



MSP BRIEFING: TACKLING CHILD POVERTY IN SCOTLAND DELIVERY PLAN 2022-26 - SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT MINISTERIAL STATEMENT AND DEBATE, 24 MARCH 2022

Introduction

Shelter Scotland exists to defend the right to a safe home and fight the devastating impact the housing emergency has on people and society. We work in communities to understand the problem and change the system. We run national campaigns to fight for home.

We are pleased to have the opportunity to outline to MSPs our key concerns and our recommendations to help address the unacceptably high rates of child poverty in Scotland as the government prepares to publish its latest Delivery Plan. We believe that delivering a new generation of high-quality social homes can make a significant impact in tackling child poverty in Scotland.

Key Messages

- **Child poverty levels after housing costs are lower in Scotland due to the higher number of families in social housing.**
- **Increasing the supply of social housing decreases levels of poverty, by reducing housing costs in the long term and ensuring every child has a secure, warm and safe place to develop and grow.**
- **The housing emergency is contributing to high levels of child poverty, with children and families often stuck in unsuitable, unaffordable homes, or in temporary accommodation for unacceptable lengths of time. Delivering the social homes required can give these thousands of children the best possible start in life and help improve outcomes in health and education and reduce poverty levels.**
- **The 2022-2026 Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan must outline how the Scottish Government intends to get thousands of children out of temporary accommodation and unaffordable homes and out of poverty, and into safe, secure and affordable homes as a matter of priority.**

Social Housing

Scotland is in the grip of a housing emergency which is exacerbating child poverty across the country, and we need to see leadership from those in power at both the national and local level to help end it by building social housing.

Housing costs are a key driver of poverty, including of child poverty. **Previous research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has linked a higher supply of social housing in Scotland with lower rates of child poverty when compared to elsewhere in the UK,¹** but there is still more to be done to tackle poverty in Scotland.

¹ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2021), [Poverty in Scotland 2021](#)

The scale of the housing emergency:

- Right now, 13,192 households, including 7,510 children across Scotland, are trapped in temporary accommodation, often in cramped, unsuitable conditions. Many of them have been living like this for months, or even years
- In 2020/21, there were 33,792 homeless applications made, with 27,570 households assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness. These households included 11,804 children. This is equivalent to **32 children becoming homeless every day – more than the average primary school class.**²
- In 2020/21, a couple with children spent on average 341 days in temporary accommodation, compared to an average of 190 days for a couple without children. This means **if a couple with children entered temporary accommodation on the 24 March (the day of the parliamentary debate), they'd be there until 27 February 2023, on average**
- Figures from 2017/18 to 2019/20 showed that approximately 60,000 children in the private rented sector were living in poverty after housing costs, and 110,000 children in the social rented sector were living in poverty after housing costs³.
- Approximately **60,000 children are stuck on social housing waiting lists**⁴

We welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to deliver 110,000 new affordable homes by 2032, with at least 70% of these for social rent. This has the potential to make a real difference to the lives of children up and down the country.

These social homes must now be delivered at pace and in the areas they are needed. Only by delivering the social homes required can we achieve the structural change needed to end the cycles of poverty, by reducing housing costs in the long term and ensuring every child has a secure, warm and safe place to develop and grow. Scotland's lower poverty rate compared to the rest of the UK is due to lower housing costs driven by a higher proportion of social homes. Delivering a new generation of social homes will help Scotland go even further in tackling unacceptably high poverty rates.

The Impact of the Housing Emergency

The on-going housing emergency is contributing to high levels of child poverty, with children and families often stuck in unsuitable, unaffordable homes or temporary accommodation, some for unacceptably long periods of time.

The effects of waiting for a place to call home are shattering. Learning is disrupted. Family life is strained. Health and job prospects can be ruined. And in the face of a growing cost-of-living crisis, the problem will only worsen. More and more people, especially families with children, are being pushed further into poverty, often having to choose whether to pay rent or keep themselves warm.

² These figures are likely an underestimate; an unknown number of people, including children, experience hidden homelessness, meaning they do not appear in official figures. Some people aren't aware they can make a homeless application. Others, especially families, exhaust all other options – including staying with friends and family, and even separating their children – before going to the council for help. Finally, due to their immigration status, some families are not eligible to make a homeless application.

³ Scottish Government (2021) [Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2017-20](#)

⁴ Scottish Government (2020) [Scottish household survey 2019: annual report](#)

Children who have been homeless are three to four times more likely to experience mental health problems than children who have never been homeless, even a year after they've secured a permanent home, as well as increasing the risk of severe ill-health or disability.⁵ And according to teachers, children who are homeless or in bad housing are often late, exhausted and struggle to maintain relationships with other children.⁶

To tackle child poverty long-term, and improve health, mental health and educational outcomes we need to ensure there is an adequate supply of social homes for children to live and grow-up in. The latest Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan must also outline in detail a credible proposal to get the 7,510 children trapped in temporary accommodation across Scotland into safe, secure homes as quickly as possible.

Social Security

Alongside the structural change that a new generation of high-quality social homes will bring, immediate measures will also be vital in ensuring children have food, warmth and clothing during the current cost of living crisis.

The Scottish Child Payment has been labelled a 'game-changer' for its potential to provide support to the most hard-pressed families across the country, and we welcomed the Scottish Government's commitment to double this to £20 per child per week from April. However, in the face of rampant inflation, rising energy bills, and the callous cut to Universal Credit by the UK government, more may need to be done immediately to ensure more children do not fall into poverty – such as doubling this payment again to £40 per child per week. We have also been pleased to join with partners across the sector calling on the Chancellor to scrap the unjust benefit cap, and opposed the recent cut to Universal Credit which is devastating for so many families.

The cost of living crisis we are currently facing only serves to underline the fact that ensuring housing is affordable, warm and secure is a vital step we can take to tackle child poverty here in Scotland. This means delivering a new generation of social homes to give all children the best possible start in life.

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⁵ Shelter (2006) The chance of a lifetime

⁶ Digby A and Fu E for Shelter (2017) Impacts of homelessness on children – research with teachers. Kantar Public.