

DELIVERING AN END TO SCOTLAND'S HOUSING EMERGENCY



Scottish Parliament election 2026

Introduction

Scotland is in the grip of a housing emergency that is damaging lives, undermining communities, and weakening economic growth. We know our housing system is broken and biased, with marginalised groups more likely to experience harm, and councils routinely breaking the law. We know that homelessness is becoming normalised and is the inevitable result of a failure to build social homes at scale and defend the hard-fought-for rights we have.



68%

**OF ADULTS IN SCOTLAND
THINK POLITICIANS
IN HOLYROOD SHOULD
BE DOING MORE TO TACKLE
THE ISSUE OF HOUSING**

But we know it doesn't have to be this way.

We will know that Scotland's housing emergency is ending when no local authority is breaking homelessness laws, we are building enough social homes to reduce need, and homelessness where it occurs is rare, brief, and non-recurring.

Shelter Scotland has worked with people with personal experience of our housing emergency to develop this delivery plan to end the housing emergency.

We held workshops across Scotland with frontline organisations; people currently trapped in the homelessness system and those recently moved into a social home of their own.

Each of those sessions expressed shared concerns.

We can't end homelessness without more social homes, homelessness services remain underfunded and undermined by the lack of housing, and people are forced to jump through hoops and fight for their rights instead of being treated with dignity and respect.

Participants also shared that they no longer trust politicians to fix the problem.

At a time when already broken homelessness services are being further strained by an inhumane asylum system that makes refugees homeless by design, politicians in Holyrood, Westminster and in local authorities must not be complacent about their responsibility.

Because homelessness is a political choice. Politicians can choose to manage the problem or work seriously to end it.

This is not the time for more laws that are unenforceable or that promise change that is never delivered. We cannot afford another lost parliament which fails to tackle the worsening housing emergency.

This is a time to get on and build the homes and protect local services.

We believe that this plan provides a blueprint to deliver.

Now it is over to our politicians to get on and do it.

DELIVERING CHANGE

What we are doing is not working, but the answer is simple - deliver enough social homes to bring down homelessness.

The Scottish Government has delivered more social homes per head of population over the last decade than the UK average. While commendable, clearing the low bar set by UK governments is not enough for Scotland's communities. We are failing to deliver the social homes we need.



That failure is harming some communities more than others. Black and People of Colour are now more than twice as likely than their white counterparts to experience homelessness in Scotland; people with multiple and complex needs are more likely to present as homeless multiple times and to sleep rough; women and children experience violence, vermin, and isolation in unlawful temporary accommodation.

Like others, we welcomed the ambition of the Scottish Government's Housing to 2040 vision but, five years on, we despair at the lack of a delivery plan, unifying purpose, or meaningful policy objectives for delivering new homes.

We had hoped the Scottish Government's September 2025 Housing Emergency Action Plan would represent a watershed moment that would connect policy to a reduction in homelessness and need.

Whilst there were some welcome measures to improve conditions for people experiencing homelessness, particularly children and women, the plan's goal does not come close to delivering the homes Scotland needs, and would guarantee that high levels of homelessness are here to stay.

The lack of a single-minded focus for Scottish Government housing policy is illustrated by the myriad of initiatives, working groups and plans, all of which have come and gone as homelessness has gone up and social housing delivery has slowed.

It is time for the Scottish Government to focus on a single strategic goal for housing policy.

The next Scottish Government must commit to a goal of reducing affordable housing need by the end of the next parliament.

To do this it must deliver the social homes we need, and deliver the housing rights we need.

Rights without the homes or the homes without the rights will not give people access to a home when they need one.

This document sets out the priorities we believe will deliver those homes and the housing rights that underpin access to them.

Full detail of the evidence behind these asks is available on our website.

DELIVERING THE SOCIAL HOMES WE NEED



Deliver enough new social homes to reduce affordable housing need, by:

- buying and building a minimum of 15,693 social homes every year to begin reducing housing need – a total of at least 78,465 over the five-year parliamentary term – backed by at least £8.8bn of investment
- implementing a new approach to capital funding that prioritises buying and building homes where affordable housing need is greatest

Take national responsibility for reducing affordable housing need, by:

- establishing a new National Housing and Land Agency with the objective of reducing affordable housing need.
- enabling that agency to bring forward a supply of development-ready sites in the right places
- allowing that agency to secure the benefits of increases in land value due to public investment in infrastructure and land. Let the agency reinvest those gains in delivering new homes

Make maximum use of existing stock, by:

- using the National Acquisitions Programme to reduce the number of children trapped in temporary accommodation
- accelerating efforts to bring empty homes back into use by implementing previously promised Compulsory Sale Orders
- mandating the use of Section 5 referrals to significantly increase the proportion of social housing allocations to go to homeless households to reduce the backlog of households trapped in the homelessness system

DELIVERING THE HOUSING RIGHTS WE NEED

Ensure people's housing rights are realised, by:

- guaranteeing existing housing rights are here to stay
- ending breaches of people's lifeline housing rights
- committing to ending austerity and providing housing and homelessness services with the funding they need
- promising no new rights without new funding so local authorities are not set up to fail
- adequately funding the civil legal aid system so people experiencing homelessness can access advice and support to enforce their housing rights
- passing the delayed Human Rights Bill to legislate for an enforceable Human Right to Adequate Housing in Scots Law
- ending the use of unsafe and harmful temporary accommodation for children

End the systemic inequality that characterises Scotland's broken housing system, by:

- protecting existing funding to mitigate the so-called bedroom tax and benefit cap, as well as committing to effectively end the two-child limit in Scotland
- enhancing the Scottish Welfare Fund to support marginalised women, including migrant women, women with no recourse to public funds, and unpaid carers
- working with the UK Government to close the loophole which means families lose out on Scottish Child Payment when they are forced into temporary accommodation
- removing barriers to the bidding process for social housing faced by people with no access to digital services or for whom English is not their first language
- targeting the systemic racism in Scottish housing that means Black and People of Colour are more than twice as likely to experience homelessness as their white counterparts
- implementing effective enforcement measures against landlords found to be practicing racial discrimination in the private rented sector
- providing direct financial and wraparound support to individuals granted leave to remain in the UK who have chosen to make Scotland their home, and to the local authorities supporting them
- advocating for additional support and a more humane asylum and refugee policy from the UK Government

Acknowledgements

Shelter Scotland is immensely grateful to the support of Talat Yaqoob and Kate Nevens for their work facilitating the workshops that have informed this plan.

We would also like to thank those who participated in these sessions, giving up their time and experiences to provide us with invaluable support. That includes representatives and participants from Rock Trust, Edinburgh Tenants Federation, Streetwork, Glasgow Disability Alliance, Maryhill Integration Network, Scottish Refugee Council, West of Scotland Regional Equality Council, Aberdeen Foyer, Aberdeen Cyrenians, Grampian Regional Equality Council, and Fife Gingerbread, as well as experts by experience from Shelter Scotland.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to Scottish Refugee Council and Aberdeen Foyer for kindly hosting two of these sessions.

This Delivery Plan has been informed by the views and needs of those at the frontline of our housing emergency, including representatives from partner organisations such as Glasgow Disability Alliance. Here is what their participants, Luke and Gavin, told us about what housing means to them:

Luke:

"We need more accessible social housing that can be adapted and age with us. Disabled people's needs change over time and our housing needs to adapt with this."

Gavin:

"Having a home that is accessible and meets a disabled person's needs is core to an individual's mental and physical health and enables an individual to be part of a community where they can thrive and socialise within that community and contribute to it. This benefits Scotland as a whole ensuring that an individual or family have a sense of place and belonging and allows them to create memories."



Social housing ends homelessness, and it's time our politicians got on with delivering those homes.



Email Scotland's party leaders today: tell them to prioritise building social homes.

shelterscotland.org/party-leaders



We exist to defend the right to a safe home and fight the devastating impact the housing emergency has on people and society.

For more information visit shelterscotland.org