



GLASGOW'S HOUSING EMERGENCY

Key points:

- This is a national housing emergency which manifests itself differently in local authorities across Scotland.
- The homelessness system in Glasgow is at breaking point with rights breaches once more becoming increasingly routine after years of improving practice.
- Large increases in the numbers of households and households with children in temporary accommodation.
- Live homelessness cases rising consistently each year.
- The lack of social housing means that people are struggling to move on from temporary accommodation into permanent homes.
- Glasgow can and must do more to tackle the housing emergency.

The national context

Scotland is in the grip of a devastating housing emergency which is damaging the lives and opportunities of thousands of people from every community in the country. This is a national problem - the result of decades of underinvestment in social housing and austerity policies, exacerbated by increasing pressures caused by the pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, and the war in Ukraine.

It is not just Shelter Scotland warning of a broken and failing housing system. The Scottish Housing Regulator's recent report stated the homelessness system is at risk of 'systemic failure'¹. The Accounts Commission's report warned that housing and homelessness services are at risk² and SOLACE has essentially declared a housing emergency³.

Whilst the housing emergency affects different parts of Scotland in different ways, it is a shared challenge. This briefing sets out what this national housing emergency looks like in Glasgow, and why the council must take action and declare a housing emergency.

Increasing homelessness

The latest statistics show large increases in the numbers of live homelessness cases:

- 5,237 live homelessness cases, a 14% increase compared to the year before.
- The number of live cases has increased in each year since March 2018 and is now 44% higher than the number of 3,639 in March 2019.

While the number of homelessness applications and assessments both declined in the most recent annual statistics for 2022/23, as well as the number of children associated with homelessness assessments, the ever-increasing number of live homelessness cases in the

¹ Scottish Housing Regulator (2023), [Homelessness Services in Scotland: A Thematic Review](#)

² Accounts Commission (2023), [Local Government in Scotland](#)

³ SOLACE (2023), [Housing in Scotland: Current Context and Preparing for the Future](#)

system shows there is a backlog and increasing pressure on the system even if the number of assessments was moving in the right direction.

People are becoming stuck in the homelessness system, and the well-reported issues with homelessness services that have emerged in recent months⁴ show that this situation has not improved since the end of the last statistical period in March 2023.

The situation is likely to rapidly deteriorate over the winter, with an expectation that people fleeing violence and persecution being forced to leave Home Office accommodation and entering the homelessness system. British Red Cross figures show there are currently 4,627 people in asylum accommodation in the city, and the number of people requiring support over the winter is likely to run into the thousands. Glasgow's housing emergency is longstanding but has been exacerbated recently by Home Office policy. People who have come to Glasgow seeking sanctuary are among the many victims of the Housing Emergency in Glasgow.

Testimony from frontline staff

Every day our advisers hear from frontline council staff about how bad the situation is in the city. These hardworking and dedicated members of staff want to do their best for those seeking help, but simply do not have the resources to do so. It is having a detrimental impact on the mental health of staff both inside and outside the council. In recent months, frontline staff have told us:

"This is the worst situation I've experienced here."

"The pressure is making us feel horrible – it's really hard telling people there is no accommodation."

"We have had to tell 20 people already today there is no accommodation for them."

"We don't want to lose all the progress that we have made."

Housing rights are not being upheld.

The increasing pressure on homelessness services means that Glasgow City Council is often unable to meet its legal duties to households applying as homeless.

The official statistics show that in 2022/23 there were:

- 190 instances of a household being kept in TA which was deemed by law to be unsuitable to their needs (in breach of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order).

However, there are known issues with the recording of these statistics, and so they are likely an undercount and don't give an accurate picture of the scale of the problem.

A recent report to the city's HSCP⁵ added that, **as of 1st April 2023, 504 households were in temporary bed and breakfast accommodation that is in breach of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order.** We know from our services that the situation is much worse than the official statistics show.

This is particularly true for instances of households entitled to Temporary Accommodation not being offered it.

⁴ BBC News, [Glasgow faces rough sleeping rise after funding reduced, charity warns](#) (July 2023)

⁵ Glasgow City Integration Joint Board, [Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan Service Developments 2023/24](#) (May 2023)

While the official figure was fewer than four, we know from our own services that this has increased dramatically in recent months, with the situation as bad as it has been for many years.

This is manifesting itself in our services seeing rough sleeping levels we have not experienced since before the pandemic.

Case study: Gatekeeping and rough sleeping

Recently, one of our clients had their homelessness application in the city refused, despite being legally entitled to being accommodated.

Our client became homeless after fleeing violence, and arrived in the city seeking temporary accommodation. The council refused to accommodate, and instead offered our client travel to return to another city and did not accept the homelessness application, despite our client, who suffers a physical disability, having nowhere else to go. This was a breach of our client's housing rights, and resulted in them being forced to sleep rough. Only after Shelter Scotland intervened was the rights framework followed and the council eventually took up their full duty to provide accommodation. Our client said they felt "illegal" and could not understand why the council would not help him when he had nowhere else to stay.

Case study: Gatekeeping and rough sleeping

Another client was refused temporary accommodation despite being entitled to it.

When the client contacted us, they were sleeping in an out-of-use caravan without electricity, water or heating, after the council had initially refused his homelessness application. We assisted them in making an application, but the client was told there was no accommodation. Only after a solicitor intervened some days later was accommodation offered.

Temporary accommodation

The increasing demand on temporary accommodation in the city, combined with a lack of social housing for people to move on to, means that the system is beyond breaking point.

On 31 March 2023 there were record numbers of households and children living in temporary accommodation in Glasgow:

- 3,207 households living in temporary accommodation (TA), this is a 7% increase compared to the year before.
- 1,175 households with children living in temporary accommodation, an 8% increase compared to March 2022.
- 2,855 children living in temporary accommodation, this is a 1% increase compared to the year before.

For cases closed in 2022/23 households spent on average 219 days in temporary accommodation, up 12% from the 196 days the year before. Households whose application was still open on 31 March 2023 had spent 332 days on average in temporary accommodation by that date. 260 households whose homeless application was still open on 31 March 2023 had been in temporary accommodation for 3 or more years.

Households with children are more likely to spend longer in TA than those without. For cases closed in 2022/23 households with children in Glasgow spent on average 321 days in temporary accommodation.

For households with children currently still living in TA in Glasgow, 43% have been living there for over a year, 21% for over 2 years and 13% for over 3 years. 160 households with children whose homeless application was still open on 31 March 2023 had been in TA for over 3 years.

Lack of social housing

The key structural solution to the housing emergency is delivering social housing. Building and buying enough social homes can help to clear the backlog in temporary accommodation and give people the secure, settled homes from which they can thrive.

According to Glasgow City Council's own Strategic Housing Investment Plan⁶, the council aims to deliver over 1000 social homes per year on average up to 2029. Only 737 social homes were completed in the city in 2022/23, while only 29 were started in the first quarter of 2023/24. The city is behind schedule in delivering on its own building targets.

Recent papers presented to the city's HSCP⁷ suggest that the number of social lets going to homeless households continues to lag far behind what is necessary. The HSCP target is for 4,500 lets (60%) to go to homeless households – however, in 2022/23, this figure was around 2,800 (~37%), and reaching around 47.5% in the most recent published statistics for this year⁸. The HSCP also acknowledges difficulties in bringing void properties back into use, failing to make full use of existing stock.

Case study: Trapped in Unsuitable Temporary Accommodation

Our client has been unable to access temporary accommodation which meets their needs, or a permanent social home.

Our client is a single mother with 5 children, and they were initially accommodated in a single hotel room in Glasgow city centre. Only after Shelter Scotland intervened were the family offered an additional hotel room. This remains a wholly unsuitable situation for the family, who remain forced to live in a city centre hotel that clearly does not meet the needs of the household.

This situation has been caused by the lack of social homes in the city, with families like this one facing prolonged spells in so-called 'temporary' accommodation as there is nowhere else for the council to house them.

Declare a housing emergency

Clearly "business as usual" is not working, an emergency situation requires an emergency response. Glasgow City Council must declare a housing emergency and prioritise action by mobilising existing resources, re-evaluating current approaches, and advocating for additional resources to effectively address the challenges.

⁶ Glasgow City Council, [Strategic Housing Investment Plan 2024/25 – 2028/29](#).

⁷ Glasgow City Integration Joint Board, [Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan Service Developments 2023/24](#) (May 2023)

⁸ Glasgow City Council, City Administration Committee Report, [Impact of Home Office Decisions via Streamlined Asylum Process Update](#) (November 2023)