



A Shelter Scotland report:
*Progress and Drift: A review of
the Homelessness Task Force
Recommendations*

From the Shelter Scotland policy library

February 2011

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Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Scottish Council for Single Homeless for their help in surveying local authority homeless officers for this report and to all those who took the time to respond to that survey.

Thanks also to everyone who took part in the Stakeholder Discussion Group.

February 2011

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Summary

- The Homelessness Task Force produced a series of 59 recommendations in 2002 following a review of the *'causes and nature of homelessness in Scotland'*¹. These recommendations served as a blueprint for a systematic shake-up of the way services to homeless people were delivered: addressing legislation, policy and cultures across the sector.
- The most significant recommendation set out a timeframe for the removal of the 'priority need' test when a homeless application was made, effectively guaranteeing the right of every unintentionally homeless person to permanent accommodation. This represented a radical change and challenge for local authorities, but put Scotland's homelessness strategy at the forefront of progressive legislation.
- The recommendations were and still are viewed as ambitious and were a product of the specific time in the Scottish Parliament's history. The expansion of the rights-led approach rightly received national and international acclaim and, in the initial stages, the recommendations made were backed up by a financial commitment and leadership from the Scottish Government.
- The work of the Homelessness Task Force and, in particular, the legislative changes produced by the recommendations, have been extremely significant and continue to shape and drive homelessness policy across Scotland. All of those consulted in preparing this Shelter Scotland report were not only aware of the recommendations, but thought they continue to influence strategy, policy and priorities at local authority level.
- A key achievement of the Task Force was to raise the political profile of homelessness and to make the case for a shift in emphasis to prevention and intervention services rather than solely delivering crisis services.
- A majority of those consulted raised concerns about homelessness services being adversely affected by forthcoming budget cuts and the issue of the supply of affordable housing was identified as a major hurdle to delivering on recommendations around priority need and temporary accommodation.
- Despite progress towards the explicit 2012 commitment on 'priority need', the failure to commence other parts of legislation on 'local connection' and 'intentionality' is inexplicable and suggests a lack of leadership around the recommendations. With two-thirds of the legislative package lying dormant we are far from meeting this Task Force aim.
- A majority of respondents to a survey we carried out felt that partnership at all levels and corporate buy-in is vital to the reduction of homelessness and more needs to be done to ensure that the delivery of support services is targeted, consistent and joined

¹ 'Helping Homeless People: An Action Plan for Prevention and Effective Response' Homelessness Task Force Final Report, 2002

up. In some areas it was felt that there was a significant gap between the recommendations and the national objectives and the reality of implementation at a local level.

- It is evident that the momentum behind some of the areas covered in the recommendations has been lost, in particular around the health agenda where significant barriers still remain for homeless people accessing services. For health outcomes to be improved, those consulted felt there needs to be stronger leadership at national level and better joining up of services to support homeless people with substance misuse issues and mental ill health.
- Prevention and interventions to help those at risk of homelessness has seen a great deal of attention but only in recent years as the shortage of affordable homes to rent has become increasingly problematic for local authorities. Targeted prevention is now an explicit aspiration of all homelessness strategies, although many believe that resources are still heavily weighted towards crisis intervention.
- Progress on the recommendations has been inconsistent across different areas, with the cluster of actions addressing problems with benefits affecting homeless people, never having been addressed in any meaningful way.
- With dwindling activity from the Homeless Monitoring Group (HMG) which has not met since 2006², there is no real leadership or direction taking forward the Task Force Recommendations as a whole, many of which remain un-actioned or incomplete. There is a need for new political leadership at Ministerial level, including the possibility of the Housing Minister attending Scottish Cabinet meetings dealing with housing and homelessness.

Shelter Scotland Recommendations:

- There are some areas where progress has stalled but the policy intention is still pertinent and Shelter Scotland has outlined a series of recommendations to ensure that progress continues. These are:
 1. After the May 2011 elections, we would like to see the Scottish Government Housing Minister putting homelessness at the top of the agenda making sure it is a priority in the budget.
 2. Considering the number of changes to legislation, policy and funding since the Code of Guidance on Homelessness was published in 2005³, the Scottish Government should produce a consolidated and revised Code of Guidance. Despite the addition of a new section on homelessness prevention in 2009, there is a need for a total revision of the original guidance. This is especially

² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/Housing/homeless/H-M-G/hmgminutes>

³ The Code of Guidance on Homelessness (Scottish Government 2005)
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/05/31133334/33366>

important considering the shift towards Housing Options, the 2012 commitment, changes to housing support and the welfare system.

3. The Scottish Government, with the Scottish Housing Regulator, should initiate and fund a new and independent study to undertake a series of progress checks on implementation of the recommendations and future priorities.
4. Following on from this 'progress check study', the Scottish Government along with COSLA and other key partners should initiate a second stage of planning for the post-2012 era and produce a phase two action plan.
5. To take forward this 'second phase action plan' there should be the equivalent high-level political leadership that guided the Homelessness Task Force.
6. The Scottish Government should prioritise the continued financing of vital homelessness initiatives, services and projects to continue to build on the existing good practice and positive developments.
7. The Scottish Government should commence all parts of the Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003, including 'local connection' and 'intentionality'.

Section 1: Introduction

This report has been written to assess progress on the recommendations made by the Homelessness Task Force (HTF) in its final report in 2002. The purpose of the report is to assess how successful the implementation of these recommendations has been, how the work of the Task Force and its recommendations have impacted on homelessness services in Scotland and what the priorities should be moving forward post-2012. This paper has been written in lieu of any recent publicly available monitoring of implementation of the Task Force recommendations by the Scottish Government, but there is a need for further in-depth analysis of this policy area.

The Homelessness Task Force

The Homelessness Task Force was set up by the then Scottish Executive in August 1999 to consider national policy and practice that affects homeless people in Scotland and to draw up an action plan for the future, based on existing legislation and policy, research and wide consultation. The remit of the group was:

'To review the causes and nature of homelessness in Scotland; to examine current practice in dealing with cases of homelessness; and to make recommendations on how homelessness in Scotland can best be prevented, and where it does occur, tackled effectively'⁴

The final report was published as an *'action plan for prevention and an effective response to homelessness'* including both long and short-term goals all of which were accepted by the Scottish Executive. The recommendations combined components of legislative change, policy initiatives, guidance for good practice and, significantly, funding - in the region of £127m to be spent on homeless policy and initiatives from 2003/04-2005/06⁵. The recommendations placed homelessness in its wider social context, emphasising the need for corporate responsibility across all local authority departments and highlighted the need for stronger partnerships across all public bodies, private organisations and voluntary agencies working on homelessness and associated issues.

The headline recommendation - that all homeless applicants should be regarded as being in 'priority need', essentially giving all those found to be homeless the right to permanent accommodation - attracted a great deal of national and international attention. This ambitious commitment represented a shift in the approach to homelessness and positioned Scotland's homelessness strategy as one of the most progressive in the world. Taken as a whole, these reform measures sought to fundamentally change the focus of homeless

⁴ 'Helping Homeless People: An Action Plan for Prevention and Effective Response' Homelessness Task force Final Report (2002)

⁵ 'Housing and Social Justice: the case of Scottish homelessness policy' (2003)
http://www.nhc.edu.au/downloads/2003/DayOne/01_Goodlad_paper.pdf

services and extend a rights-led approach to all homeless people. At the time, for many Scottish politicians nothing better symbolised the failure of the pre-devolution Westminster-led government better than the increase in homelessness in the 1980s. By making homelessness an early priority, Scotland's new parliament showed a high-level of cross-party co-operation and was also marking a point of departure from Whitehall.

The abolition of priority need - 'The 2012 Commitment':

In 2003 the Scottish Parliament passed groundbreaking legislation stating that local authorities would have a duty to provide every homeless person with a home by 2012. This is known as 'the 2012 commitment'. But it is much more than an aspirational target – it is a specific legislative commitment to remove the priority/non-priority need distinction in the homelessness assessment process. What this means in practice is that the right to permanent housing will be expanded to include all those found to be unintentionally homeless from 1 January 2013. The "target" then is the date when that change takes place and once it has happened it will be in place continuously. This makes it very different from a target such as, say, the target to eradicate fuel poverty by 2016. That target has to be delivered by continuous improvement over a long period and so 2016 is an *end* date (although, in practice, households will continue to fall into fuel poverty thereafter). By contrast the 1 January 2013, for homeless people is a *start* date.

The '2012 commitment' is sometimes referred to as 'the end of homelessness' or the 'homelessness target' but this over-simplifies the policy intention and the long term goal behind abolishing the priority need distinction. The '2012 commitment' was envisaged as only one, albeit very important, recommendation of fifty-nine, designed to improve services, advice, support and provision for homeless people. The phasing out of priority need means a duty on local authorities to provide housing for all homeless people. This has become the headline recommendation from the Task Force Report and the intention behind it is widely supported, but it was also recognised at the time that this headline commitment relied on other recommendations – around supply, advice, prevention and support - also being implemented to make a real difference to homeless people. The expansion of rights in isolation per se is a means to an end and the members of the Task Force recognised that delivering it mechanistically would be unlikely to achieve the transformation envisaged. Therefore the timeframe set for the abolition of priority need was designed to allow central and local government to plan, adapt and change policies and practice - as laid out in the Homelessness Task Force recommendations – in preparation for this change in the law.

So, there is no option to 'not meet' the 2012 commitment. The only choice is whether Scotland has prepared sufficiently for the consequences of the change in rights.

The recommendations made in the initial report from the Task Force published in 2000, formed the basis of Part 1 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. The 2001 Act required all local authorities to produce homelessness strategies which assessed the level of

homelessness in the area and laid out a multi-agency plan to respond to it, coming into effect from October 2001. The Act also stipulated that local authorities had a duty to provide temporary accommodation to all homeless households while their assessment is being processed and for a short time post-decision, with effect from September 2002. The 2001 Act set out a broad framework for forthcoming housing policy and provided the Task Force with a base for future action.

As it continued its work, the Task Force also had 3 sub-groups focusing on specific areas: 2012 Planning; Awareness raising and good practice and Intentionality. Another specific priority was the work of the Rough Sleepers Initiative which aimed to eradicate rough sleeping in Scotland by April 2003. This initiative had funding of £40m from 1997-2002 but an additional £10m a year was allocated for 2002/03 and 2003/04. Finally, the Task Force also spawned a group looking at the future of the large-scale hostels in Glasgow which eventually lead to their closure.

The second and final Task Force report, published in 2002, made a further 59 recommendations addressing all elements of homelessness services from legislative change right through to staff culture and client empowerment. This report marked the end of the work of the Homelessness Task Force and the new phase of implementation.

The radical nature of the Task Force's recommendations won them international acclaim⁶ and the scale and timeframe set for the changes to homelessness policy and practice were recognised as ambitious. The change of government at Holyrood in 2007 has had significant implications for delivery at a local level due to the introduction of the Concordat between central and local government. As a result, monitoring of homelessness now focuses on the national performance framework and local priorities through single outcome agreement (SOAs). The most significant implication of this shift was the changes to funding for homelessness funds and housing support and the removal of ring-fenced funding. What this meant in practice was the removal of secured funding streams of around £440 million per annum⁷. This was roughly £40m in direct homelessness funds and a further £400m a year through the Supporting People funding. This has changed not only the delivery of services, but also the accountability mechanisms through which ministers could track progress and effectiveness of homelessness services. The intention was that the removal of this ring-fenced funding would allow local authorities to develop flexible support packages but it has also had an impact on the commissioning, planning and delivery of services.

⁶ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/4834902.stm>

⁷ This does not mean that the funds ceased to be made available in these policy areas. Indeed, the Scottish Government's annual budget reports retrospectively on what provision councils have made for housing support and homelessness. However, councils are no longer *required* to spend money on these areas of activity.

The Homelessness Monitoring Group

In 2002 a Homelessness Monitoring Group (HMG) was established with the intention that it would report annually on progress against the recommendations. Both the Task Force and the Monitoring Group were made up of representatives from public bodies, voluntary organisations and civil servants⁸ but the HMG was not Chaired by a Minister as the Task Force had been, which probably contributed to the group having a far lower profile. The Monitoring Group was, however, a powerful body, initially tasked with overseeing the development of all 59 recommendations and implementation of legislation brought in by the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003. The HMG published three annual reports in 2004, 2005 and 2006 that used a traffic light system for marking progress. According to the Scottish Government website, the HMG has not met since 2006⁹ and it is important to note that in the final progress check in 2006, only 8 of the 59 recommendations were 'green' or fully realised¹⁰.

In its final phase, the HMG changed its approach and measured progress against 5 key outcomes along with the 2012 commitment, as opposed to all recommendations, and produced a report in 2008¹¹. The HMG then stopped reporting in 2008 leaving a conspicuous absence of any formal monitoring of the specific recommendations and policies. Although it has never been formally dissolved, by 2008 it was seen to be floundering. For the Scottish Government, the broad partnership approach of the HMG was seen to be at odds with the primacy of the partnership with local government. For voluntary sector members its dwindling effectiveness meant that there was only a muted voice of concern when the HMG simply ceased to meet. Shelter Scotland along with other key homelessness organisations began to argue, instead, that the Scottish Government should carry out a 'stock-take' on homelessness. While the Scottish Government along with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) has formed a 2012 Steering Group to '*To assess, inform and influence progress towards the 2012 homelessness target*'¹², the work of this group is narrowly focused on the 2012 commitment. A wider stock-take should include the 2012 target but also look in considerable depth at the other recommendations and priorities such as homelessness prevention and health, in order to drive forward policy and service provision. That stock-take would be a useful benchmarking tool for local authorities and could lay out an action plan for delivering on future priorities¹³.

In the interim, this report looks at developments over the past 8 years and where there has been progress but also importantly, drift. This paper explains each cluster of

⁸ For a full list of Task Force and HMG members see Appendix 1

⁹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/Housing/homeless/H-M-G/hmgminutes>

¹⁰ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/04/19133657/0>

¹¹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/217503/0058272.pdf> (March 2008)

¹² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/Housing/access/homeless/2012Target/RemitoftheGroup>

¹³ Scottish Parliament Local Government and Communities Committee Papers (Feb 2009) <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/lgc/papers-09/lgp09-05.pdf>

recommendations and what the policy intention was behind them. Then through published reports, data and from the discussions we have had with stakeholders we have tried to gauge where the recommendations have been delivered – either in part or in full. This assessment takes into account the challenges to local and national delivery and the changes to the social, political and financial environment, but ultimately seeks to ask whether the Task Force recommendations have been delivered and if not, why not.

Our approach

There are a number of mechanisms for monitoring homelessness service performance in Scotland and we have looked at data and reports from a range of sources including the statistics collected from local authorities through the Scottish Government's HL1 and HL2 statistical returns¹⁴. Through these we have looked at key performance indicators such as: homeless applications, priority need assessments and the numbers of families in temporary accommodation. These statistical returns are invaluable but they cannot be used to gauge more qualitative changes such as service user experience and customer satisfaction. In addition to these data we have looked in detail at the inspection reports from the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) which has completed an assessment of every local authority homeless service (along with Housing Management and Property Maintenance). While some councils have re-inspections pending (following poor inspection grades) these reports still give a good overall picture of performance across Scotland.

Using published data as an important backdrop, along with other useful research into homelessness¹⁵, we then spoke to a range of stakeholders and practitioners in order to assess progress and the development of services and practice. This took the form of a Stakeholder Discussion Group¹⁶, which brought together individuals working in local authority homeless services and voluntary organisations working in homelessness. The Scottish Council for Single Homeless (SCSH) also surveyed the Local Authority Homeless Strategy Officers Network on our behalf. From the 32 local authorities who received the questionnaire there were 22 responses¹⁷ covering a wide geographical area with a range of council sizes and urban/rural locations.

The purpose of the discussion group and the questionnaire was to gauge what are considered to be the most significant achievements of the Task Force, what progress has been made and the perceived relevance of the recommendations in the homeless sector

¹⁴ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/RefTables>

¹⁵ 'The impact of devolution: Housing and homelessness' (Jan 2010) <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/impact-of-devolution-long-term-care-housing.pdf>; 'Evaluation of homelessness prevention activities in Scotland' (2007)

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/03/26095144/0>; 'Sustainable solutions to homelessness: the Scottish Case' (2007)

<https://dspace.stir.ac.uk/dspace/bitstream/1893/1436/3/Sustainable%20Solutions%20to%20Homelessness.pdf>

¹⁶ For a list of members of the Stakeholder Discussion Group, please see Appendix 2

¹⁷ This survey ran from 19 August 2010 until the 27 September 2010. For a list of the local authorities who responded to this questionnaire, please see Appendix 2

today, eight years after they were published. Progress on many of the recommendations is difficult to measure through statistics and data alone so through the stakeholder discussion and the survey, we have attempted to gauge what practitioners feel has been achieved and the successes and shortcomings that are apparent through day-to-day delivery.

Section 2: Local Authority Inspections

As background to the analysis of individual recommendations, inspection reports from the Scottish Housing Regulator over the past 7 years and the grades awarded, give the national performance picture against key Performance Standards. We have included this section as it provides a backdrop to progress within individual homelessness services. Council services are not benchmarked against Homelessness Task Force recommendations explicitly but many of the themes are the same so we think it is important information to bring together. The SHR reports give insights based on data, interviews and service user consultation and the assessments have brought into sharp focus the spectrum of quality and range of strengths and weaknesses across council homelessness departments. So the table below gives the grade awarded to each council and the date on which it was given.

Local Authority	Homelessness Assessment Grade/Year
Aberdeen City Council	D (2005)*
Aberdeenshire Council	C (2009)
Angus Council	C (2004)
Argyll and Bute Council	C (2010)
Clackmannanshire Council	C (2007)
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	C (2008)
Dumfries and Galloway Council	C (2007)
Dundee City Council	C (2009)
East Ayrshire Council	C (2008)
East Dunbartonshire Council	B (2008)
East Lothian District Council	C (2008)
East Renfrewshire Council	C (2005)
Edinburgh City Council	A (2006)
Falkirk Council	D (2008)*
Fife Council	B (2010)
Glasgow City Council	C (2010)
Highland Council	C (2007)
Inverclyde Council	C (2008)
Midlothian Council	D (2008)
Moray Council	C (2009)
North Ayrshire Council	B (2008)
North Lanarkshire Council	C (2006)
Orkney Islands Council	B (2010)
Perth and Kinross Council	B (2011)
Renfrewshire Council	C (2008)
Scottish Borders Council	C (2007)
Shetland Islands Council	C (2007)
South Ayrshire Council	C (2005)
South Lanarkshire Council	C (2010)
Stirling Council	C (2005)
West Dunbartonshire Council	B (2004)
West Lothian Council	C (2006)
	* - Re-inspection pending

While each report highlights the particular challenges and the good and bad practice of each council, looking collectively it is clear that homelessness services generally cannot be said to be high-performing services, with 75% of local authorities having received either a C or D grade. To date only one A has been awarded, to the City of Edinburgh Council in 2006 prior to the removal of ring-fenced funding. There have been 5 B and 21 C grades (some following re-inspections). The remaining 3 councils have received a D for their inspections which means the Regulator found significant shortcomings. These ranged from councils not providing temporary accommodation, high levels of repeat homelessness, insufficient provision of advice and support service information, difficulty in accessing the homeless service out of hours and incorrectly discharging duty to homeless applicants.

These inspection reports provide a good source of independent information and the assessments include consultation with service users which is an important part of any assessment of homeless services. The SHR has also carried out a series of thematic reviews on various elements of homelessness services considering national performance levels. In July 2009 it was concluded that local authority homeless services *'generally achieve lower grades than the grades we have awarded to housing services'* and while it was thought that *'local authorities are becoming more focused on preventing homelessness'* it identified 5 key areas of poor practice that were recurring themes from all the inspection findings:

- a lack of clear corporate leadership;
- weaknesses in basic assessments;
- a heavy reliance on bed and breakfast temporary accommodation, and breaches of the Unsuited Accommodation (Scotland) Order;
- limited service user involvement; and
- poor monitoring of the quality of outcomes for homeless people¹⁸

While some local authorities will no doubt have made improvements since their inspections, some of which took place over 6 years ago, these reports show the range of areas within homeless services that need to be improved. The high number of 'C' grades also emphasises that most local authorities are only providing a 'fair' service to homeless applicants. This suggests that there remains room for improvement and that many of the Task Force recommendations are still pertinent to improving services for homeless people.

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http://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk/stellent/groups/public/documents/webpages/shr_shaping_up_for_improvement.pdf

Section 3: Looking at the Recommendations

*'Homelessness will not be solved by legislation alone'*¹⁹

This report recognises the significance of the Task Force recommendations which has been echoed in all our discussions in preparing this report. Among the homelessness staff we spoke to there was broad agreement that the work of the Task Force was inspirational and had changed the culture of homelessness services to some degree, having an influence on implementation at all levels.

The findings from our stakeholder discussions were particularly helpful for informing our analysis of implementation of national policies. The local authority survey, carried out by SCSH, gave a variety of views. Of the 22 local authority homelessness officers who responded to the questionnaire, all of them were aware of the work of the Task Force, and 87 percent felt that the recommendations continue to influence strategy, policy and prioritisation either 'a lot' or 'mostly'. Respondents commented that the recommendations were *'positive in determining homelessness as a priority'* and that *'the recommendations have given local authorities a firm basis for responding to homelessness'* and put prevention on the national and local agenda. It was also recognised that despite the changes in government since 2002 the *'general principles are largely holding fast'*.

The Homelessness Monitoring Group (HMG) grouped the recommendations into sections and mapped progress under themes, and we have followed the same structure for analysis. For each cluster of recommendations we have:

1. Given a brief overview of the recommendations
2. Given an analysis of what progress has been made
3. Reflected key themes and thoughts from stakeholder discussion

Legislation (3 - 5, 24, 25)

This cluster of recommendations set out a series of changes to primary legislation aimed at increasing the rights of all homeless applicants by suspending local connection and making a provision for support and accommodation of intentionally homeless applicants. The headline recommendation was that the priority need test should gradually be abolished, effectively guaranteeing all applicants found to be homeless, the right to permanent housing. Recommendations also addressed the need for lenders or landlords to notify local authorities when they are evicting a tenant or owner-occupier in order to prevent homelessness post-eviction. Collectively these legislative recommendations aimed to remove the 'means testing' from the homeless assessment process by removing or radically

¹⁹ 'Helping Homeless People: An Action Plan for Prevention and Effective Response' Homelessness Task force Final Report, 2002

altering the hurdles of priority need, intentionality and local connection. Once fully implemented, the policy intention was that if you were assessed to be homeless, there would be a duty on local authorities to provide you with a home.

Analysis:

This is a group of recommendations where there have been important achievements, specifically changes in primary legislation through the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003. This, coupled with the Ministerial Statement on the Abolition of Priority Need in 2005, which established that all local authorities must remove this distinction by the end of 2012, set a clear framework for action.

Table 1: Priority assessments as a % of all assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness²⁰

	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
Scotland	73	73	75	76	77	80	83	85
Aberdeen City	64	66	72	70	66	66	87	84
Aberdeenshire	65	68	73	68	71	76	86	87
Angus	72	81	81	82	78	81	91	100
Argyll & Bute	69	61	58	65	74	74	77	84
Clackmannanshire	78	77	74	81	81	80	81	85
Dumfries & Galloway	60	71	75	75	81	85	85	81
Dundee City	80	86	91	88	81	81	89	99
East Ayrshire	59	57	67	63	69	67	91	93
East Dunbartonshire	69	67	72	71	74	74	82	79
East Lothian	64	61	66	65	63	65	68	60
East Renfrewshire	72	74	77	71	70	78	73	83
Edinburgh, City of	67	69	72	78	81	82	82	82
Eilean Siar	57	54	62	61	64	71	76	77
Falkirk	65	64	75	72	72	78	85	89
Fife	62	62	63	63	65	69	71	74
Glasgow City	85	87	86	86	85	87	89	90
Highland	67	57	52	56	71	79	82	81
Inverclyde	75	66	76	74	69	70	86	94
Midlothian	73	71	77	78	83	81	79	83
Moray	84	60	52	50	54	69	71	72
North Ayrshire	73	75	78	77	80	89	95	91
North Lanarkshire	69	68	80	77	76	75	79	81
Orkney	70	83	79	76	76	79	91	93
Perth & Kinross	75	76	74	69	69	71	73	82
Renfrewshire	81	76	80	86	86	90	92	96
Scottish Borders, The	68	74	66	69	69	73	73	68
Shetland	65	69	90	77	71	63	70	64
South Ayrshire	52	60	68	72	77	74	81	87
South Lanarkshire	67	65	70	72	72	83	82	86
Stirling	58	65	62	68	68	70	69	88
West Dunbartonshire	81	82	85	89	90	96	97	98
West Lothian	68	71	73	74	79	80	79	85

²⁰ Scottish Government Homelessness Statistics annual reference tables
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/hmlss0910>

The table shows that national progress towards meeting the 2012 commitment has been steady, although there are local inconsistencies and some councils are still a long way from assessing all unintentionally homeless applicants as priority need.

Nationally, priority assessments have risen from 73% in 2003/04 to 85% in 2009/10 which represents steady but slow progress towards the 100% commitment at the end of 2012. There is however, significant discrepancy across different councils with some still some way off. As part of the Ministerial statement on Priority Need, an interim target was also set for all local authorities to reduce the number of non-priority homeless assessments by half by 2009, although councils were given discretion as to how they did that. This represented a different challenge for each local authority, with some having to increase priority need assessments by as much as 21% (Highland Council) in 5 years, while for others, already assessing a far higher percentage, they only had to increase by 7% (Dundee City Council). In 2009 only 14 councils met or exceeded their interim target with 11 councils falling more than 5% short of their target.

The most recent statistics released by the government for 2009/10 show that 11 local authorities have still not met the 2009 interim target although one local authority (Angus Council) has abolished priority need altogether and another handful are ahead of schedule for meeting the 2012 deadline. What is certain is that progress is not uniform and some councils have considerably more to do in the next two years than others did in a much longer time.

The '2012 commitment' was rightly applauded both nationally and internationally, but it was one of a series of challenging changes to local authority provision for homeless people outlined in the recommendations, some of which are yet to come to fruition. The changes to the legislation covering intentionality and local connection were included in the 2003 Act but have not yet been commenced. This is an unusual situation and the Scottish Parliament may take a dim view of legislation being passed and remaining inert for no apparent reason. While the Scottish Government consulted on the implications of commencing these laws, in 2009, COSLA formally withdrew its support for the suspension of local connection and it seems implementation of both of these legislative changes have now lost momentum.

It is important to see these three changes as part of a continuum. Priority need was to be abolished, local connection suspended and the sting taken out of intentionality because the Homelessness Task Force wanted to see homelessness services transformed from a system which tested *eligibility* according to set "tests" to a system which focused on understanding an individual's problems and on finding solutions. With two-thirds of the package lying dormant and the third as yet unrealised in full, we are far from meeting that Task Force aim.

The requirement to notify the relevant local authority of proceedings for possession was commenced in 2009, commonly known as a Section 11 Notice. Between April 2009 and March 2010 there were 14,116 notices to local authorities of the intention to repossess a property from housing associations, private landlords and creditors in mortgage repossession cases. Only 3% of these were from private landlords while the majority – over 65% - were from banks and building societies where the homeowner defaults on their mortgage²¹. While this mechanism seeks to ensure that local authorities have advance notice of people in their jurisdiction at risk of losing their homes, there has been little assessment of how well this is working in practice. The HL1 statistics show that Section 11 Notices are being made but the information is incomplete on how widespread referrals are and what the outcomes are for the people affected.

These ambitious recommendations have not yet been fully realised, but they succeeded in reprioritising homelessness and putting it formally at the top of the government and local authority agenda. Arguably, the legislative programme also set in motion a shift in both the culture and perceptions of homelessness and where responsibility lay for responding to and preventing it. This was noted in the SHR thematic inspection of homelessness in 2005 where it was found that all 5 of the pathfinder councils investigated *‘were committed to a shift in the focus of services to prevention of homelessness’*²².

Commentary:

Among stakeholders, despite agreement that some of the recommendations, especially those concerning uncommenced legislation may have lost momentum, the significance of the recommendations influencing policy and practice is undiminished. There was consensus across both the voluntary sector and local authorities consulted that the recommendations *‘have given local authorities a firm basis to respond to homelessness’* and some local authorities commented that their *‘services and reporting are based largely on the outcomes from these recommendations’*. But it was suggested that the targets and the timeframes were always ambitious, creating a gap *‘between national objectives and local level implementation’*. Shortfalls in the supply of affordable housing mean that local authorities have found the changes in legislation extremely challenging, especially towards the 2012 commitment. The sheer scale of the challenge in phasing out priority need means that there has been little appetite for commencing the dormant parts of the 2003 Act on local connection and intentionality. Having said this, failure to commence legislation is unusual and the absence of a statement on or indication of why this legislation has not been commenced is conspicuous.

²¹ Table 40 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/hmlss0910>

²² ‘Key themes from inspections: Homelessness’ June 2005
http://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk/stellent/groups/public/documents/webpages/SHR_KEYTH_EMESFROMINSPECTION-HO.pdf

Both the discussion group and the respondents to the questionnaire had some concerns about the amount of attention being focused solely on meeting the 2012 commitment to reduce priority need. It was suggested by some that the remaining recommendations are *'taking a very back seat – however short-sighted that might be'*. It was also suggested that the removal of ring-fenced funding for homeless services through the Concordat, coupled with the impending public sector spending cuts, would mean reprioritisation which could *'reduce some of the good practice'*. It was commented that in real terms implementation is challenging because *'pressures around other requirements can be contradictory to recommendations'*. It was also suggested by a number of people that *'legislation is only part of the jigsaw'* and that the right culture, staff and practice were all vital to reducing homelessness.

Culture & Training (1, 33)

These were specific recommendations that aimed to increase homeless people's control and choices and ensure their participation and involvement in the development of future policy. More broadly there was a recommendation seeking to put the needs of homeless people at the centre of all policy, practice and training and to make sure that services were responsive and personalised.

Analysis:

The emphasis on culture change was integrally linked into the prevention of homelessness in the recommendations and aimed to change the approach to homeless clients and provide them with a personalised service focusing on their specific needs. This showed recognition of the diversity of the people affected by homelessness and engaging with homeless services, but also how little involvement service users had in policies and strategies and how little feedback was routinely collected.

This aspiration represented a shift for the delivery of homeless services and the Scottish Government published a revised Code of Guidance in May 2005 to reflect this change in emphasis. In addition, Communities Scotland conducted a series of pathfinder inspections, the results of which were published in June 2005 which led to changes in the inspection framework. It is difficult to assess culture change across the whole of Scotland, but it appears that, nationwide, the approach to the delivery of homeless services has improved. In terms of homeless people participating in policy, the developments have been less focused and there is very little monitoring of homeless involvement. The HMG established an Awareness Raising and Best Practice subgroup which built on some research carried out by the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) into the views of homeless people. This represented an important strand of the work of the Task Force but this sub-group did not meet for long and therefore had limited impact.

While initial activity in this area made a lot of headway, many of those consulted felt that the drive behind these recommendations has been lost. While services are now felt to be a lot more customer focused, and consultation with service users is an integral part of the inspection framework, it seems progress on both culture and engagement is patchy across different local authorities with practice varying in different areas.

Commentary:

All those consulted felt the publication of the Task Force Recommendations was an opportunity to *'refashion the approach'* and there has been considerable change in the way services were delivered. There was a consensus that some of the stigma around making a homelessness presentation had been removed, but that there is still work to be done around the different types of homelessness and who it can affect. The findings of a module on attitudes to homelessness in the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey in 2007 found that 45% of those surveyed believe that *"homeless people could find somewhere to live if they really tried"*. 35% agreed that *"many people say they are homeless just to try and get a house from the council"* and 1 in 5 surveyed believe that *"most people end up being homeless simply because they drink too much"*²³. The attitudes revealed in this survey show that while there is a wide spectrum of opinions across different ages, sexes and educational levels, the public perception of homelessness still holds many negative connotations and there are a number of myths around homelessness that have not yet been dispelled.

Housing Policy (6 – 12)

This set of recommendations focused on setting homelessness as a priority in all housing strategies. In addition, there were recommendations looking specifically at issues such as lead tenancies, rent deposit schemes and a framework for furnished tenancies. It was also recommended that guidance should be issued on choice-based letting systems and that the number and quality of accommodation – particularly temporary accommodation- offered to homeless applicants should be monitored by Communities Scotland.

Analysis:

These recommendations sought to make homelessness a priority across all of Scotland through housing and homelessness strategies. This framework was established before the development of the Concordat between the Scottish Government and Local Authorities which changed not only the process but the financial mechanisms for accessing funding. In 2008 the Scottish Government and COSLA produced guidance for the preparation of local housing strategies, focusing on outcomes and linking into local delivery mechanisms. This coincided with the requirement to have a separate homelessness strategy being dropped.

²³ Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2006 - Public Attitudes to Homelessness
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/203226/0054128.pdf>

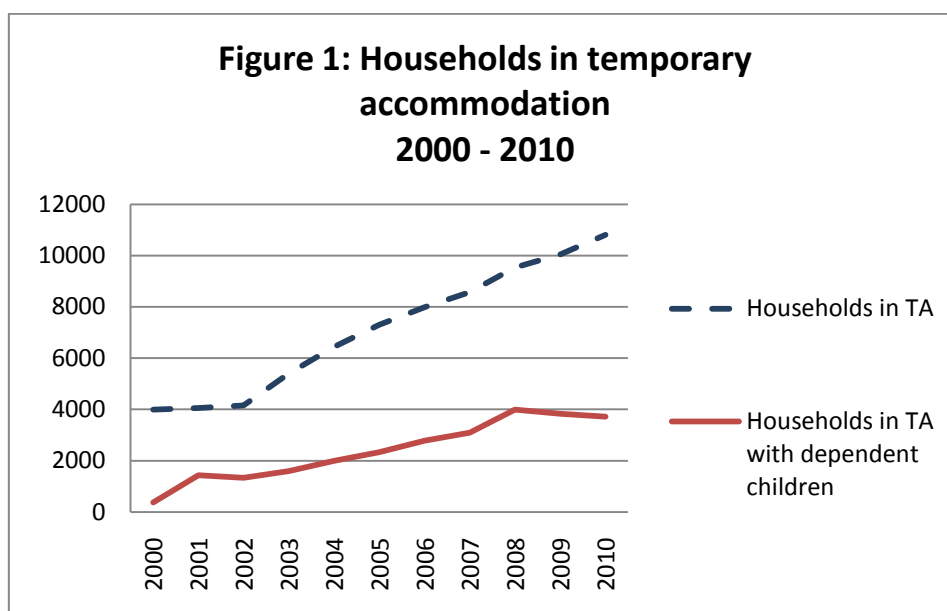
With homelessness now subsumed within overall housing strategies there is potential for it to lose focus.

Some of the other recommendations looked specifically at lead tenancies and furnished tenancies linked to tenancy sustainment. Shelter Scotland produced a report with CRNS in 2010 which highlighted the importance of providing adequate furniture especially when homeless applicants are given a new home to help them keep their tenancy²⁴.

With such a limited stock of affordable housing, problems with temporary accommodation are becoming more pertinent with higher numbers of people in temporary accommodation for longer and sometimes in poor conditions. Since 2002 the number of people in temporary accommodation has risen from 4,153 to 10,815, an increase of 160%, the increase of families with children in temporary accommodation has increased by 180% nationally.

In partnership with CIH Scotland, Shelter Scotland has published Guidance on Standards of Temporary Accommodation²⁵ which aims to give all temporary accommodation providers with a benchmark to aim for in terms of the quality, location and management of properties being let to homeless households. The standards draw on the experience of staff managing temporary accommodation and the views of people who have lived – or are currently living – in temporary housing.

Figure 1 shows the steady rise in the number of households in temporary accommodation across Scotland and how many of those are households with dependent children.



²⁴ 'Furniture for the homeless: A house without furniture is not a home' (Shelter & CRNS, August 2010) http://www.crns.org.uk/sites/files/furniture_for_the_homeless_report.pdf

²⁵ Guidance on Standards of Temporary Accommodation (2010) http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/301686/CIH_Temp_Accommodation.pdf

Commentary:

The biggest challenge for housing policy is supply of affordable homes which continues to be the pivotal issue impacting on many aspects of practice, including a local authority's ability to meet legislative requirements in line with the 2012 commitment. Throughout the discussion group, the problem of insufficient supply was raised in relation to both permanent and temporary accommodation. While specific local challenges were also noted, seventeen of the twenty-two questionnaire responses suggested supply of affordable housing was a major concern currently and moving forward into a more restricted funding environment. The lack of permanent accommodation was identified as a problem across a geographically diverse group of local authorities, many of who felt that this, along with wider funding issues means that housing policy generally and therefore homeless service provision is strained:

'The lack of suitable permanent accommodation remains a significant worry and the continuing tensions between allocations to those affected by homelessness and other reasonable preference groups.'

'The biggest challenge is obvious – lack of accommodation!'

'Funding has always been a challenge, providing support for complex needs and providing suitable accommodation.'

There was a lot of discussion around housing support and how vital good support is for tenancy sustainment for vulnerable tenants and for the prevention of repeat homelessness although it was recognised that *'funding has always been a challenge along with providing support for complex needs'*. The removal of ring-fenced funding for housing support was raised as a concern and that there was uncertainty about where within each local authority money for support now sits: *'due to the Supporting People budget no longer being ring fenced this has caused great difficulties in the provision of support'*. Scottish Government figures for the 2011-12 budget show that housing has been the biggest single loser with the budget for housing and regeneration falling by 35% in real terms²⁶.

Benefits (13 – 17, 29)

Although benefits issues are reserved for the Westminster parliament, this group of recommendations recognised how crucial benefits are to tackling homelessness and hoped to clarify some of the existing peculiarities impacting on homeless people. In particular, it was recommended there should be a review of benefit provision for the under 25s and the Social Fund should be reformed to allow for community care grants to be paid in advance. It was also suggested that Single Room Rent and Local Reference Rent restrictions should be reviewed. More generally, it was recommended that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) be asked to review a series of specific benefits impacting on homeless people, the

²⁶ 'Housing and Budget 2001-12' Shelter Scotland (Nov 2010)
http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0018/303282/Budget_2010_first_response_2.pdf

provision of the Social Fund and allowing local authorities to pay housing benefit to those expected to be in prison for more than three months.

Analysis:

The wide-ranging reform of benefits that these recommendations sought to bring in never happened. It is unclear how much the Scottish Government ever expected to influence the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), although immediately following the publication of the Task Force Recommendations the then Scottish Executive, liaised regularly with DWP to discuss the importance of these recommendations²⁷. These discussions did not result in any of the recommendations being taken forward.

The reform of benefits being driven by the government at Westminster is fluid as we write and will continue to change. However, at present, some of the most important changes include:-

- Extension of shared room rate from U-25s to U-35s and the impact this will have on options for housing single homeless people.
- Restricting local housing allowance in private renting to a lower rent and restricting the rate of increase in future years. Other things being equal, this is expected to increase homelessness from the Private Rented Sector (PRS) and reduce PRS capacity to provide homeless accommodation.
- Restrictions on funding of temporary accommodation from Housing Benefit and the overall impact on funding of homeless services.

Other changes include reductions in Housing Benefit for those on Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) for more than a year, reducing incentives to those under-occupying social housing increases in non-dependant deductions and the possibility of Housing Benefit becoming part of a universal credit. The Scottish Government has formed a Housing Benefit Stakeholder Group which has produced a paper analysing the potential fallout of these reforms²⁸.

Benefits policy was already very difficult for Scottish homelessness policy and one in which almost no progress has been made. The future looks like the situation will only get worse²⁹.

Commentary:

There was very little discussion about this group of recommendations since they have not been taken forward. However those consulted were extremely concerned about the

²⁷ Homelessness Monitoring Group First Report (January 2004)
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/26487/0028733.pdf> p10

²⁸ Scottish Government 'Housing Benefit impact paper' submitted to DWP in December 2010.

²⁹ For more on Shelter's response to DWP proposals see 'Shelter's response to the Department for Work and Pensions consultation – 21st century welfare' (Shelter England, October 2010)
http://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/293564/10-10_DWP_21st_Century_Welfare.pdf

Coalition government's forthcoming changes to the welfare system and there were specific suggestions on what should be done:

'the coalition government need to be persuaded that welfare and benefit reforms are damaging and will create more homelessness'

'ensure we continue to protect people's rights'

'much better liaison at highest level (Government) between DWP and housing'

'A rethink of the proposed changes on housing benefit entitlement in relation to the provision of temporary accommodation'

Prevention (18 – 23, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31)

A significant number of recommendations addressed prevention and the early identification of high-risk groups where homelessness and repeat homelessness could be avoided. This was linked closely to local authority housing strategies and the prevention recommendations looked at three key areas:

- Evictions: with specific provisions looking at illegal eviction, arrears management and anti-social behaviour policies.
- High-risk groups: looking specifically at high-risk groups such as looked-after children, prisoners, those leaving the armed forces and asylum seekers.
- Homelessness strategies: with the suggestion that there was a review of the availability, accessibility and quality of services around areas such as counselling/mediation, advocacy, financial/debt management issues and services for those with substance misuse problems.

Analysis:

The Scottish Government has placed a good deal of emphasis on the prevention of homelessness in the last two years, which has impacted on the focus of homelessness services at a local level to some degree. At a high level there seems to be significant support and commitment to a corporate response to prevention as the pressure on both temporary and permanent accommodation has increased, but delivery on the ground remains quite patchy. Since the initial jump in homeless application numbers from 2002/03 onwards, the number of applications each year has remained relatively constant across Scotland at around 57,000 a year. It seems that prevention work still has plenty of scope to make an impact.

Research commissioned by the Scottish Executive in 2007 showed that while most local authorities have developed a more prevention-focused approach, prevention services are

*'rather small and fairly experimental'*³⁰ focusing on specific at-risk groups. It has also been argued that despite the different legal frameworks, prevention activity in England and Wales is far more developed than it is in Scotland³¹. In the past two years there has been an increasing focus on prevention services which has meant considerable changes to local authority homelessness prevention strategies. However the pressure on local authority housing stock is perhaps more of an impetus for this than the Task Force recommendations.

There has been some progress on the development of good practice around eviction and a changing culture towards eviction as an arrears management tool. Since 2001/02 evictions have fallen nationally by 59% which is a positive indication of the change in culture although there remains more work to do around tenancy sustainment and debt management. There has been less positive work around illegal evictions which still happen and there remains some reluctance by police to intervene in these cases.

The Scottish Government and COSLA published homelessness prevention guidance in June 2009³² which was seen to be very useful by those consulted. The Scottish Government also added this as a supplementary section to the Code of Guidance although the original material has not been revised since 2005³³. The specific projects targeting high-risk individuals such as former prisoners, those leaving the armed forces and looked-after children are also valued by some local authorities who felt protocols for ex-service personnel and implementation of the Care Leavers Policy have been particularly successful. In particular, the government-funded work by Shelter Scotland and other agencies with prisoners and research by Poppy Scotland into ex-service personnel shows the progress in targeting high-risk groups. However, in its Final Report, the Homelessness Task Force clearly stated that *"There is ample evidence that those leaving prison, residential care, long stay hospitals or the armed forces are particularly vulnerable to homelessness"*³⁴ and laid out specific recommendations, many of which have not been implemented.

In a research report published in 2004, further recommendations were made relating to housing services for prisoners based on the evaluation of 6 government funded projects³⁵. These recommendations included housing advice services, guidance and better monitoring of services for prisoners, however there is still no national housing advice service for prisoners and there remains a gap in housing support and advice services. There is no

³⁰ 'Evaluation of homelessness prevention activities in Scotland' (2007) Pawson et al. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/03/26095144/0> pvii

³¹ 'The impact of devolution: Housing and homelessness' (Jan 2010) <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/impact-of-devolution-long-term-care-housing.pdf> pp 42-3

³² 'Prevention of Homelessness Guidance' June 2009 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/274719/0082198.pdf>

³³ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/Housing/access/homeless/achievements/guidance>

³⁴ 'Helping Homeless People: An Action Plan for Prevention and Effective Response' Homelessness Task force Final Report (2002),p24

³⁵ 'The Provision of Advice and Housing to Prisoners in Scotland: an evaluation of the projects funded by the Rough Sleepers Initiative'(2004) <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/09/19825/41859>

consistent approach to training and support for Scottish Prison Service staff to help prisoners with housing issues to prevent homelessness after release. The inconsistency of funding which is currently on a year-on-year basis makes the planning of services very difficult and the delivery inconsistent. The Scottish Government convened a Short Life Working Group on a model for Housing Advice services for prisoners which met throughout 2008 but still has not published its findings.

Preventing homelessness relies on buy-in from a range of services and delivery agents because the prevention of homelessness cannot be achieved through housing solutions alone. Support and advice services are crucial to the identification of potential homelessness and the prevention of repeat homelessness, since in many cases the resulting housing crisis is a symptom of other underlying factors.

Commentary:

Local authority strategy officers felt there was a range of successful developments in line with the prevention recommendations, reflecting both national and local initiatives and priorities. In particular, work around prevention as an integrated part of the homelessness service has developed along with a more holistic and client focused service, '*seeing homelessness as one of a range of needs*'. This included specific development of mediation services and improved access to services such as health. There were particular comments about the development of protocols to work with young people leaving care and good partnerships working effectively with Community Justice Authorities to improve service to ex-offenders and prisoners. Many people commented on the general improvements to access to advice and assistance and the shift in emphasis to a strategy of prevention:

'development of the prevention agenda, housing options and joined up working have been the most successful developments'

'the focus on good quality advice and information is crucial in the prevention of homelessness'

'I think our shift into changing services with a bigger focus on prevention is the right way forward'

However, it was suggested that there is still some way to go to redress the balance between crisis services and those focusing on early interventions for those individuals and families some way from housing need. It was commented that, while there are some good models out there, there needs to be a more fundamental shift so that focus and resources are on identifying those at risk of homelessness and preventing it as opposed to rebranding existing practice. This was also linked to the move towards Housing Options and where this fits in with homeless services and homeless prevention; although many people commented that RSLs and the PRS still remain bit-players in the homeless picture and there is potential for a higher percentage of lets going to statutory homeless people. It was felt by some that

sometimes the 'homeless process' was enacted too soon and that sometimes people were filtered down that route without being given information or fully considering their other options. This is perhaps where a good, impartial housing options (see boxed text) approach would be extremely useful in meeting individual needs and aspirations.

The question was raised about how 'prevention' of homelessness is measured and how extremely valuable early intervention projects and pilots are appraised. It was also discussed that simply looking at repeat homelessness statistics to assess how well homelessness is being prevented is a crude and unhelpful measure.

It was felt by a number of respondents that a *'more person centred approach [is] resulting in sustainable solutions for individuals'* and that *'the prevention agenda, housing options and joined up working has been the most successful development'*. There were quite a lot of positive comments suggesting that attitudes and perceptions of homelessness have changed in the aftermath of the recommendations, including a *'recognition that it isn't just about rough sleeping'*.

'The most successful development is good partnership working which has come a long way with everyone now realising that they have to 'do their bit'.

Housing Options:

Housing Options has not featured much in this report because, as an approach, it was not a key part of the HTF recommendations and has only come to prominence in the course of 2010. As a way to try and prevent homelessness, the Scottish Government are encouraging councils to take a more holistic approach to housing need, considering a range of tenures and finance options and wider housing support, along with the option of making a homelessness application. In June 2010 the Scottish Government launched the Scottish Housing Options Funding programme which is providing in the region of £500,000 of 'enabling funds' to local authorities over a 14-month programme³⁶. As part of the development of Housing Options, 5 regional 'hubs' have been established with 'lead' local authorities facilitating discussion, learning and the sharing of best practice.

Applied properly, by expanding the range of possibilities open to people who approach local authorities with a housing problem, a Housing Options approach has the potential to improve choices for homeless people and relieve some pressure on social housing lets. This gives grounds for cautious optimism. However, it is early days and it remains to be seen how practice will evolve.

³⁶ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/Housing/access/homeless/HomelessnessPrevention>

Homelessness Response (32 – 56)

The remaining bulk of the recommendations looked at responses to homelessness in an attempt to make services as effective as possible. Underpinning this intention was the need for enhanced partnerships across local authority departments, especially with social work departments and with other stakeholders including health professionals and voluntary service providers. The recommendations focused on availability of support services and establishing multi-agency protocols for those with particular health needs and about joining up services for those with substance misuse problems. Specifically, recommendations looked at effective responses in:

- Health
- Employment and
- Social Networks.

This included drawing up Health and Homelessness Action Plans, provision of support for homeless people to maintain current health networks, to mainstream services, and monitoring GP registrations. In terms of employment, there were targeted recommendations to help improve access to mainstream employment, facilitate employer participation and expand opportunities for homeless people in the public sector. Many of these focused on the work of Jobcentre Plus and concentrated on funding from the New Future Fund. Through many of these initiatives, there was an emphasis on giving all homeless people the advice, support and opportunities through their initial resettlement period and beyond, to help maintain their tenancy. This included establishing or maintaining social networks and working to building social interaction into wider needs assessments.

Analysis:

Considering the breadth of this cluster of recommendations, for successful implementation multi-agency buy-in would be required. In terms of a national picture however the seems to be only pockets of true partnership working across different agencies on the ground.

Health and homelessness is a vital area and one where progress has been fragmented, with a lack of political leadership to drive this cluster of recommendations forward. While there have been significant improvements in the partnerships across local authorities and health boards, health outcomes for homeless people remain very poor³⁷ and there seems to be a problem in joining up the services to provide consistent support for a range of health needs. Recent research by Scottish Council for Single Homeless (SCSH) showed that while there is a good awareness of the Health and Homelessness Standards, some areas are operating much better than others and some parts of the action plan need to be pulled back on track

³⁷ Research by Dr David Morrison at Glasgow University, concluded that homeless people are 4 times more likely to die prematurely than those who are not homeless
<http://ije.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2009/03/21/ije.dyp160.abstract>

through government initiatives³⁸. Stalled progress in this area has been exacerbated by the changes to ring-fenced funding and no nationwide training and development initiatives.

There have been some important initiatives around the social networks of homeless people and employability, particularly through the funding of Glasgow Homeless Network and The Scottish Homelessness and Employability Network. The Scottish Social Networks Forum was also established in response to the Task Force recommendations to raise awareness of the need for positive social networks. The Scottish Government New Deal service and the Progress2Work initiatives culminated in the Employability Framework being published in 2006. However there remain significant barriers to homeless people accessing employment and there is no clear national agenda driving these initiatives forward.

There has been very little progress in terms of the recommendations relating specifically to supply and allocations policy.

Commentary:

Effective responses to the wide range of support needs that homeless applicants have, rely heavily on multi-agency planning and delivery of services. Partnership working was regarded by many of those consulted as a key achievement since the Task Force recommendations were published, even if the policy framework hasn't developed as much as in other areas. It was thought that:

'good partnership working has come a long way'

'joined up working has been the most successful development'.

'many new dedicated posts have been created and service delivery is much more focused on individual need'.

'promoting and improving joint working between key partners and Council departments to ensure a corporate approach to address homelessness'.

However the picture that emerges is fragmented, with some respondents saying that partnerships have *'proved a harder nut to crack especially with health partners and (to a lesser degree) social work colleagues'* with many respondents agreeing that other local authority departments and external partners do not take responsibility for homelessness. It was suggested that to see real improvements in health and homelessness practice and outcomes, it would be necessary to build in requirements on health boards. It was also felt that a better diagnostic tool for GPs would be useful to help with intervention and prevention strategies.

³⁸ Health and Homelessness Standards Survey 2010 <http://www.scsh.org.uk/information/features.htm>

Key services within health are substance misuse and mental health services. There was concern that advice and support for those with poor mental health was inconsistent and that sometimes staff are not equipped to deal with complex needs. In addition, it was also commented that assessment and planning should be done on a multi-agency basis because for the most vulnerable applicants with multiple support needs *'accommodation is just not enough'* for some vulnerable people. There was some discussion that joining up services would also help with planning and commissioning what is needed.

It was generally felt that recommendations to take forward employment policies for homeless people had largely been unsuccessful and this was linked to both a lack of resources and a lack of political will to drive through changes. It was commented that there had been significantly less emphasis on these recommendations from central government since the Concordat ushered in a new funding regime, and that what was necessary was more targeted funding for specific projects in areas where they are particularly needed.

'with so many issues, employability and social networks etc are the kind of areas that fall down the priority list'

'difficulty in seeing homelessness issues as a responsibility for any other service but housing'.

Information (2, 50, 58)

The final recommendations dealt with the ongoing analysis and further research, including the establishment of a Homelessness Monitoring Group. This also covered further analysis of ethnic status of homeless applicants, and a more inclusive range of questions relating to homelessness being included in the Scottish Household Survey.

Analysis:

The Homelessness Monitoring Group was established in accordance with these recommendations and the work and research it produced contributed to the evidence base, but also in keeping homelessness on the political agenda while it was still reporting. The activity by the group has now petered out, underlining the feeling that homelessness does not occupy the same priority status it did when these recommendations were published.

Commentary:

The final recommendations around specific research and monitoring data have largely been satisfied, the work of the Homelessness Monitoring Group has tapered off and there is now no formal reporting of what developments and progress is being made which makes planning and prioritising at a local level challenging.

Section 4: Conclusions

This report has shown that implementation of the Homelessness Task Force recommendations is incomplete. That, in itself, is hardly surprising. It would be unlikely that any report produced nine years ago would perfectly anticipate all future priorities and remain uniformly relevant across such a long period. In other words, some things may not have happened because, on reflection they seemed less important or, at least, not as important as other priorities which have emerged. That much is reasonable. What is less reasonable is that those shifts seem to have occurred with very little explicit rationale. Priorities simply seem to have leaked away and there has been nothing like the systematic appraisal which characterised the Task Force. This is the “drift” of the report title.

The work of the Homelessness Task Force and the final recommendations sought to achieve a significant step change in homelessness policy and practice and improve advice, support and provision of services for those affected by homelessness. The developments in legislation, in particular the 2012 commitment, cannot be underestimated, and have impacted on policy and the understanding of services to homeless people. It seems that there has been some high-level buy-in to the notion that homelessness is not just a housing issue although corporate support for homelessness interventions remains patchy. There is still some way to go with wholesale buy-in but there has certainly been a gradual acknowledgement that to prevent homelessness and repeat applications, strong partnerships, joint protocols and targeted interventions are vital. Joint working across local authority departments but also with RSLs, the PRS and voluntary sector partners is seen as a high priority going forward, specifically in relation to homeless people and families with high levels of support needs.

While it was agreed that there were positive developments around prevention in recent years, respondents to the questionnaire agreed that focusing resources on early intervention/prevention remains the most important element in reducing homelessness in Scotland, after maintaining funding levels. There was strong consensus that *‘with public sector cuts, it is inevitable that services will be affected and jobs lost, this will clearly have an impact on homeless services’*. It was also felt that throughout the forthcoming budget cuts, Ministerial and high-level political leadership would be crucial to making sure homelessness is at the top of the agenda. While the financial backdrop has changed considerably since the recommendations were published in a way that could probably not have been anticipated, we must ensure that the successful delivery of existing services does not come under threat as homelessness competes with other policies. The concerns in this area were widespread with calls to *‘re-introduce ring fenced monies and standardise the provision of housing information and advice’* and to maintain a *‘continual review of existing services to ensure specific housing and care needs of homeless households are met’*.

Despite the relevance of the recommendations on homelessness policy and practice, implementation is constrained by limited supply of affordable homes. This is impacting not only on provision of permanent accommodation for homeless households but also on the quality and supply of temporary accommodation where more and more households are finding themselves. With ongoing cuts to funding, the partnerships across all sectors and within local authorities will be increasingly vital to service delivery, but ironically, will be increasingly strained. The clear concern from all quarters about the current and future financial constraints on local authority budgets is understandable and will certainly shape future policy decisions. However, it must be remembered that there was a lack of momentum behind the implementation of a lot of the recommendations before the recession hit. When the HMG produced its final annual report in 2006, only 8 of the recommendations were 'fully realised' and the dwindling of reporting or monitoring of the recommendations since 2006 suggests that there is a declining will at national level to drive the second and arguably harder part of this policy commitment: implementation.

It seems clear from analysis and discussion that reducing homelessness and achieving long-term goals is about more than legislation and there is some way to go to achieving the recommendations. While there will clearly be implications from the changing financial environment, there is also a requirement for *'continued, increased greater focus on prevention'* and *'more emphasis both at national and local level towards prevention of homelessness'*. Many of those who fed into this report believe that we now need to be looking at policy post- 2012 and *'start to think about the future beyond that...our focus should be about long term and sustainable solutions'*.

The most structured and measurable recommendation from the Task Force was the 2012 commitment to remove priority need distinction, and this will be achieved within the timeframes, albeit with some significant challenges arising in some local authorities. It is, however, important to bear in mind that this was only ever about expanding categories and rights to housing, there were other Task Force recommendations around how to support and advise homeless people that were designed to underpin this expansion of rights and duties. The fact that the 2012 commitment was only one of a package of reforms and improvements means that it was never intended to be delivered in isolation and on the basis of this report; there remains a huge amount to do.

Section 5: Recommendations

The work of the Homelessness Task Force has been held up as '*some kind of exemplar for the rest of the European Union*'³⁹ and it is imperative that the Scottish Government sees the HTF Recommendations through to their successful conclusion. With homeless application numbers still high, the recommendations remain important and should not be allowed to become eclipsed by new priorities.

There are many examples of unfinished business highlighted throughout this report. Rather than repeat these here, below we set out ways forward at a more strategic level:

1. After the elections in May 2011, we would like to see the Scottish Government committing to reduce homelessness by doing the following things:
 - The Housing Minister should make homelessness top of his or her agenda and make sure it is a priority in the Scottish budget.
 - The Housing Minister must ensure that the voices of homeless people are heard in housing and related policies.
 - The Housing Minister must lobby against the UK Government's damaging benefit cuts that will impact disproportionately on homeless and vulnerable people.
2. Considering the number of changes to legislation, policy and funding since the Code of Guidance on Homelessness was published in 2005⁴⁰, the Scottish Government should produce a consolidated and revised Code of Guidance. Despite the addition of a section on homelessness prevention in 2009, there is a need to revisit all parts of the guidance and update them to reflect changing legislation and priorities. This is especially important considering the shift towards Housing Options, the 2012 commitment, changes to housing support and the welfare system.
3. The Scottish Government with the Scottish Housing Regulator should initiate and fund a new and independent study to undertake a series of progress checks on implementation of the recommendations and future priorities. Shelter Scotland has previously called for a 'stock-take' on homelessness policy⁴¹ and we feel this study should pick up where the HMG's work ended, but extend the remit and look beyond

³⁹ 'Sustainable solutions to homelessness: the Scottish Case' (2007)
<https://dspace.stir.ac.uk/dspace/bitstream/1893/1436/3/Sustainable%20Solutions%20to%20Homelessness.pdf>

⁴⁰ The Code of Guidance on Homelessness (Scottish Government 2005)
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/05/31133334/33366>

⁴¹ 'Progress on homelessness: Evidence to Local Government and Communities Committee 11.06.08'
http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0009/86058/hmg_progress_to_committee_june_08.pdf

2012. With a new financial environment and so many competing priorities, there is concern that homelessness is being subsumed under other issues and the drive to improve outcomes may be lost. The new SHR could, for example, take a long-term approach and report findings and make further recommendations for the next 20 years, deliverable through 5 year plans.

4. Following on from this 'progress check study', the Scottish Government along with COSLA and other key partners should initiative a second stage of planning for the post-2012 era. This should result in a second phase action plan for the reduction of homelessness, building on good practice, positive examples and the further development of homelessness prevention strategies.
5. To take forward this 'second phase action plan' there should be the equivalent high-level leadership that guided the Homelessness Task Force. This would help to ensure that after the 2012 commitment is met, there remains a tight focus on the challenges that remain and the national and local solutions to them.
6. The Scottish Government should prioritise the continued financing of homelessness initiatives, services and projects to continue to build on the existing good practice and positive developments. It is important that the progress that has been made in homelessness services over the past 10 years is not undone.
7. The Scottish Government should commence all parts of the Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 as recommended by the Task Force final report and passed by the Scottish Parliament. The legislation concerning intentionality and local connections are integral parts of the implementation plan for the 2012 commitment and should be delivered as soon as possible.

Appendix 1:

Homelessness Task Force Members:

Iain Gray, Minister for Social Justice (Chair)

Cllr Rita Miller, COSLA; Mark Turley, COSLA

Robert Aldridge, Director, Scottish Council for Single Homeless

Liz Nicolson, Director, Shelter Scotland

Margaret Taylor, Director, Glasgow Council for Single Homeless

Mel Young, Director, The Big Issue in Scotland

Dave Alexander, Scottish Federation of Housing Associations

Pat Bagot, Policy and Practice Manager, Communities Scotland

Suzanne Fitzpatrick, Department of Urban Studies, Glasgow University

David Belfall, Head of Group, Development Department, Scottish Executive

Homelessness Monitoring Group:

Robert Aldridge - Scottish Council for Single Homeless (SCSH)

Liz Burns - Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA)

Isobel Anderson - University of Stirling

Mike Neilson - Scottish Executive Development Department

Archie Stoddart - Shelter Scotland

Catriona Renfrew - Greater Glasgow Health Board

Mark Turley - Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA)

Karen Watt - Communities Scotland

John Mills - Fife Council (CoSLA)

Rab Murray - Association of Directors of Social Work (ADSW)

Appendix 2:

Stakeholder Discussion Group Members

- Fiona King, Policy Officer, Shelter Scotland (facilitator)
- Zoe McGuire, Policy Assistant, Shelter Scotland (Minutes)

- David Bookbinder, Head of Policy and Public Affairs, CIH
- Alastair Cameron, Chief Executive, Scottish Churches Housing Action
- Dan Coote, Policy Officer, SCSH
- Claire Frew, Policy Officer, Glasgow Homelessness Network
- Tracy Lindsay, Homelessness Strategy and Operations Co-ordinator, South Lanarkshire Council
- Iain McLean, Homelessness Development Officer, West Lothian Council
- David Ogilvie, Planning and Strategy Manager, SFHA
- Pam Orchard, Deputy CEO, Cyrenians
- Esther Wilson, Housing Strategy and Development Service Manager, East Lothian Council

Local authority questionnaire respondents

Aberdeenshire Council
Angus Council
Argyll & Bute Council
Dundee City Council
East Ayrshire Council
East Lothian Council
Fife Council
Highland
Inverclyde Council
Midlothian Council
North Ayrshire Council
North Lanarkshire Council
Perth and Kinross Council
Shetland Islands Council
South Ayrshire Council
South Lanarkshire
The Moray Council
West Dunbartonshire Council
West Lothian council

Appendix 3:

Priority assessments as a percentage of all assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness: by local authority: 2002-03 to 2009-10

	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
Scotland	73	73	75	76	77	80	83	85
Aberdeen City	64	66	72	70	66	66	87	84
Aberdeenshire	65	68	73	68	71	76	86	87
Angus	72	81	81	82	78	81	91	100
Argyll & Bute	69	61	58	65	74	74	77	84
Clackmannanshire	78	77	74	81	81	80	81	85
Dumfries & Galloway	60	71	75	75	81	85	85	81
Dundee City	80	86	91	88	81	81	89	99
East Ayrshire	59	57	67	63	69	67	91	93
East Dunbartonshire	69	67	72	71	74	74	82	79
East Lothian	64	61	66	65	63	65	68	60
East Renfrewshire	72	74	77	71	70	78	73	83
Edinburgh, City of	67	69	72	78	81	82	82	82
Eilean Siar	57	54	62	61	64	71	76	77
Falkirk	65	64	75	72	72	78	85	89
Fife	62	62	63	63	65	69	71	74
Glasgow City	85	87	86	86	85	87	89	90
Highland	67	57	52	56	71	79	82	81
Inverclyde	75	66	76	74	69	70	86	94
Midlothian	73	71	77	78	83	81	79	83
Moray	84	60	52	50	54	69	71	72
North Ayrshire	73	75	78	77	80	89	95	91
North Lanarkshire	69	68	80	77	76	75	79	81
Orkney	70	83	79	76	76	79	91	93
Perth & Kinross	75	76	74	69	69	71	73	82
Renfrewshire	81	76	80	86	86	90	92	96
Scottish Borders, The	68	74	66	69	69	73	73	68
Shetland	65	69	90	77	71	63	70	64
South Ayrshire	52	60	68	72	77	74	81	87
South Lanarkshire	67	65	70	72	72	83	82	86
Stirling	58	65	62	68	68	70	69	88
West Dunbartonshire	81	82	85	89	90	96	97	98
West Lothian	68	71	73	74	79	80	79	85

This table contains all applications with an assessment date within the financial years above and an assessment decision of homeless and in priority need as a percentage of those assessed as homeless.

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/hmlss0910>