

# **Aberdeen Community Hub Impact Report**

Shelter Scotland

September 2018

Until there's a home for everyone.

[shelterscotland.org](http://shelterscotland.org)

## Introduction

**Shelter Scotland is the national housing and homelessness charity.**

At Shelter Scotland we work to alleviate the distress caused by homelessness and bad housing.

We do this by giving advice, information and advocacy to people in housing need, and by campaigning for lasting political change to end the housing crisis for good.

We strive every day to give people the help they need and we campaign relentlessly to achieve our vision of a safe, secure and affordable home for everyone.



## Aberdeen Community Hub

Shelter Scotland has 4 Community Hubs; in Aberdeen, Dundee, Glasgow and Edinburgh. All our Community Hubs offer independent housing advice alongside advice on money and debt, welfare benefits and fuel poverty; as well as access to legal advice and advocacy.

The Aberdeen Community Hub, based at 36 Upperkirkgate, Aberdeen, in the city centre, operates a regular drop-in service. Our staff provide the public with specialist advice as well as an Information Station where clients can access digital services. Simply put – we help de-stress an already stressed situation by delivering person-centred support.

Our Aberdeen Hub makes Shelter Scotland visible within the local community, making it clear that we are available both locally and nationally. While housing and homelessness problems are a national concern, Aberdeen has its own local concerns and it's essential that Shelter Scotland delivers support in line with these specific issues.



Official National Statistics show that in Aberdeen in 2017/18...

# 1,362

households were assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness.

## 1,708

homelessness applications were made



a 13% increase on 2016/17

## 78%

of applications were assessed as homeless



lower than the national average of 82%

## 4,395

housing options approaches were made



**425** households in temporary accommodation on 31 March 2018, incl. **80** children; decreases of 4% and 30% respectively.



## 85

households were re-assessed as homeless within the same year



a 21% increase on 2016/17

## 46%

of assessments identified an additional support need



a 15% increase on 2016/17

## 28%

of households are classed as fuel poor



not statistically different to the national level

## 80

households slept rough in the 3 months before applying



a 36% decrease on 2016/17

## 45

households slept rough the night before making an application



a 36% decrease on 2016/17

## Key Issues and Concerns

Shelter Scotland recognises that Aberdeen has a complex socio-economic make up with many people priced out of the housing market in the rental sector and a lack of appropriate social housing stock available.

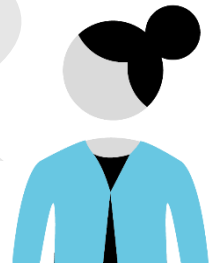
Constant changes to the benefit system have worsened the ability of clients to fully understand their rights and navigation of the system with regard to sustaining tenancies.



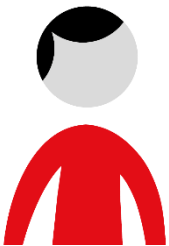
Staff from the Aberdeen Hub take their expert housing advice to the streets

### Our frontline housing and homelessness advisors in Aberdeen tell us that:

“Court action is being used by the council as a means of debt collection. Many cases need not have come to court if earlier intervention had taken place. Court action for eviction should only be used as a last resort”



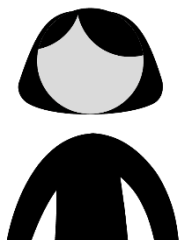
“The Pre-Action requirements for evictions now just seem like a tick box exercise in the process of raising eviction proceedings, rather than a valid attempt by housing officers to address the issues that led to rent arrears.”



“We’re concerned by instances of people being turned away before a homeless application is accepted, and told there has been “no material change in circumstances’, when no investigation into their circumstances is done.”



“Since the downturn in the oil industry, we are seeing an increase in homeowners seeking our assistance to prevent the repossession of a mortgaged home.”



Summary of Shelter Scotland Aberdeen Cases (1<sup>st</sup> April 2017 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018)

**1,355** households from Aberdeen approached Shelter Scotland for help last year

**90** (7%)

of those were currently homeless / facing homelessness that night

**260**

(19%) were at risk of homelessness within next 28 days

**521**

(38%) were at risk of homelessness but not within next 28 days

**336**

(39%) households who were homeless / at risk of homelessness contained children

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## Shelter Scotland Case Studies

The following case studies are just a small example of the types of situations our advisors handle on a regular basis and all relate to cases in Aberdeen City Council.

### CASE STUDY A

An EEA national with a 6-year-old son came to the Aberdeen hub, due to be evicted the following day. The Council refused to defer the eviction for further investigation into the client's right to reside.

The client was evicted but Shelter Scotland staff arranged temporary accommodation and a Homeless Assessment. A 1-hour appointment confirmed that the client had derivative right of residence. Shelter Scotland staff then successfully appealed a benefits decision; benefits which had previously been stopped were backdated, and the client cleared their outstanding rent arrears.

The initial decision of intentionally homeless was overturned, and the family were made statutorily homeless. The client and son are now in a permanent tenancy, and backdated JSA has allowed them to pay for appliances for the property.

### CASE STUDY B

A client and her children fled a domestic abuse situation and went to stay with relatives in Glasgow. Due to the difficult situation, she failed to maintain rent payments and accrued arrears. When she returned to Aberdeen, she found an eviction from the local authority had been granted against her in court.

The Hub's Money and Debt Advice service intervened, resulting in backdated DHP (which reduced her arrears) and negotiation with the local authority landlord. The eviction of the client and her children has been prevented and her debts are being addressed by means of affordable repayment arrangements.

### CASE STUDY C

After being liberated from jail after a short remand, a client was referred to Shelter Scotland from Criminal Justice Social Work. The client had met with a case officer in prison and been told she would not be provided with assistance of accommodation upon release, despite being sober and engaging with services.

Shelter Scotland evidenced a material change in circumstances and requested a new homeless application be accepted. When this was refused, the Shelter Scotland Law Service challenged the Local Authority for not following their legal duties. The Local Authority conceded their error, accepted a new homeless application and provided temporary accommodation.

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## Recommendations for Action

Shelter Scotland have a number of suggestions of action to better prevent and respond to homelessness cases on a Local Authority level. We'd like to see a move towards a more person-centred, joined-up approach, in which a person's engagement with various different services is coordinated, rather than fragmented. We'd like those experiencing or facing homelessness to receive comprehensive support that recognises their diverse and unique needs.

### Prevention

In Aberdeen specifically, we recommend a focus on earlier intervention by the Local Authority to identify the cause of rent arrears and provide solutions. There have been a high number of cases in which this would have prevented a situation escalating to homelessness.

### Complex Needs

We recommend that a common definition is developed of what we mean by complex needs, perhaps in line with Chaos Index used by Simon Community Scotland.

We recommend that single managers should be appointed to strategically coordinate the response to people with complex needs.

We recommend that local services focus on the problems that underlie the presenting factors of those with complex needs, and allow for a greater length of time to engage with these individuals.

### High Risk Groups

We recommend that, where possible, local authority homelessness teams avoid placing prison leavers in hostels as temporary accommodation.

### Empty Homes

Unlike over half of Scottish Local Authorities, Aberdeen City Council does not have a dedicated Empty Homes Officer. We recommend that Aberdeen City Council engage an Empty Homes Officer to generate more homes from the current housing stock.

For more information, or to chat through this further, don't hesitate to get in contact:

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Shelter Scotland helps over half a million people every year struggling with bad housing or homelessness through our advice, support and legal services. And we campaign to make sure that, one day, no one will have to turn to us for help.

We're here so no one has to fight bad housing or homelessness on their own.

Please support us at [shelterscotland.org](https://shelterscotland.org)