The Midlothian Health & Homelessness Steering Group was formed in 2016 in response to a need identified by the Midlothian Health and Social Care Partnership Strategic Plan (2016 – 2019). Health, housing, and homelessness were recognised as priority areas for further investigation and action within the Partnership’s broader responsibility to addressing health inequalities in Midlothian.

The Steering Group, membership of which includes NHS Lothian and Midlothian Council staff, was tasked with improving integrated work involving health and homelessness services to both prevent and ensure provisions meet the needs of people and families in Midlothian. Conversations at a professional forum in June 2016 informed the development of our action plan’s four main objectives:

- Improve local evidence base on the health needs of people who experience homelessness
- Through integrated work involving health and homelessness services, maximise opportunities to prevent homelessness
- Review and improve health (and other health-related) service provision to ensure it meets the needs of people and families who have experienced homelessness
- Integrate health and homelessness into the Midlothian Housing Strategy

Numerous projects are currently underway to support these objectives. A small grant has been received to explore a patient pathway from the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh to local services to prevent homelessness should hospital staff become aware that a patient’s living situation is unstable. Training has also been developed to support health and social care staff in identifying clients at risk of homelessness and initiating a referral to the Midlothian Housing Options team.

We are currently conducting interviews with local organisations and individuals with experience of homelessness to better understand their health needs and to identify early intervention and prevention opportunities. Linked health and homelessness data will be analysed alongside stakeholder consultation findings to inform recommendations for future service delivery in Midlothian. The overarching questions guiding the consultation are:

1. What are the health needs of people who experience homelessness in Midlothian?
2. What are the impacts of homelessness on health and wellbeing, and vice-versa?
3. What are the opportunities and barriers to supporting individuals at risk of becoming homeless in Midlothian?
4. What current supports and services are working well, which need improvement, and where are the gaps?

Given the midpoint position of our work, the Midlothian Health & Homelessness Steering Group would be pleased to submit a report to the Local Government and Communities Committee outlining our findings and recommendations from the above projects in Autumn 2017. Our findings and recommendation are anticipated to have relevance nationally.