISK ASSESSMENT

Core objective 1 of the QAF prescribes that:

“Assessments of Needs and Risk are carried out for all service users. Processes place service users’ views at the centre, are managed by skilled staff and involve carers and/or other professionals if service users wish”

The priority given to needs and risk assessment is based on the premise that the delivery of all supported housing services should be planned and delivered in a way that suits the needs of the individual and reflects their aspirations.

The range of needs of people using SP services are varied and disparate. Subsequently the range of services included in the programme varies greatly in their shape and focus and there is no standard needs and risk assessment that will suit all services. There are, however, some common basic principles to guide the assessment process.

PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE THE NEEDS AND RISK ASSESSMENT

Clear aims and objectives

The Needs and Risk Assessment should reflect the overall aims of the housing support service; the nature and level of the housing support offered; the level of risk which the service can manage and the needs of the specific client. In consultation with the service user, the service provider should identify and prioritise specific areas of need and risk around which an effective support plan can then be developed. Assessments should identify both short and long term needs.

*For example, a night shelter providing short-term support is likely to address the emergency accommodation needs of the service user, with the secondary aim of helping the individual secure more permanent accommodation. In a crisis situation it is likely that the support provider is going to be more proactive, particularly in the initial stages.*

Empowering the individual

Each needs and risk assessment should acknowledge the specific requirements, of the individual, and recognise their strengths as well as areas where they need support.

In order for the needs assessment to be effective the service user should, where possible, have a sense of ownership. This could be promoted by, for example, ensuring that the service user and/or their representatives take part
in the assessment process and have access, when appropriate, to assessment records.

Personal safety needs and the risks presented by and to the individual should also be considered.

**Involving the service user**

The most effective way of empowering the individual service user is by involving them at every step. The assessment of needs and, when appropriate of risks, should reflect their own views and understanding as participation tends to encourage individuals to take more ownership and responsibility for decisions that are made. For example, service users could carry out a scored self-assessment of their needs. This could be compared with a similar assessment carried out by their support worker. Then an agreed set of needs could be drawn up, based around the discussion of each person’s views. Where appropriate, a similar approach could be adopted when assessing risk.

Providers may, on occasion, find it difficult to encourage service users to become involved. The following guidelines may be useful in these circumstances:

- **Explain** the process of needs and risk assessment clearly
- **Describe** its purpose
- **Recognise** the service user’s current situation e.g. does he/she have needs around financial security or housing that need to be met before other considerations?
- **Be aware** of any cultural, social & racial issues
- **Avoid** jargon and use acceptable language e.g. some people may prefer to use the term ‘help’ rather than ‘support’.
- **Use other means** to establish preferences and dislikes when a person has communication difficulties e.g. facilitated communication, video, audio, and graphics
- **Describe** any restrictions on choice and freedom imposed by a specialist programme.
- **Explain** what needs the service can and can’t help the service user with.
- **Meet** at a venue where the person feels comfortable.
- **Give** the person a copy of the needs and risk assessment, where appropriate, or discuss and agree where copies are to be kept.
- **Explain** and **discuss** confidentiality and agree who has access to the needs assessment.
- **Review** the needs and risk assessment on a regular basis, against which process can be recorded and new goals set.
Any individual needs and risk assessment should follow four stages:

1. Carry out and document an initial assessment of need
2. Carry out and document an assessment of risk
3. Review of progress and reassessment of needs and risk, within a regular, specified time
4. Link review findings to Support Plan and set new goals and tasks

This is a cyclical process that should be ongoing for as long as the client continues to use the service.

1. Assessing Individual Need in Relation to the Service Available.

The needs assessment aims to identify the needs and aspirations of the service user. The initial needs assessment should begin within a short period (1 or 2 days) of the person being accepted / admitted to the service.

As previously stated, the assessment of need should reflect the overall aims of the service and the type and level of support that can be provided.

As an example, the following might be discussed with a person being admitted to a direct access hostel:

- Safety, security, health and well being
- Managing money, benefits and entitlements
- Ability to manage daily living tasks
- Support on emotional and personal issues
- Education, employment and training
- Practical issues
- Permanent accommodation needs

In general the following good practice is recommended to providers of supported housing services.

- Needs assessment should reflect the aims of the particular housing support service
- The areas for assessment of need and goal setting should reflect the areas of support available within that service (e.g. maintaining the safety of the building, daily living skills, help with budgeting etc.)
• The person receiving support should set their own objectives with the support and guidance of his or her support worker
• Where possible and if appropriate the service user should write his or her own needs assessment
• The service user has the right and choice to share his or her needs assessment with whomever they choose

2. Assessing Risk

For new service users, an initial risk assessment should be carried out at the same time as the assessment of need, (within 1 or 2 days. The service’s approach to the assessment of risk and the procedures involved should be clearly documented. Again, content and format will vary between schemes, but all risk assessments should:

• Identify all potential risks to the individual, staff, other service users and any other groups;
• List the means by which each of these risks could be controlled: for example, epilepsy could be identified as a risk to the service user and others and the controls might include First Aid training for staff and ensuring that the resident was aware of the need to take medication;
• Rank the probability / severity of risk, for example in terms of high, medium or low;
• Contain dates or identify situations when a review is to be carried out.

3. Reviewing Progress

Needs
The review is the time to assess how things are going and the progress made. In short term services the review should be carried out, at least, on a monthly basis. In long term services the interval between reviews will depend on the level of vulnerability and needs of the service users. It should also be made clear that service users can ask for more regular or frequent meetings to discuss their needs and particular issues. Also that a review should take place if there are significant changes to the individual’s circumstances and/or needs.

The review should become the main tool to record progress on the issues being addressed. It should reflect the same areas as the initial needs assessment and support plan.

Risk
Intervals between reviews of risk will also depend on the client group and the needs and vulnerability of individual service users. General guidance would
suggest that risk assessments should be reviewed after each particular incident, each critical incident and at least annually, in long term services. In short term services, risk should be reviewed on a more frequent basis as appropriate.

4. **Agreeing Next Steps**

The review presents the opportunity to review progress and identify new areas of need which can then be used to reframe or refocus the Support Plan; for example to identify new aims and goals or try different ways to achieve these.
### Checklist

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREA</th>
<th>CHECKLIST</th>
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<tr>
<td>Needs and Risk</td>
<td>Clear aims and objectives for the service Explain the needs and risk assessment processes to the service user. Engage the service user in the process” With the service user assess their needs in relation to the housing support service available. Identify strengths as well as areas of need Identify inhibiting factors and enabling factors. Sign and date the needs assessment. Agree with the service user how and where the needs and risk assessments are to be stored. A formal risk assessment process should be included as part of the assessment process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>Develop Support Plan based on the needs and risks identified. Keep progress under review and adjust Support Plan in the light of developments or new information.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review the Needs</td>
<td>Reassess - Formally assess progress - Identify new needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next Steps</td>
<td>Sign and date needs and risk assessments. Set next review date. Link to Support Plan: set new goals, timescales, and responsibilities.</td>
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The policy should outline the aims and principles of the organisation’s approach to needs and risk assessments. The procedure should outline the practice, style and methods to be followed by staff in implementing and reviewing individual needs and risk assessments.

The format of needs and risk assessments should reflect the SP eligible housing support tasks carried out by the service.

It is possible that policy and procedures around service user involvement and participation need to be updated to reflect the needs and risk assessment process.

**Preparation for QAF**

Core objective 1 in the QAF specifies the standards associated with needs and risk assessment. There is also a comprehensive list of evidence requirements that demonstrate the standards are being achieved. SP providers are encouraged to acknowledge these in developing or adapting the organisation’s policy and procedure in relation of needs and risk assessment.

**Staff awareness and training**

It is imperative that staff involved in the process of needs and risk assessment are competent and have the necessary skills to deliver this process with the requisite care and diligence.

In this context it may be necessary to revisit training needs assessments for staff and to tailor training and development plans accordingly.

**CONTACTS / FURTHER SUPPORT**

The SP team have produced this briefing paper to assist you in developing needs assessment and support planning processes. In addition you can contact the SP team at supportingpeople@nihe.gov.uk or visit the Supporting People section of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive’s (NIHE) website at www.nihe.gov.uk.
A number of additional briefings have been produced by the SP Team and are available on the SP Supporting People section of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive’s (NIHE) website, [www.nihe.gov.uk](http://www.nihe.gov.uk).

- Monitoring & Review of Supporting People services
- The Quality Assessment Framework
- The Provider Accreditation Process
- Contract Monitoring
- Needs and Risk Assessment
- Support Planning
- Security, Health & Safety
- Protection From Abuse
- Fair Access, Diversity & Inclusion
- Complaints