



## **SHELTER SCOTLAND WRITTEN EVIDENCE: HOUSING TO 2040, LOCAL GOVERNMENT, HOUSING AND PLANNING COMMITTEE, 27 FEBRUARY 2024**

Shelter Scotland exists to defend the right to a safe home and fight the devastating impact the housing emergency has on people and society. We work in communities to understand the problem and change the system. We run national campaigns to fight for home.

We are grateful to have the opportunity to respond to the Committee's inquiry into the Scottish Government's Housing to 2040 strategy. We are now nearly a quarter of the way through this 20-year strategy and we are deeply concerned about the current direction of travel.

Scotland is failing to live up to the aspirations outlined in Housing to 2040, and recent budget cuts suggest the government does not plan to provide the level of investment needed to fix the broken and biased housing system in this country.

### **Key messages**

- **We are in a housing emergency, and that requires an emergency response from government.**
- There is consensus across the housing and homelessness sector and beyond **that business as usual will not address the exceptional levels of homelessness** and housing unaffordability people in Scotland are currently experiencing.
- **We no longer have confidence in the government's ability to deliver the ambitions outlined in Housing to 2040.**
- Recent interventions from the Scottish Housing Regulator, ALACHO, SOLACE and others have made clear the scale of the challenge our local authorities face, with **homelessness systems across the country now experiencing systemic failure.**
- The **130% increase in the number of children stuck in temporary accommodation** since 2014 is a national scandal and reversing this trend should be the government's priority.
- The Scottish Government's decision to make **massive cuts to the housing budget** suggests they do not view the record numbers of children and families left without a place to call home as something that requires urgent action.
- **Local authorities must be given the support and resources they need** to uphold housing rights and prevent homelessness services from failing.

We have always said that the ambitions outlined in Housing to 2040 are to be supported and the engagement undertaken to develop that long-term strategy was the right approach. However, we are deeply concerned with the severe lack of progress being made on delivering these ambitions, and it is bitterly disappointing to see that on almost every metric – whether that is social housing supply or homelessness – things are getting worse rather than better.

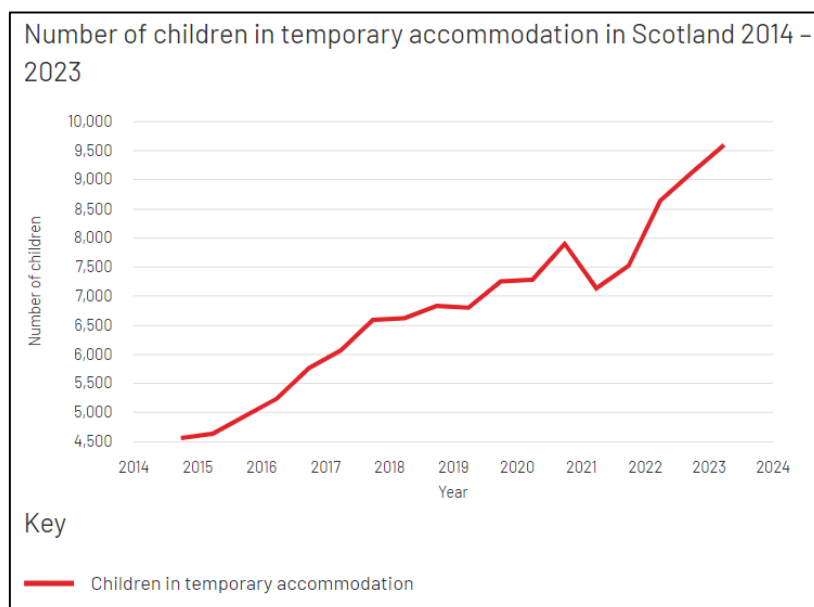
The Scottish Government must acknowledge that we are in a Housing Emergency and provide the support and resources needed to tackle it now, or Housing to 2040 truly will be dead in the water.

## Scotland's Housing Emergency

Scotland is in the grip of a devastating housing emergency which damages lives every single day.

- A record **9,595 children trapped in temporary accommodation** – up 130% since 2014.
- **45 children become homeless every day.**
- A **household becomes homeless every 16 minutes.**
- A **10% increase** in households becoming homeless compared to last year.
- Local Authority homelessness services are busier than ever, with record numbers of open homelessness applications.
- Couples with children spend just under **a year trapped in temporary accommodation**, on average<sup>1</sup>
- Routine **failure by local authorities** to uphold housing rights.
- A **failure to deliver the social homes** we urgently need and a significant slowdown in new social housing developments in the last year.
- Private **rents continuing to rise** despite emergency legislation, and household incomes and the UK Government's **Local Housing Allowance rates are failing to keep pace.**
- Warnings of **a broken and failing housing system** from the Scottish Housing Regulator<sup>2</sup>, the Accounts Commission<sup>3</sup>, and the Scottish Government's own expert Task and Finish Group on Temporary Accommodation<sup>4</sup>
- **Local Authority Chief Executives have stated<sup>5</sup> Scotland is experiencing a housing emergency** and emergency action must be forthcoming.
- A government willing to prioritise other areas of public spending over providing safe, secure homes for children.

This is an emergency that damages health, wellbeing, education and the economy, and leaves tens of thousands of people without anywhere to call home. It is **a national scandal.**



<sup>1</sup> Scottish Government (2023), [Homelessness in Scotland 2022/23](#).

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Housing Regulator (2023), [Homelessness Services in Scotland: A Thematic Review](#)

<sup>3</sup> Accounts Commission (2023), [Local Government in Scotland](#)

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Government (2023), [Temporary Accommodation Task and Finish Group: final report and recommendations](#)

<sup>5</sup> SOLACE (2023), [Housing in Scotland: Current Context and Preparing for the Future](#)

## Delivering Housing to 2040

The Scottish Government's Housing to 2040 strategy has much in it that we supported. The aims and ambitions of a fairer housing system which helps to tackle inequality, tackle poverty, grow the economy, improve health and education outcomes and reduce homelessness are obviously to be applauded. However, the crucial part was always going to be delivering on the strategy, and unfortunately on almost every metric things are getting worse, not better.

**The Scottish Government has no chance of meeting the ambitions and policies within this Strategy – from good placemaking to Housing First to delivering an enforceable human right to adequate housing – without sufficient good quality social homes.** However, since this strategy was published in 2021, the government has chosen to slash the Affordable Housing Supply Programme budget, most recently in the 2024/25 draft budget.

We believe that this budget cut fatally undermines the wider Housing to 2040 strategy. Without an adequate supply of homes, most crucially social homes, the rest of the ambitions within the strategy are unachievable. The government itself puts affordable housing supply at the centre of its strategy, and the Housing to 2040 document admits that delivering the ambitions will be expensive.<sup>6</sup>

**For the government to continue arguing that the Strategy is achievable while cutting the budget so severely over the last two years is simply unrealistic.**

It is not just us warning of this failure. Recent reports from the Scottish Housing Regulator, ALACHO, SOLACE, the Accounts Commission, the Scottish Government's own expert Task and Finish Group on Temporary Accommodation, and recent declarations of Housing Emergencies in Argyll and Bute, Edinburgh, and Glasgow, have all showed that things are heading in the wrong direction and urgent action is needed to get people out of the homelessness system, never mind to help meet the Housing to 2040 ambitions. It appears that the Scottish Government has chosen to ignore these warnings.

If homelessness is allowed to continue increasing and the social housing supply programme is left to wither away, delivery of the longer-term Housing to 2040 strategy may as well be considered a pipedream.

### **Deliver the social homes we need**

Without sufficient good quality social homes across Scotland, we will not meet anti-poverty targets, tackle health inequalities, close the attainment gap, reduce homelessness, or alleviate the significant strain on local services. The Housing to 2040 strategy notes many of these things as being aided by increasing affordable housing supply, as well as the economic benefits in terms of jobs and investment in communities.

However, the government is failing to deliver new social homes at the rate required to reduce housing need, with budget cuts for next year set to see new supply decline even more sharply.

**Year-on-year budget cuts have resulted in a steep fall in both starts and approvals of new social homes (down 29% and 18% respectively in the most recent statistics<sup>7</sup>)** – and without those homes the housing emergency is only going to get worse with more people trapped in temporary accommodation for longer, and more people unable to have their housing rights upheld.

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<sup>6</sup> Scottish Government (2021) [Housing to 2040](#), p.8.

<sup>7</sup> Scottish Government (2023), [Housing Statistics for Scotland Quarterly Update to end September 2023](#).

We raised our concerns with the Finance Secretary<sup>8</sup> ahead of the budget and called on her to ensure that the Affordable Housing Supply Programme was at a minimum protected. **The Scottish Government has no hope of meeting its statutory child poverty targets if it continues to look to the social housing supply budget for savings** at every opportunity.

We are devastated that these calls, from ourselves and partners from across the housing, homelessness and anti-poverty sectors, have fallen on deaf ears, with housing pretty much singled-out for cuts in the 2024/25 draft budget. **To cut the housing supply budget by 26% in cash terms is a staggering decision by the Scottish Government, particularly when the overall capital budget is only falling by 4% in real terms.**<sup>9</sup>

The government knows the consequences of this decision for the supply programme and Housing to 2040, and the knock-on impact that has on the economy, jobs, poverty, homelessness, health, education and more. It suggests that they are not prepared to stand behind their own Housing to 2040 strategy, a feeling further confirmed by their early review of the 10-year housing supply target.

This target, 100,000 in Housing to 2040 and increased to 110,000 in the Bute House Agreement, isn't just a target for the sake of it. The success of the wider housing strategy, and efforts to fix the broken and biased housing system, rest on the government delivering enough homes in the coming years. To cut this target following the budget cut undermines the rest of their Housing to 2040 strategy. A cut budget and a likely cut target suggests the government no longer has faith in its own Housing strategy.

## Equalities

The **unequal impact of the housing emergency** in Scotland continues to devastate lives and the Scottish Government has a responsibility to ensure everyone – no matter their race, ethnicity, disability, gender or sexual identity – is able to access a home that meets their needs.

For too many people, this is simply not the case at present – and stretched homelessness services are struggling to ensure the diverse needs of our communities are met. Recent homelessness statistics showed that the majority of homeless households have at least one identified support need (such as mental or physical ill-health, disability or medical condition), while **African households spend longer trapped in temporary accommodation and the homelessness system than people from other backgrounds**. Even at the sharp end of the housing emergency, racial inequality continues to play a part in outcomes for households.

Recent research commissioned by Shelter Scotland into the role of race in housing in Scotland<sup>10</sup> made a number of recommendations, and **we urge the Scottish Government to use the budget process to make progress on these recommendations**. In particular, the Scottish Government must play a leadership role in delivering the social homes we need and ensuring these are able to meet the needs of a diverse population, and help build capacity within social landlords to ensure staff have the training and resources they need to better meet the needs of their tenants.

Housing to 2040 will not meet its ambitions unless more action is taken to tackle the wider broken and biased housing system in this country. Housing to 2040 talks admirably on these

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<sup>8</sup> Shelter Scotland (2023), [Letter to Cabinet Secretary for Finance, 12 September 2023](#)

<sup>9</sup> Scottish Fiscal Commission (2023), [Scotland's Economic and Fiscal Forecasts](#), p.6.

<sup>10</sup> Menezes, D., Netto, G., and Hasan, S. (Shelter Scotland) (2023), [Minoritised Ethnic Access to Social Housing in Scotland at Key Transition Points](#).

issues, but we are unfortunately yet to see significant progress, and this has real-life consequences for far too many people across Scotland.

It is also **vital for homes to be able to meet the needs of everyone in our communities** – whether that means ensuring homes are designed sensitively to different cultural needs, or ensuring that they can be adapted to enable people to live independently in their homes for as long as they wish to do so. The adaptations commitment is an important commitment within the Housing to 2040 strategy and one that must be factored into any long-term plan for our housing system given the demographic challenges that we face now and will face into the future.

This is why once again we find it baffling that this area of the housing budget has also been cut for 2024/25. This will simply mean **more people living in homes that do not meet their needs for longer**, and again does not live up to the ambitions outlined in the Housing to 2040 strategy. It is again **hard to see how the government itself can remain committed to this strategy without putting the funding behind any substantial part of it.**

Another crucial element of the current failing-housing system is the lack of family sized homes being brought forward. This is obviously due to a combination of factors, but was a key element of why the Scottish Government's Task and Finish group on temporary accommodation called for a National Acquisition Programme, to enable more homes of the right size to be brought into the social housing system more quickly to help clear the backlog in temporary accommodation. It is no coincidence that the numbers of families with children stuck in temporary accommodation has skyrocketed in recent years – we simply haven't seen the delivery of enough 'family-sized' homes to meet the needs of this cohort.

Any cut to the overall supply budget will of course result in fewer of this kind of home being delivered – and the long-term impact of slowing down delivery for families stuck in temporary accommodation is massive. You can't solve child poverty without solving child homelessness. You can't solve child homelessness without social homes.

Sustained cuts to the housing budget are simply undermining any hope of delivering the ambitions in Housing to 2040.

### **Safe homes**

We note the committee's ongoing interest in issues such as damp and mould, and we were pleased to have the chance to give evidence on this issue last year. The written and oral evidence we provided at that time still stands, and we are happy to draw committee's attention to that once again<sup>11</sup>.

As with so much of the Housing to 2040 strategy, ensuring homes are suitable, safe and liveable, at the heart of vibrant communities, comes back to the need to fix the structure of our broken and biased housing system. To do that, and to deliver for everyone across the country, not just those living in temporary accommodation or trapped in the homelessness system, requires the delivery of more social homes. That is the structural solution we need, and that is the bedrock of everything else contained within Housing to 2040.

If we don't achieve that, and we see cuts to the social housing supply budget year after year after year, then we have no hope of Housing to 2040's laudable aims becoming a reality.

**For further information, please contact [David\\_Aitchison@shelter.org.uk](mailto:David_Aitchison@shelter.org.uk)**

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<sup>11</sup> Shelter Scotland written evidence, [Damp and Mould, LGHP Committee](#), April 2023.