



SHELTER SCOTLAND BRIEFING: SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES DEBATES, 11 AND 13 JUNE 2024

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.

All parties across the chamber recognise that Scotland is in the grip of a devastating housing emergency that impacts the lives of tens of thousands of children across Scotland each and every day. It is vital that we understand and act on the link between Scotland's poverty crisis and the lack of social housing.

Stubbornly high rates of child poverty in Scotland are a symptom of the wider housing emergency we are facing, with far too many people across Scotland being pushed into poverty due to high housing costs, or being forced into a homelessness system which is failing.

We welcome the First Minister's commitment to eradicating child poverty in Scotland – this should be the aim of every government until it is achieved and we hope that the First Minister makes early progress on this pledge. However, he will be unable to meet this goal if he doesn't tackle child homelessness, and find permanent homes for the 10,000 children currently trapped in temporary accommodation.

While 45 children becoming homeless every single day is tolerated, we have no hope of eradicating child poverty from Scotland. This requires urgent and emergency action from all levels of government.

After declaring a housing emergency last month, this must be the First Minister's overriding priority if he truly aims to eradicate child poverty.

Key messages

- **The 138% increase in the number of children stuck in temporary accommodation since 2014 is a national scandal.**
- **The First Minister has said eradicating child poverty in Scotland is his 'driving mission' – he must show that he is serious by prioritising action to end Scotland's housing emergency, and by tackling child homelessness.**
- **The Scottish Government must prioritise finding safe, secure and permanent homes for the 10,000 children stuck in temporary accommodation right now, through purchasing of social homes via a ramped-up National Acquisitions Plan.**
- **We cannot sit by while 45 children become homeless every single day – the government must prioritise emergency action in the face of the housing emergency.**
- **The permanent solution lies in increasing the supply of social homes across Scotland, which will reduce housing costs in the long-term.**
- **Child poverty levels after housing costs have been consistently lower in Scotland than elsewhere in the UK due to the higher number of families in social housing.¹**

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

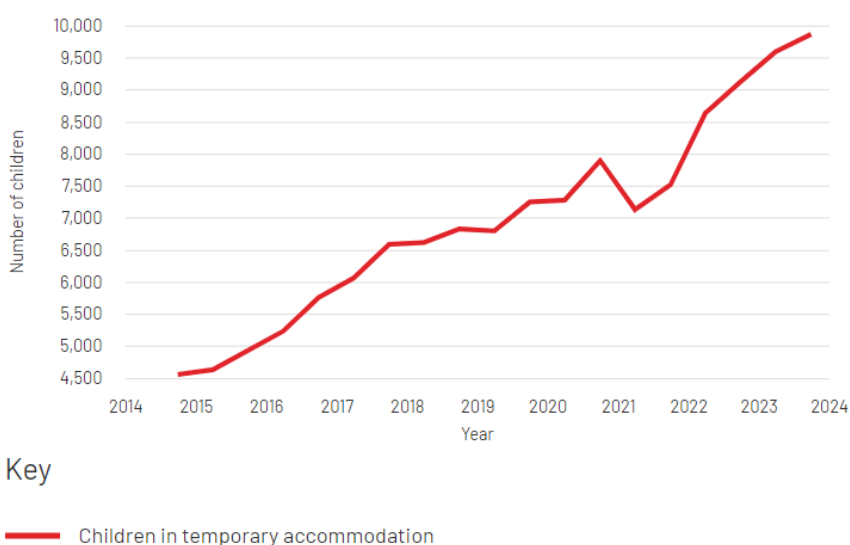
Scotland's Housing Emergency

Scotland is in the grip of a devastating housing emergency which damages lives every single day.

- A record **9,860 children trapped in temporary accommodation** – up 138% since 2014.
- **45 children become homeless every day.**
- A **household becomes homeless every 16 minutes.**
- A **10% increase** in households becoming homeless compared to last year.²
- **Local Authority homelessness services in systemic failure across the country.**
- Routine **failure by local authorities** to uphold housing rights.
- A **failure to deliver the social homes** we urgently need and a significant slowdown in new social housing developments in the last year.
- Private **rents continuing to rise** despite emergency legislation, and household incomes and the UK Government's **Local Housing Allowance rates are failing to keep pace.**

This is an emergency that damages health, wellbeing, education and the economy. It risks creating a lost generation of children. It is **a national scandal.**

Number of children in temporary accommodation in Scotland 2014 – 2023



Housing and poverty

The Scottish Government has been consistent in recognising the links between housing and poverty, most recently in their Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan progress report for 2023–24.³ The progress report notes that housing is fundamental to tackling child poverty in Scotland, and the First Minister makes clear in his foreword that there are far too many children currently living in temporary accommodation.

We agree with the Scottish Government on this, but it is incumbent on them to take urgent and emergency action if we are to see progress on the temporary accommodation emergency, and on reducing levels of child poverty more broadly.

² Scottish Government (2023), [Homelessness in Scotland 2022/23](#).

³ Scottish Government (2024), [Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022–2026 Progress Report, 2023/24](#).

That is why we are calling on the Scottish Government to **commit to developing an urgent Scottish Housing Emergency Action Plan with a central goal of finding permanent homes for as many of the 10,000 children currently stuck in temporary housing as possible** before the next election.

If the government fails to do this, their driving mission of eradicating child poverty will remain out of reach. Simply put, **you can't tackle child poverty without tackling child homelessness.**

We echo calls from our partners at Poverty Alliance that we also need greater investment in key policies such as the Scottish Child Payment and new approaches across Scottish Government portfolios. This must be underpinned by urgent action across our housing and homelessness system if we are to meet the government's own ambitions on child poverty, and if we are to tackle the housing emergency that MSPs from all parties now accept is devastating lives.

An emergency response

The recent housing emergency declaration must be backed up by emergency action – declaring in itself will not deliver the kind of structural changes that we need to see across the country. Only action from every layer of government will achieve that.

We have been consistent in our support of Scottish Government calls for the UK government to unfreeze and uplift Local Housing Allowance, to end the two-child limit and so-called 'rape clause', to scrap the Bedroom Tax and benefit cap, and ensure Scottish Government capital funding is increased rather than cut.

Westminster has a critical role to play in helping to tackle the housing emergency in Scotland, and the next UK government ending the era of austerity will be central in efforts to lift children out of poverty.

However, there are many things that the Scottish Government can do to make an immediate difference for the 10,000 children trapped in temporary accommodation and to tackle child poverty. Crucially, **this will require fully funding local services so that all local authorities are able to meet their legal duties.**

Deliver the social homes we need

Without sufficient good quality social homes across Scotland, we will not meet anti-poverty targets.

However, the government is failing to deliver new social homes at the rate required to reduce housing need, with budget cuts for next year set to see new supply decline even more sharply. **Year-on-year budget cuts have resulted in a steep fall in both starts and approvals of new social homes** – and without those homes the housing emergency is only going to get worse with more people trapped in temporary accommodation for longer, and more people unable to have their housing rights upheld.

Planning for fewer social homes means planning for higher child poverty rates. If families do not have somewhere safe, secure and affordable to call home, large amounts of their income will continue to be used to meet unsustainable housing costs, and more people will be forced into poverty as a consequence.

We remain angered that the Scottish Government chose to cut the **housing supply budget by 26% in cash terms, at a time when the overall Scottish capital budget is only falling by 4% in real terms.**⁴ We welcome the partial uplift of an £40m for acquisitions announced late last

⁴ Scottish Fiscal Commission (2023), [Scotland's Economic and Fiscal Forecasts](#), p.6.

month, but this still leaves the sector facing a £156m cut for this year. The Poverty and Inequality Commission has noted that the 110,000 target looks “unattainable” as a result.⁵

The success of the wider Housing to 2040 strategy, and efforts to fix the broken and biased housing system, rest on the government delivering enough homes in the coming years. That is why we are calling on John Swinney to:

- **Fully reverse the cut to housing supply announced in the 2024/25 Scottish Budget**
- **Buy and Build at least 38,500 social homes during this parliamentary term, with a particular focus on reducing the numbers of families with children trapped in temporary accommodation.** This reflects the recommendation of the Scottish Government’s Expert Temporary Accommodation Task and Finish Group.

A recent response to a written question from Mark Griffin MSP⁶ showed that the 2023/24 £60m National Acquisition Programme had proven successful in acquiring affordable homes across the country, with over £83m being spent on acquiring around 1,500 homes. This has enabled properties to be brought into the affordable sector at pace.

We urge the government to continue this work, with an **explicit aim of acquiring larger properties to help reduce the numbers of children in temporary accommodation**, as was recommended by the Temporary Accommodation Task and Finish Group.

Fully Fund Local Homelessness Services

The Scottish Housing Regulator’s confirmation that two local authorities (Edinburgh and Glasgow) were in systemic failure, while eight others (Aberdeen, Dundee, Dumfries and Galloway, East Lothian, East Renfrewshire, Fife, Stirling, and West Lothian) were at heightened risk of systemic failure should awaken us all to the severity of the situation facing local authorities across the country.

Systemic failure means that the level of demand on housing and homelessness services in those areas is surpassing the local authority’s ability to respond. That means people are being turned away from homelessness services, unable to access temporary accommodation or have their housing rights enforced. It’s a situation that is reflected in the 1,400% increase in failures to provide temporary accommodation in the most recent homelessness statistics.

Failure on this scale demands an emergency response. We cannot simply accept people’s rights being breached with such regularity – and to be clear, that means local authorities breaking the law – and not demand immediate action to tackle the problem.

Over a decade of austerity and real terms budget cuts have left local authority services stripped to the bone while they try to deliver the rightful extension of housing rights from national government. The Scottish Government must ensure local services have the resources they need to deliver on existing and future housing rights.

We are therefore calling for:

- **Scottish Government to provide additional funding to local authorities to ensure they are able to uphold and enforce housing rights.**
- **Funding to be targeted at local authorities on the basis of need not population and ensure that the money is focussed in areas that need it most – those local authorities experiencing systemic failure and those who have declared local housing emergencies.**

⁵ Poverty and Inequality Commission (2024), [Child Poverty Delivery Plan progress report scrutiny](#), p.18.

⁶ Written question, [S6W-26978, Mark Griffin MSP to Paul McLennan MSP](#), answered on 7 May 2024.