

Dundee Community Hub Impact Report

Shelter Scotland

September 2018

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.



Dundee 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 Dundee Community Hub, based at 4 South Ward Road in the city centre, operates an open-door policy to provide the public with specialist advice as well as an Information Station where they can access digital services. Simply put – we help de-stress an already stressed situation by delivering person-centred support.

Our Dundee 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, Dundee 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 Dundee in 2017/18...

1,025

households were assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness.

1,401

homelessness applications were made



a 9% increase on 2016/17

74%

of applications were assessed as homeless



lower than the national average of 82%

1,165

housing options approaches were made



255 households in temporary accommodation on 31 March 2018, incl. **175** children. These are increases of 2% and 9% respectively.



35

households were re-assessed as homeless within the same year



no change since 2016/17

58%

of assessments identified an additional support need



an 8% decrease on 2016/17

37%

of households are classed as fuel poor



not statistically different to the national level

175

households slept rough in the 3 months before applying



a 5% decrease on 2016/17

85

households slept rough the night before making an application



a 19% decrease on 2016/17

Key Issues and Concerns

Cases from Dundee make up 6% of all cases dealt with by Shelter Scotland, despite the fact that Dundee constitutes less than 3% of Scotland's population.

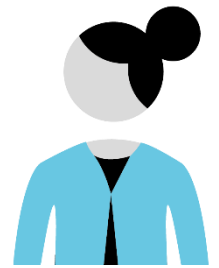
Compared to our other Community Hubs, the Dundee Community Hub encounters a disproportionate amount of Money and Debt Advice cases and Advice+ cases compared to housing advice cases.



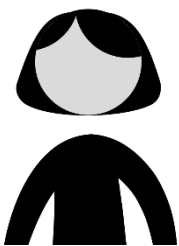
Staff from the Dundee Hub take their expert housing advice to the streets

Our frontline housing and homelessness advisors in Dundee tell us that:

“We have serious concerns about the amount of families in temporary accommodation.”



“We have been seeing people in the private rented sector losing their accommodation due to the new tenancies. Landlords have new obligations, and the reduction in tax breaks means landlords are evicting tenants in order to sell the properties.”



“There have been a number of recent cases in which landlords have predated tenancies to prior to 1st December 2017 in order to avoid entering into a new Private Rented Tenancy, and sidestep the obligations that come with it.”



Summary of Shelter Scotland Dundee Cases (1st April 2017 – 31st March 2018)

1,268 households from Dundee approached Shelter Scotland for help last year

165

(13%) of those were currently homeless / facing homelessness that night

71

(6%) were at risk of homelessness within next 28 days

285

(22%) were at risk of homelessness but not within next 28 days

197

(38%) households who were homeless / at risk of homelessness contained children

Shelter Scotland Case Studies

The following case studies have been collected over the period of one week. They are just a small example of the types of situations our advisors handle on a regular basis and all relate to cases in Dundee City Council.

CASE STUDY A

A client approached the Dundee Community Hub after experiencing a relationship breakdown the previous weekend. He was originally from Dundee but had spent the past 4 years with his partner in Angus. He and his disabled son (of whom the father is the registered carer) were sofa surfing between multiple houses.

The client was advised by Angus Council to present to Dundee, and vice versa. The client had no income and no money to travel. However, a housing options adviser informed us that both councils were incorrect; the client can present as homeless wherever he chooses. The client was supported by Shelter Scotland to make a homeless application in Dundee.

CASE STUDY B

Shelter Scotland were contacted by a client who had recently fled the threat of violence in his home. He had applied as homeless to his local council, but had been found intentionally homeless.

Shelter Scotland appealed the decision, and found temporary accommodation for the client while the appeal was underway. The appeal was upheld, meaning the client had a right to access social housing. He was later accommodated by the local council.

CASE STUDY C

A gentleman called the Shelter Scotland helpline as he was street homeless. He had already approached the local authority, and although they agreed he was unintentionally homeless, they refused to offer temporary accommodation as there was “none available”. He was told to continue to present to the office each day and ask if any accommodation became available. This continued for some weeks, during which he was still rough sleeping.

However, once Shelter Scotland became involved, the local authority admitted that they were failing their statutory duty, but still persisted in refusing temporary accommodation. A Shelter Scotland staff member began gatekeeping proceedings, and within hours of the council receiving notice that this case would be referred to Shelter Legal service, the gentleman was offered temporary accommodation with immediate entry.

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.

Housing Stock

Independent evidence on housing need and demand shows that we need at least 12,000 affordable homes each year for the next 5 years in Scotland.

The cases we see in Dundee underline that need for a systematic increase in housing stock for the foreseeable future.

Dundee City Council: Collaboration

Staff from the Shelter Scotland Dundee Community Hub have been working closely with Dundee City Council for some time, including leading on some strategic objectives.

We are extremely appreciative of this collaborative approach, and hope it continues going forward.

Angus Council: Repayment arrangements

We have seen a number of cases in which housing officers have secured tenants' signatures on mandates that bind the tenant into repayment arrangements. When tenants default on those payments, the mandate is taken to court as grounds for eviction.

We see this as an improper use of both housing officers and repayment mandates. We would like to see an end to this practice.

We recommend housing officers intervene earlier in cases of rent arrears, and engage constructively with tenants in order to establish the original cause of arrears and identify solutions.

Funding

We recommend that local authorities provide a clear break down of homelessness costs by advice and assistance, and temporary accommodation, with transparency around costs relative to services provided, to allow for better understanding of the cost of homelessness services.

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