

**Scottish Labour
Policy Forum First
Stage Consultation
Paper –
Communities**
Shelter Scotland
response

August 2019

SHELTER SCOTLAND

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.

Shelter Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Labour Policy Forum's First Stage Consultation Paper on Communities, and has answered the following questions:

1. How can we increase the supply of housing in the council and social sector and increase the choice for tenants?
5. What measures should be taken to build more accessible homes?
9. What further regulation is required in the private sector including Houses in Multiple Occupation and Airbnb?
10. What further action is required to eliminate homelessness by 2020 at the latest?

1. How can we increase the supply of housing in the council and social sector and increase the choice for tenants?

Shelter Scotland believes that everyone should have access to a safe, secure and affordable home, but this is not the case for a number of households in Scotland.¹ Demand dramatically exceeds supply in Scotland's housing system, the only way to ensure that there is greater choice for tenants is to increase the amount of housing supply in the system – with a particular focus on homes for social rent.

Scotland has seen decades of underinvestment in the supply of affordable housing, and it is this failure to build consistently and at scale which is at the root of the current housing emergency. In 2016, Shelter Scotland called for 12,000 dwellings to be built per annum over five years in order to address the housing shortage,² and welcomed the Scottish Government's commitment to build 50,000 homes over the course of this parliament as a step in the right direction.³ But this is just the foundation - it will not address Scotland housing need. It will take more significant commitments like this to address the chronic housing shortage which leads to a lack of choice for tenants in the social sector. Shelter Scotland are repeating our research from 2015 alongside SFHA and CIH Scotland to provide a refreshed target for new affordable homes.

Without a long-term, cross-party commitment to an affordable house building programme these issues of unmet demand in the housing system will continue, demonstrated by long waiting lists and a lack of choice. We need another numerical target based on thorough research and evidence to ensure that affordable house building is maintained beyond 2021.

5. What measures should be taken to build more accessible homes?

Shelter Scotland believes that the supply of adapted and adaptable housing in Scotland is currently insufficient and should be increased across all tenures.⁴ According to Independent Living in Scotland in 2017, only 0.7% of local authority housing stock and 1.5% of housing managed by registered social landlords (RSLs) is accessible to wheelchair users.⁵

Demand for accessible housing is increasing, particularly for wheelchair users. Projections indicate that there will be 80 per cent growth in the number of wheelchair users by 2024.⁶ Shelter Scotland works frequently with people who

¹ Shelter Scotland (2018) [Shelter Scotland Impact Report 2017/18](#)

² Shelter Scotland (2015) [Affordable Housing Need in Scotland – Summary Report](#)

³ Shelter Scotland (2018) [Review of Strategic Investment Plans for Affordable Housing](#)

⁴ Shelter Scotland (2018) [Response to LG&C Committee call for evidence on housing adaptations](#)

⁵ EHRC (2018) [Housing and Disabled People: Scotland's hidden crisis](#)

⁶ EHRC (2018) [Housing and Disabled People: Scotland's hidden crisis](#)

are stuck in housing that does not meet their needs, often rendering them housebound and cut off from social networks, or forced to make significant and inappropriate changes to their lives including sleeping on sofas, washing at a sink or being carried up multiple flights of stairs.

Case study

Carol, a kidney dialysis patient, contacted Shelter Scotland because she faced delays having a shower installed in her housing association home. The delays had a severe impact on her health and wellbeing. Not only did she have to stand at a sink to wash every day, but a complication of her illness is an uncomfortable rash covering her whole body which was exacerbated by the lack of a shower. A shower was finally installed after Shelter Scotland became involved in supporting Carol and her case.

Case study

Linda and her two teenage children became homeless due to marriage breakdown. As a wheelchair user who was also homeless the housing association restricted the homes she could bid on to the small number it allocated for people with mobility problems. However, Linda's Occupational Therapist confirmed there were properties suitable for adaptation in the category allocated to people experiencing homelessness which Linda was not allowed to access. Due to the limitations on the properties she could bid for, Linda endured three years in a temporary flat which was unsuitable for her disability rendering her housebound at times when the lift broke down. She was finally offered a suitable home as the result of out of court negotiation between the Housing Association and Shelter Scotland's Law Service.

Analysis of Strategic Housing Investment Plans and a sample of Affordable Housing Supply Plans on behalf of Shelter Scotland raised several issues relating to accessible housing, including those around funding.⁷ The research found that 12% of new homes planned are classed as 'specialist housing' but that it is difficult to track what type of specialist housing they are. The Equalities and Human Rights Commission has recommended that local authorities should ensure that a minimum of 10 per cent of new housing is built to a wheelchair-accessible standard.⁸ Shelter Scotland would agree that, given the housing crisis and the profile of the ageing population, a serious discussion needs to be had about how we increase the amount of accessible housing to meet current and future needs.

⁷ Shelter Scotland (2018) [Review of Strategic Investment Plans for Affordable Housing](#)

⁸ HRC (2018) [Housing and Disabled People: Scotland's hidden crisis](#)

The right to adequate housing is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but there is currently no legal right to adequate housing in Scottish law, and often existing rights are denied when adequate housing is not provided. Shelter Scotland believes that there should be a legal right to adequate housing⁹ and a programme of enforcement and awareness of housing rights, alongside a supply of housing which meets everyone's needs. For Shelter Scotland, it is sustained social housing supply and strong housing rights (and better realisation of rights) that will have the greatest impact on improving the housing system and people's experiences of it. Without these, new initiatives and other policy interventions are simply tinkering around the edges.

9. What further regulation is required in the private sector including Houses in Multiple Occupation and Airbnb?

Scotland has seen significant positive reform in the private rented sector (PRS) in the last decade. The introduction of landlord registration, the Private Residential Tenancy, and letting agent regulation and the creation of the First Tier Tribunal have all been part of a package of reform which intends to offer protection to tenants in Scotland's growing PRS. Shelter Scotland welcomes these changes, but in a system where demand significantly exceeds supply, further change is essential to protect tenants – particularly those on lower incomes who may not have an alternative to living in the PRS.

Data

Scotland lacks robust and detailed data on rent levels in the private rented sector. Much of the data that is currently available is collected from market rates, rather than rent levels for sitting tenants. Additionally, increases between tenancies are not monitored nor are quality standards on PRS properties on a national scale.

Shelter Scotland believes that the current landlord register is not extensive enough in terms of the data it has the potential to collect. Better data on a range of aspects will allow us to better understand the issues facing Scotland's growing PRS, and develop effective protection for tenants based on this.

Affordability

Shelter Scotland has significant concerns regarding the affordability of housing across all tenures. The main reason people came to Shelter Scotland for support last year was because they were struggling to pay or afford their housing costs.¹⁰ This is particularly potent in the PRS, given the greater reliance on this tenure in recent years from households on low incomes.

⁹ Shelter Scotland (2019) [Housing is a human right](#)

¹⁰ Shelter Scotland (2018) [Shelter Scotland Impact Report 2017/18](#)

Fundamentally, rents are too high because housing values are too high. However, ultimately, the only measure that will bring down rents in the long term for tenants in Scotland is ensuring there is a sustained programme of work to increase housing supply in Scotland – both building affordable homes and bringing empty homes back into use. Without a long-term, cross-party, cross-parliamentary term commitment to affordable housing supply these issues in the housing system, manifesting in high rents in the PRS, will not be meaningfully addressed.¹¹

Quality

Greater regulation and enforcement are required to ensure that the quality of Scotland's PRS stock is adequate. Currently, the monitoring and enforcement of standards in the PRS varies considerably across local authorities due to resource and structure. Shelter Scotland believes that enforcement action should be consistent and easy for tenants to access across all local authorities.

For Shelter Scotland's positions on short term letting regulation¹² and the expansion of regulation for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)¹³ please see the footnoted links.

10. What further action is required to eliminate homelessness by 2020 at the latest?

There is a currently a housing emergency in Scotland. The latest Scottish Government statistics found that homelessness in Scotland has gone up across almost every indicator between and 2017/18 & 2018/19.¹⁴ Last year there were 36,465 homeless applications in Scotland, a 3% increase on the previous year. This is alongside an increase in the number households in temporary accommodation (+1%), and households in temporary accommodation containing children (+2%), and an increase in the average length of time a household is in temporary accommodation – 180 days, compared to 175 days the previous year.¹⁵

Despite new and growing initiatives around homelessness, such as Housing First, the system is overwhelmed by extremely high levels of need. More needs to be done to prevent homelessness much further up stream, and to properly resource local authorities to respond to those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness including the provision of support.

¹¹ Shelter Scotland (2019) [Shelter Scotland consultation response to the Proposed Fair Rents \(Scotland\) Bill](#)

¹² Shelter Scotland (2019) [Consultation response – Short term lets: a regulatory framework for Scotland](#)

¹³ Shelter Scotland (2019) [Consultation response: Adding new categories to the definition of an HMO](#)

¹⁴ Scottish Government (2019) [Homelessness in Scotland: 2018/19](#)

¹⁵ Shelter Scotland (2019) [Analysis briefing on the Scottish Government Homelessness in Scotland 2018/19 statistical release](#)

Homelessness cannot be solved by the housing and homelessness sector alone. Leadership and responsibility from health, education and justice amongst others is vital.

Shelter Scotland recommends the following actions to address homelessness in Scotland, as set out in our Homelessness in Scotland topic briefing:¹⁶

Prevention

- The Housing Options Training Toolkit should be rolled out to all local authorities as a priority.
- The Scottish Government should carefully consider the learnings from the introduction of a prevention duty in Wales and assess whether this approach could work in Scotland, and what changes or improvements could be made in the Scottish context.
- A multi-agency and cross-sector approach is crucial to preventing homelessness before it happens; detailed plans and agreements as to how this will happen in practice should be set out.

Temporary accommodation

- Minimum standards of temporary accommodation should be implemented as soon as possible, and cover not only physical standards, but management and location standards.
- The use of Bed and Breakfast should be ended entirely.
- The Unsuitable Accommodation Order should be extended to all groups, and the Scottish Government should work closely with local authorities to ensure this is achieved effectively and sustainably.
- These changes should be supported by strong statutory guidance for local authorities.

Support

- The Scottish Government must provide reassurance to local authorities that they will be supported and funded to continue to provide high quality support into the future. Support is crucial to people accessing and sustaining a tenancy.
- The Scottish Government and local authorities must ensure that those who have support needs but do not qualify for Housing First do not slip

¹⁶ Shelter Scotland (2019) [Homelessness in Scotland – topic briefing](#)

through the cracks and are not disadvantaged by new support programmes.

Supply

- The Scottish Government must keep pace with demand and continue to invest in and build high levels of safe, decent and affordable homes in places and communities where people want to live.

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

Please support us at shelterscotland.org

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