

Edinburgh campaign briefing

Are You With Us?

November 2019

Until there's a home for everyone.

shelterscotland.org

Shelter
Scotland

Are you with us?

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.

We're fighting for a Scotland where everyone has a place to feel safe. Where no one chooses between food and rent, and no one sleeps on the streets. We all have the right to a good home and we want to make it the law. **Are you with us?**

Scotland has some of the most progressive housing legislation in the world, and over time people should be finding it easier to secure the safe home that is so vital to a fulfilling life. **But whilst housing is a human right, there is a gap between this technical right and what is protected under domestic law.** And too often the existing laws and housing rights remain beyond the reach of too many. **People don't know what their rights are** and public bodies, struggling under the weight of cuts in services and increases in demand, are **unable to enforce them.** For thousands, a safe, secure and affordable home is still out of reach. We believe that citizens need better protection to secure their right to a home.

We are campaigning for a Scotland where:

- Stronger laws ensure there is a right to a safe, secure and affordable homes for all.
- Everyone knows and can defend their housing rights.
- Laws are not broken, and rights are upheld

This briefing focuses on the local iterations of these issues in Edinburgh, using official statistics, insight from our local advice and support service, as well as a consultation with Edinburgh-based stakeholders in August 2019. It also makes recommendations for local and national action to help more people achieve their right to a safe, secure and affordable home.

More information on the campaign is available at:

shelterscotland.org/areyouwithus

A national campaign briefing is also available for download.¹

¹ Shelter Scotland (2019), [Are you with us? National campaign briefing](#)

SHELTER SCOTLAND IN EDINBURGH

- Last year, 565 households in Edinburgh approached Shelter Scotland for support with their housing, including through our national helpline and our Edinburgh Community Hub.²
- 177 of those households were either currently homeless or facing homelessness that night.
- 115 of those households were at risk of homelessness after that point.

The Edinburgh Community Hub is a one-stop shop for anyone who is homeless, facing homelessness or needs advice about a housing related problem. The Hub offers specialist advice on housing, money & debt, and welfare benefits as well as access to a team of solicitors who all make sure people's rights are represented and fairly enforced. We work to engage with and involve those with lived experience of homelessness in the city and to reach new individuals and groups in need of help through our innovative Time for Change approach. We help and support anyone dealing with issues affecting their ability to find or keep a home.

KEY STATISTICS IN EDINBURGH

- In 2018-19, 3,229 homeless applications were made to Edinburgh City Council.³
- 3,077 households were assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness, and 210 households were reassessed as homeless within the same year.
- 1,515 households were living in temporary homeless accommodation on 31st March 2019, including 1,260 children.
- There were 465 breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order in Edinburgh last year – accounting for 75% of all breaches in Scotland.
- The night before making a homeless application 230 households slept rough, and 355 households slept rough in the 3 months leading up to their application.
- 42% of households assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness assessment identified as having a least one support need.
- Almost 1 in 4 children (23%) in Edinburgh live in poverty.⁴
- 17% of households in Edinburgh live in fuel poverty.⁵

² All statistics in this section are taken from internal Shelter Scotland data from 2018/19

³ All statistics relating to homelessness are taken from Scottish Government (2019) [Homelessness in Scotland 2018/19](#)

⁴ End Child Poverty [Poverty in your area 2019](#) Accessed October 2019.

⁵ Under the current definition. Scottish Government (2019) [SHCS Local Authority Analysis 2015-2017](#)

HOUSING IN EDINBURGH

This section outlines the key local housing issues relating to our national Are You With Us? campaign, using official statistics, insight from our local advice and support service, as well as a consultation with Edinburgh-based stakeholders in August 2019.

Availability

Overwhelmingly, there is an issue of availability of housing within Edinburgh. This is at the core of the impacts we see in terms of affordability of housing and suitability of temporary homeless accommodation used.

In recent years, a rise in short term lets has had a uniquely acute pressure on Edinburgh's housing system. Recent research shows Airbnb listings account for 16.7% of dwellings in Edinburgh's city centre,⁶ meaning less housing stock is available for arguably it's primary purpose: to house people. Urgent action is required to ensure that housing stock is used to its best effect to meet the needs of the resident population.

- **Increase the supply of social and affordable housing:** It is essential that the supply of social housing in Edinburgh is increased. A variety of measures will be required in the city to tackle availability issues including assessing the use of section 75 agreements, regulating the use of stock for non-residential housing such as short term lets and privately owned empty homes, and building new homes. Edinburgh City Council have recently committed to funding an officer within the council to tackle the problems of empty homes which is a great first step, and the council have also shown commitment to tackling the issue of short term lets.

Affordability

Much of Edinburgh's housing is unaffordable for its citizens.

Support with housing costs for private tenants through the social security system is often inadequate, largely because of the demand on housing which pushes rent prices up, and because the rate at which local housing allowance is set is based on a small proportion of properties spread across the Lothian broad rental market area, which is thereby skewed by much cheaper rents available outwith the city. With high demand for social rented housing, and expensive house values pricing out many people looking to buy, the only option remaining for many people is the private rented sector. However private rents in Edinburgh have soared in recent years beyond the rate of inflation⁷ and estimates suggest

⁶ October 28th 2019, Indigo House, <https://indigohousegroup.com/short-term-lets-research/>

⁷ Scottish Government (2018), [Private sector rent statistics: 2010 - 2018](#)

less than 2% of properties available in Edinburgh are affordable to people in receipt of local housing allowance,⁸ meaning many households struggle to find accommodation they can afford.

In addition, the administration of Universal Credit, and the difficulty individuals find in navigating the Universal Credit system have further compounded affordability issues in the city, much as they have elsewhere in Scotland. There are also concerns that some housing associations are still charging rent in advance of an individual taking up a new tenancy, which is often unaffordable for people and a barrier to individuals moving home.

- **Increase supply of socially rented homes:** To tackle issues of housing affordability, an increase in the supply of housing in the social rented sector is essential. It is crucial to ensure that the building of social homes continues at pace into the next parliamentary term to overcome the decades of underinvestment.
- **Strengthen housing rights:** Ensuring that housing is affordable to individuals is part of the human right to adequate housing, but at present there are gaps in legislation. We must ensure that the social security support for housing costs is sufficient to cover the high costs of rents within the city.

Quality of temporary accommodation and enforcement of rights

The acute supply issue in Edinburgh has resulted in a lack of socially rented accommodation for the council to place those they have a homeless duty for, either for a short-term period as temporary accommodation or as permanent settled accommodation. This has resulted in a high use of B&Bs and hostels for temporary homeless accommodation within Edinburgh. On March 31st 2019, 1,515 households were in temporary accommodation in Edinburgh, with 525 households in B&Bs and a further 305 placed in hostels. This accommodation is often of extremely poor quality and is high cost. Furthermore, not only is the use of this accommodation not meeting the needs of those housed within it, usage is on many occasions unlawful.

Despite the extension of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order in December 2017 to limit the time that households with a pregnant woman or children can stay in B&Bs and other accommodation deemed unsuitable, many families are allocated B&Bs for longer than the legal seven-day limit. In 2018-19 there were 465 breaches of the order in Edinburgh. Whilst stakeholders including Shelter Scotland are successful with challenging these breaches on an individual level, we need wider systemic change to ensure that people's rights aren't being denied

⁸ October 4th 2019, <https://www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/news/people/just-1-50-housing-benefits-can-afford-rent-flat-anywhere-edinburgh-new-figures-show-643089>

in the first place. A compounding issue here is that individuals are often unaware of their rights, or fearful of trying to enforce them, meaning they spend long periods in unsuitable accommodation before they seek support or challenge the practice within the council.

Stakeholders highlighted some additional concerns with B&B usage on family relationships. These included examples of mothers having to be separated from their children because of the poor quality of temporary accommodation: either through choice whereby parents choose that their children stay with extended family rather than in the B&B with them, or because of an interaction with the social work system with families frightened of having their children removed because they don't have a safe or suitable home to offer them. Parents with shared custody are unable to have their children stay with them overnight due to children not being allowed in, or because of a lack of a spare bedroom.

There are also concerns regarding some accommodation leased from the private sector, relating to poor oversight of the overall scheme and contractors, particularly for repairs.

- **Strengthen housing rights:** Legally enforceable minimum standards of temporary accommodation must be introduced to improve the quality of accommodation offered. The proposed extension of the unsuitable accommodation order to cover all individuals, not just households with children, is another important step to strengthen rights in this area.
- **Rights awareness:** To ensure stronger housing rights make a difference on the ground, we need to ensure people are aware of their rights, to ensure that people know what to do when their rights are being breached.

One option for this is rolling out the peer support advocacy model, and another is providing rights awareness workshops for community groups and for those providing advice or support to people at risk of or experiencing homelessness who are not housing experts.

- **Accountability:** We need much stronger accountability mechanisms in place to prevent systematic breaches of accommodation from occurring.
- **Increase supply of socially rented homes:** There is acute pressure on Edinburgh's housing stock resulting in a bottleneck in temporary accommodation whereby households are stuck for long periods as there is no suitable homes for them to move on to. Pressure also results in the council using unsuitable stock such as B&Bs because of a lack of alternatives. The only way to resolve this is to increase the supply of homes for social rent within the city.

Are you with us?

Shelter Scotland is seeking your support in campaigning to make housing rights front and centre nationally, and locally in Glasgow. **Are you with us?**

1. Sign the petition today to make housing rights, human rights at shelterscotland.org/areyouwithus

2. Adopt the Charter for Change: Get your employer or organisation to adopt the [Charter for Change](#) and commit to make the changes Scotland needs to ensure there's a safe, secure and affordable home for everyone.

Your pledge of support could be to take forward some of the actions identified in this briefing as crucial to strengthen people's housing rights and experiences in Glasgow.

3. Become a housing rights defender: Use your voice to raise awareness about the housing emergency - and the solutions. Share information on social media with the hashtag #areyouwithus, and stay in touch with our campaign for more information and some specific acts you can take.

4. Sign up to be a Shelter Scotland campaigner: and hear from us on new campaigns, policy work, opportunities to get involved and information on what's going on in your area https://scotland.shelter.org.uk/get_involved/campaigning

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Please support us at shelterscotland.org

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