

The 2012 Homelessness Commitment: A background note from Shelter Scotland

What is the 2012 commitment?

In 2003 the Scottish Parliament passed groundbreaking legislation stating that local authorities would have a duty to provide every unintentionally 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. This distinction is currently made when someone approaches a local authority in housing need and makes a homelessness application. The council has to assess a series of things to determine if there is a legal duty to provide that person with a home. Once proven to be homeless, there is a test of whether that person is in 'priority' or not. This would normally mean they have dependent children, a specific vulnerability or a health need. Those deemed 'non-priority' are normally single people, who at the moment have no right to permanent housing.

The '2012 commitment' will end this 'priority/non-priority' distinction. The removal of priority distinction means that local authorities will have a duty to house **all** those who are found to be homeless from 1 January 2013 and to provide the same level of service to all homeless people. The 'target' then is the date when that change takes place and once it has happened it will be in place continuously.

Background

In 2002 the Homelessness Task Force (HTF), a multi-agency forum set up by the then Scottish Executive and Chaired by the Minister, produced its final report which was a fifty-nine point action plan to radically change homelessness policy, practice and legislation.

The '2012 commitment' was envisaged as only one, albeit very important, recommendation of fifty-nine, designed to fundamentally change services for homeless people. This has become the headline recommendation but it was also recognised at the time that this headline commitment relied on other recommendations – around housing supply, advice, homelessness prevention and support to homeless people - also being implemented to make a real difference to homeless people.

The work of the Homelessness Task Force and the '2012 commitment' has put Scotland at the forefront of progressive homelessness legislation and has won international acclaim. The challenge, however, is in the delivery.

Progress to date

Progress towards the '2012 commitment' over the past 8 years has been significant, although some local authorities have been more successful than others in preparing for the expansion of homelessness duties. At the current pace, the removal of priority need status remains a challenge for local authorities and leaves a lot to be done, at an accelerated pace, in the next 18 months.

The target, put simply, is to assess 100% of all homelessness presentations as being in priority need. In 2002/03 the percentage of all homeless who were assessed as priority need, was 73% nationally and by 2009/10 (the most recent full year figures, see Appendix 1) it was 85%¹. The national figure, however, hides a lot of regional variation between different local authorities. There are 11 local authorities who are assessing over 90% of all homeless applicants as priority need and some have removed priority need all together, more than 2 years ahead of the target date. This shows significant changes in practice for councils and a commitment to improving the services to homeless people. At the other end of the scale, there are some councils who have made little or no progress and whose priority need assessments are still around 60-70%.

The timeframe for implementation of the '2012 commitment' was designed to allow for gradual expansion of priority need categories and for councils to develop homelessness prevention strategies and other initiatives around tenancy sustainment. There are pockets of good practice across the country and with the development of new forms of advice services, it is hoped that early intervention will help to reduce homelessness. However, the development of homelessness prevention services, joined up thinking and mechanisms to support those who are most vulnerable to homelessness have not developed quickly enough to absorb the widening duties.

A worrying trend developing is bottlenecks in temporary accommodation across many local authorities, with an 180% increase in the number of people in temporary accommodation since 2002. Local authorities tell us that the challenge of meeting the '2012 commitment' relies on two main factors: the supply of affordable housing and developing more proactive homelessness prevention approaches to make better use of the resources they have.

¹ All stats from the Scottish Government statistical bulletin
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/hmlss0910> (August 2010)

What needs to happen?

There is no option “not to meet” the ‘2012 commitment’. The only choice is whether Scotland has prepared sufficiently for the consequences of the change in rights.

Through analysis for a recent Shelter Scotland report looking at the progress made on the Homelessness Task Force recommendations², and from the new Scottish Government’s manifesto, we have identified some key things that must happen in order to meet the ‘2012 commitment’:

- Meeting the ‘2012 commitment’ must be a Scottish Government priority and that priority should be reflected in the Scottish budget and through Scottish Government policies.
- The Scottish Government needs to ensure that the manifesto commitment to build affordable 30,000 homes over the next 5 years is delivered. There is no value in Scotland receiving acclaim for promising to give every homeless person a home, if there are no homes to give.
- The Scottish Government should prioritise the continued financing of vital homelessness initiatives, service and projects to continue to build on the existing good practice and positive developments.
- The Scottish Government should produce a revised Code of Guidance to reflect significant changes in legislation since its publication in 2005. This would be an opportunity to pull together guidance and best practice around Housing Options, homelessness prevention and other policy developments.
- The Scottish Government should commence all parts of the Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003.
- Local authorities should work with partners across the public, private and voluntary sectors to try and prevent homelessness, or to provide sustainable solutions to people when it does occur. These include interventions such as: Rent Deposit Schemes (RDS), family mediation services, Private Sector Leasing (PSL) schemes, debt management services and tenancy support schemes amongst others.

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http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_library/policy_library_folder/progress_and_drift_a_review_of_the_homelessness_task_force_recommendations

Appendix 1:

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.

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