

BUILDING HOPE: A ROUTE MAP

TO ENDING THE USE OF UNSAFE AND HARMFUL TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION FOR CHILDREN

SHELTER
SCOTLAND

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As part of the *Building Hope* project, children have been offered the opportunity to take part in Children's Story Packs. This drawing is by a child in Fife.

Note: This report is an output of the *Building Hope* joint project between Shelter Scotland and Fife Gingerbread, funded by The Robertson Trust. However, the report is authored by Shelter Scotland and does not necessarily reflect the positions of Fife Gingerbread or The Robertson Trust.

INTRODUCTION

No child should be without a home.

17,506 children in Scotland are experiencing homelessness.[1] 10,715 of them live in temporary accommodation (TA), and many have been trapped there for years.[2] Accommodation is often unsuitable, overcrowded, and far from children's schools and support networks. This is harming children's safety, health and education[3] – and we know the impact is disproportionate for minoritised groups including Black and People of Colour and families with a disabled person. Yet change is within reach.

TA is an important right and should be provided to everyone experiencing homelessness, but it should only ever be temporary. Despite this, households spend an average of 237 days in TA, and those with children spend even longer there, averaging 406 days for couples with children. Households where the main applicant is Asian, African, Caribbean or Black spend longer again in TA (see appendix 1). 1,350 households with children currently stuck in TA have been there for over two years.[2] No child should spend this long without a permanent home, let alone in accommodation that doesn't meet their physical, social, emotional and developmental needs.

There is a sense of growing helplessness and hopelessness. The number of children in TA has doubled in just a decade. It can feel as if the problem is too big to solve.

Yet the Scottish Government has already made real commitments to reduce the use of TA, including to end the use of unsafe and harmful TA for children. This matters. What is needed now is the momentum, accountability and shared focus to turn it into change that children can feel.

Building Hope: A Home for Every Child exists for this reason. A joint project between Shelter Scotland and Fife Gingerbread, with funding from The Robertson Trust, it is about restoring belief that change is possible and showing, practically, how we can get there together.

This route map offers the focus needed to bring real accountability and fresh energy to delivering on promises to children in TA. It brings together high-level commitments already made by the Scottish Government, aligned with the three objectives of the *Building Hope* project, and sets out the specific, practical actions required over the next year to begin turning those commitments into real change.

The Cabinet Secretary's recent letter to the UK Government, urging them to scrap the freeze on Local Housing Allowance and end the system of homelessness by design for newly recognised refugees,[4] was welcome. These are vital levers to prevent homelessness, and the Scottish Government should continue putting pressure on the UK Government to change them. But the Scottish Government, too, can and must do more.

This route map is not an exhaustive list of everything that could be done. Instead, it focuses on actions within the Scottish Government's power which are likely to make the greatest impact for children in TA over the next year – to focus minds and build the accountability needed to close the implementation gap between policy commitments and the reality for children in TA.

The specific actions have been shaped through discussions with stakeholders who see the devastating impact homelessness has on children's lives – including voices from beyond housing, in recognition of the far-reaching effects of this emergency.

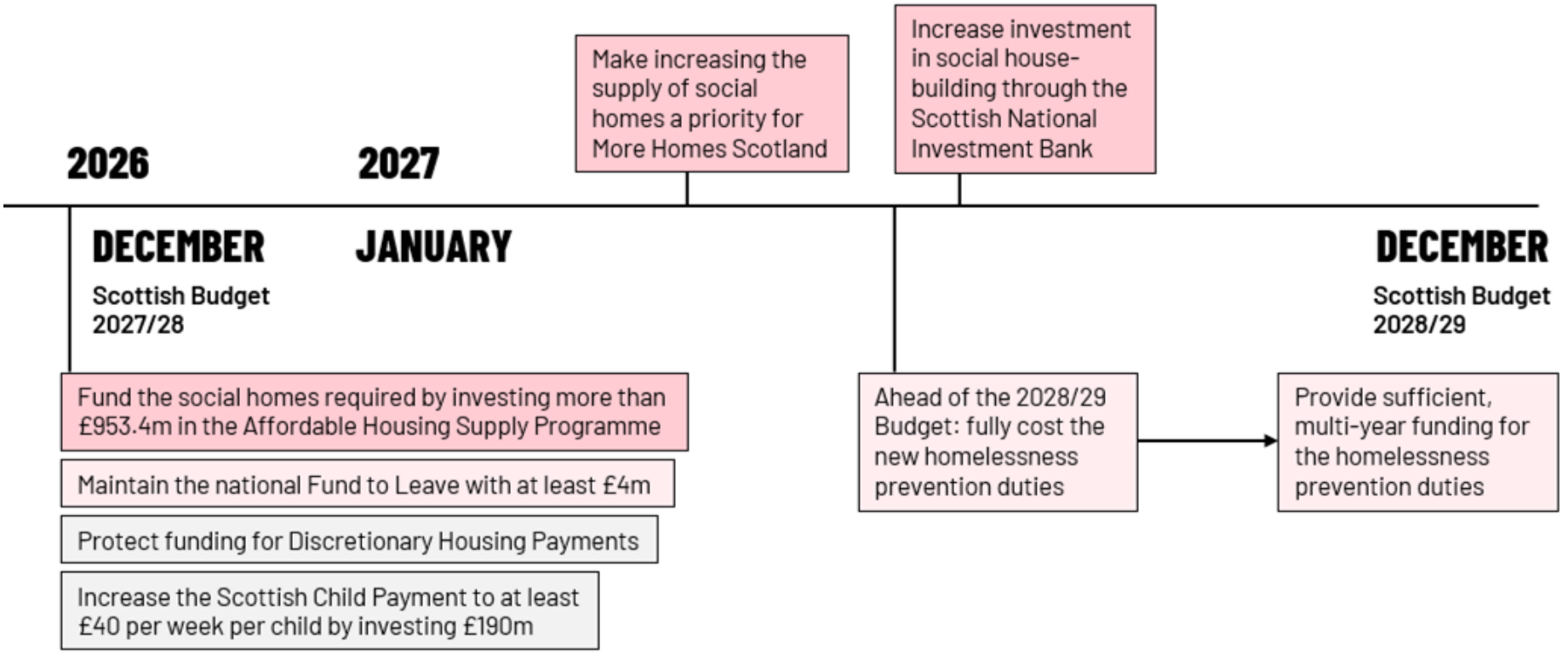
We know that we want the same thing: for every child to have a place to call home. This route map lays out how we get there.

OBJECTIVE 1: PREVENT HOMELESSNESS TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN ENTERING TA

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS:

- Deliver 110,000 affordable homes between 2022 and 2032, at least 70% for social rent
- Support homelessness prevention activity
- Reduce relative child poverty to <10% by 2030

ACTION NEEDED TO DELIVER THEM:



DELIVER 110,000 AFFORDABLE HOMES BETWEEN 2022 AND 2032, AT LEAST 70% FOR SOCIAL RENT[5]

Enhance funding committed for the Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP)

The Scottish Government committed to investing £4.1bn of public funding in the AHSP over four years,[6] including £953.4m in 2027-28.[7] However, research shows the true cost of delivering the 15,693 affordable homes Scotland needs each year will be at least £1.64bn per year over five years.[8] By the end of June 2026, just under halfway to the target deadline, only 33% of the Scottish Government's affordable homes target and 37% of their social homes target had been delivered.[9]

The 2027/28 Scottish Budget must, at the very least, provide the £953.4m promised, but if the Scottish Government intends to meet its own affordable housebuilding targets by 2032, significant further investment will be required, including ongoing investment in acquisitions (see page 8).

Increase investment in social housebuilding through the Scottish National Investment Bank (SNIB)[10]

The SNIB's investments in housing to date have primarily supported the delivery of homes for private mid-market rent or affordable purchase, alongside a small number of social homes.[11] Future SNIB investments in housing should prioritise social housing to maximise their impact on reducing affordable housing need and tackling the housing emergency.

Make increasing the supply of social homes a priority for More Homes Scotland

The new national housing agency[12] offers an opportunity to tackle the housing emergency and accelerate the delivery of social homes in line with the Scottish Government's 2032 targets. To enable the Scottish Government to meet its child homelessness aims, More Homes Scotland must have as its primary focus an objective to reduce affordable housing need and thereby reduce homelessness, and it must be designed to have the necessary powers and resources to do so.[13]

SUPPORT HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION ACTIVITY

Provide sufficient, multi-year funding for the new homelessness prevention duties

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2025 placed duties on relevant bodies to 'ask and act' to prevent homelessness. However, the Finance and Public Administration Committee raised concerns that the Financial Memorandum underestimated the funding required, noting City of Edinburgh Council's estimate that a 25% increase in homelessness presentations, generated by additional referrals under the 'act' part of the duties, would require an extra £1.9m per year for internal staffing – compared to the Financial Memorandum's estimate of £1.6m for all 32 local authorities in 2027-28.[14]

The Scottish Government announced £4m for 'ask and act' pilots in August 2025,[15] but funding beyond these is uncertain. Ahead of the 2028/29 budget, the Scottish Government should fully cost the prevention duties and commit to providing the funding required.

Maintain the national Fund to Leave

Domestic abuse is the leading cause of homelessness for women and their children in Scotland; it was the main reason for making a homeless application for 25% of women and 32% of single mothers in 2025-26.[2] The national Fund to Leave for women fleeing domestic abuse opened in February 2026[16] and by 31 March it had already supported 747 women and 1,010 children.[17] The Scottish Government subsequently doubled the fund to £4m for 2026-27.[18] This increase should be maintained in line with inflation in future years with funding regularly reviewed to ensure it is truly demand-led.

REDUCE THE RATE OF RELATIVE CHILD POVERTY TO <10% BY 2030

Increase the Scottish Child Payment (SCP)

Poverty is a key contributor to homelessness. The Scottish Government has named tackling child poverty as their number one mission,[19] setting themselves a statutory target to reduce the proportion of children in relative poverty to less than 10% by 2030,[20] but currently this figure is 21%.[21]

The End Child Poverty coalition has called for the Scottish Government to increase the SCP to at least £40 per week immediately and to £55 per week by the end of this parliament.[22] Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland estimated that increasing the SCP to £40 per week in 2026/27 would have taken 15,000 children out of poverty at a cost of £190m.[23] The Scottish Government increased the SCP to £40 per week for children under one in the 2026/27 budget,[24] but this increase must be extended to children of all ages in the next budget.

Protect funding for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) to prevent homelessness

Adequate funding for DHPs is crucial to continue to mitigate UK welfare reforms including the bedroom tax and benefit cap, which can push families into poverty and homelessness. There should also be sufficient resource to enable this budget to be used as it was initially intended: to enable discretion at local level to help households meet their housing costs, thereby preventing homelessness.

MEASURING PROGRESS

Short-term indicators:

- Funding for the AHSP
- SNIB investment in social housing
- Number of social homes delivered
- Funding for the homelessness prevention duties
- Number of women and children supported by the national Fund to Leave
- Funding to increase the SCP
- Funding for DHPs

Longer-term indicators:

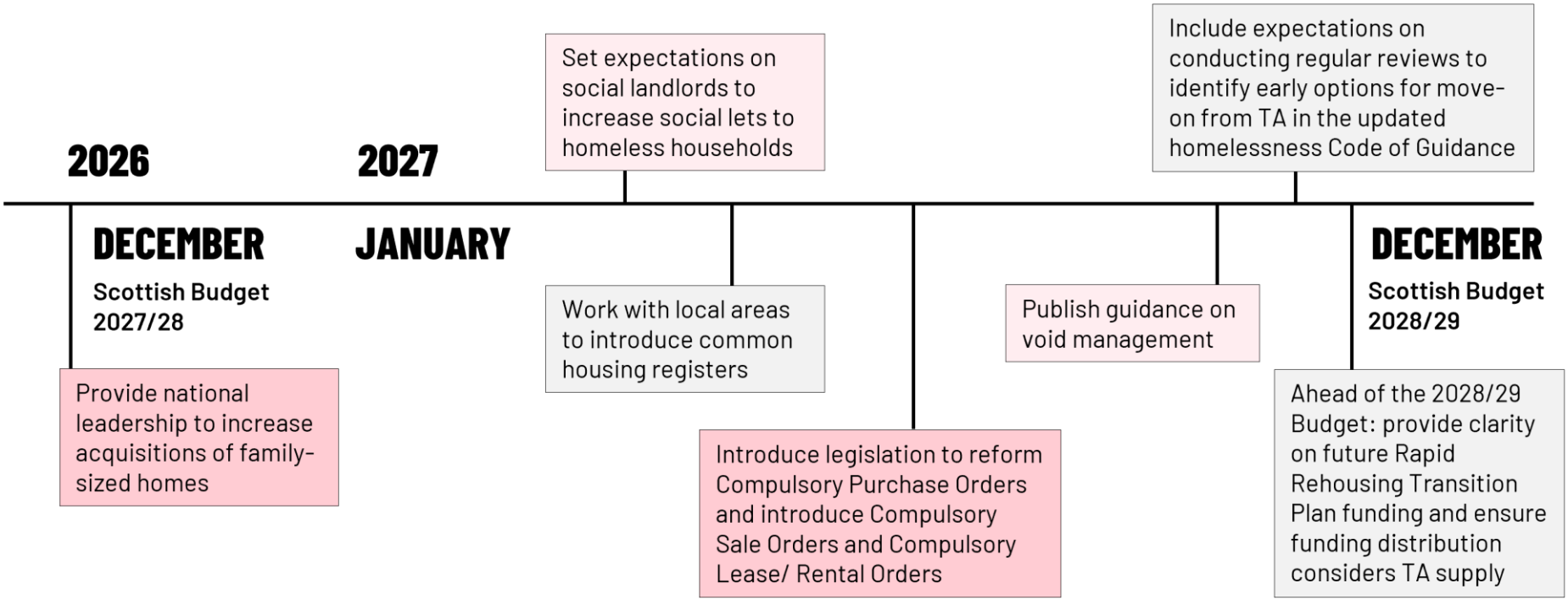
- Number of children assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness
- Number of children in TA
- Number of children living in poverty

OBJECTIVE 2: REDUCE THE LENGTH OF TIME CHILDREN SPEND IN TA

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS:

- Buy more homes for social rent
- Make better use of existing social housing stock
- Support families with children to move on from TA

ACTION NEEDED TO DELIVER THEM:



BUY MORE HOMES FOR SOCIAL RENT

Provide national leadership to increase acquisitions of family-sized homes

In 2025-26 the Scottish Government spent £118m to support the acquisition of 1,683 homes.[25] They had previously identified buying homes for social rent as a tool for increasing the supply of family homes, and estimated that increasing acquisitions funding to £80m took 600-800 children out of TA.[17] However, regular, precise data on the number of children benefiting is not available and the ratio of funding to homes acquired suggests larger properties are not being bought at the scale needed.

While funding for acquisitions has now been mainstreamed within the AHSP, this cannot result in reduced focus on it. The Scottish Government should provide national support, guidance and leadership to ensure acquisitions are used to their full potential to lift children out of TA, particularly those in larger households who spend longer trapped in TA. They should ensure the maximum viable budget is available by allocating an additional £200m to the AHSP with the expectation that this is used to buy family homes where possible. They should also gather and publish information on the size of homes acquired and barriers to delivery on the ground, to track progress and support local authorities to maximise the impact of acquisitions for children stuck in TA.

Simplify the compulsory purchase system

The Scottish Government consulted on compulsory purchase reform in 2025.[26] In August 2026 they stated that they will implement changes in this parliament to reform and modernise the compulsory purchase system, and will further explore the case for introducing compulsory sale orders.[27] These changes should be progressed as soon as possible to create a workable route to returning properties to use as affordable homes where other efforts fail.

MAKE BETTER USE OF EXISTING SOCIAL HOUSING STOCK

Publish guidance on void management

In 2023, the Scottish Government committed to publishing guidance on void management and working with local areas on solutions that are right for them.[28] Positively, social landlords reduced the average length of time taken to re-let their properties from 61 to 52 days between 2024/25 and 2025/26.[29] The Scottish Government should support further, sustained improvement by publishing the guidance promised on void management.

Set expectations on social landlords to increase social lets to households experiencing homelessness

The former Housing Minister wrote to all social landlords in October 2020 asking them to increase the number of social lets they made to households experiencing homelessness.[5] While the proportion of lets made to homeless households increased from 36% (28% RSL and 44% LA) in 2019/20 to 46% (40% RSL and 51% LA) in 2025/26,[29] [30] further increases are still required in areas with the most severe homelessness pressures. The new Housing Secretary should direct additional use of section five referrals to increase lets to homeless households to 65% for two years to help clear the backlog in TA. This should be prioritised in areas where homelessness services are deemed 'at heightened risk of systemic failure' by the Regulator.

SUPPORT FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN TO MOVE ON FROM TA

Include expectations on conducting regular reviews to identify early options for move-on from TA in the updated homelessness Code of Guidance

This commitment dates back to 2018;[31] the forthcoming update to the Code of Guidance is an opportunity to finally deliver it. This should include an expectation that families in TA are assigned a single point of contact who understands their needs and can support them to find permanent accommodation (also see page 12).

Work with local areas to introduce common housing registers

In some parts of the country, households must apply individually to every social landlord operating in the area to be added to their waiting list. This takes time, knowledge and puts significant pressure on families who are often in crisis. Common housing registers offer a solution which can help families in TA access a permanent home that meets their needs more quickly and easily. In 2023, the Scottish Government committed to supporting local areas to introduce them[28] and in November 2025, the then-Housing Secretary said she had asked her officials to "look further" at establishing one in Glasgow.[32] The Scottish Government should set out clear expectations for local authorities and RSLs on introducing common housing registers and removing the barriers families face in trying to secure a permanent home.

Provide clarity on future Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) funding and ensure funding distribution considers TA supply

The Scottish Government committed in 2023 to maximising the impact of RRTP funding and working with COSLA to agree how it would be targeted at local authorities facing the most significant TA pressures.[28] However, national RRTP funding is still year-on-year and there is no clarity about how long it will continue. 2026-27 funding is distributed by the number of households assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness, but not by the supply of TA. The Scottish Government should set out a multi-year plan to continue providing funding for RRTPs at least until no local authority's homelessness services are in systemic failure – with a view to supporting local authorities to mainstream a Rapid Rehousing approach beyond this. Funding should be distributed not only by levels of demand for TA, but also by local authorities' ability to meet this demand through their supply of TA.

MEASURING PROGRESS

Short-term indicators:

- Funding for acquisitions
- Family-sized homes acquired through the national acquisitions programme
- Properties acquired for social housing using compulsory purchase orders
- Long-term voids brought back into use
- Void turnaround times
- Social lets to homeless households
- Areas with common housing registers
- Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan funding

Longer-term indicators:

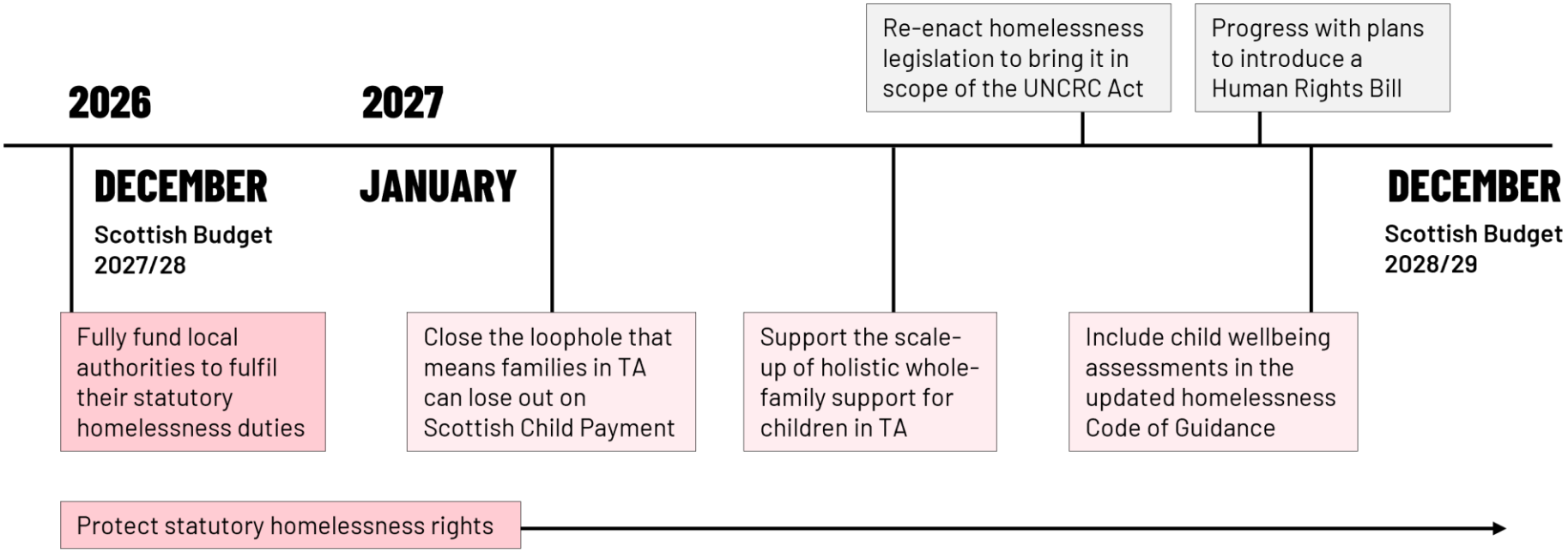
- Average number of days households with children spend in TA
- Number of households with children spending more than a year in TA
- Number of families assessed as homeless with a social let recorded as an outcome

OBJECTIVE 3: ENSURE THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD ARE UPHELD FOR CHILDREN IN TA

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS:

- Improve the standards and suitability of TA
- Support children's wellbeing and access to services in TA
- Incorporate international human rights treaties into Scots law

ACTION NEEDED TO DELIVER THEM:



IMPROVE THE STANDARDS AND SUITABILITY OF TA

Fully fund local authorities to fulfil their statutory homelessness duties

The Scottish Housing Regulator has assessed City of Edinburgh Council and Glasgow City Council's homelessness services as being in 'systemic failure', meaning they do not have the resource required to meet their statutory duties to people experiencing homelessness.[33] Glasgow City Council is facing a £110m budget gap over 2026/27 to 2027/28, with homelessness costs expected to reach £56m in 2026/27, showing that current funding for homelessness services is insufficient.[34] Nine other local authorities in Scotland are 'at heightened risk' of systemic failure.[33]

The Unsuitable Accommodation Order (UAO) was breached 1,310 times for households with children in 2025-26, a slight decrease from 1,350 the previous year, but triple the 2021-22 figure of 430.[2] The 'In Their Own Words' research commissioned by Shelter Scotland showed the impact of unsuitable accommodation on children, with participants reporting overcrowding, damp and mould, broken or no heating, and pest infestations – with profound effects on their physical and mental health.[3]

Local authorities need sufficient resources to deliver high-quality frontline services, properly assess household needs, develop and maintain their TA stock and monitor the standard of outsourced units. Alongside providing adequate funding for local authorities to buy and build more permanent social homes, the Scottish Government must provide homelessness services with the funding required to meet families' needs and uphold their rights, targeted to areas of greatest demand. Any public service reforms should lead to improved outcomes for families experiencing homelessness, not just short-term cost savings.

Protect statutory homelessness rights

Calls to roll back homelessness rights in response to pressures on local authorities must be resisted. Changes such as reinstating local connection rules to limit where households can access support would make it harder for families to access TA in an area that's suitable for them. Rights must be protected and local authorities fully resourced to deliver them.

SUPPORT CHILDREN'S WELLBEING AND ACCESS TO SERVICES IN TA

Include child wellbeing assessments in the updated homelessness Code of Guidance

The Scottish Government committed in 2018 and 2021 to including advice on child wellbeing assessments in the updated homelessness Code of Guidance[31 5]– one of their few specific commitments on improving the wellbeing of children in TA. This should be delivered through the forthcoming update to the Code of Guidance, with a requirement that child wellbeing assessments are carried out for all children experiencing homelessness, to ensure decisions about TA allocation are made with full consideration for their wellbeing.

Support the scale-up of models of holistic whole-family support for children in TA

As part of the *Building Hope* partnership, Fife Gingerbread is delivering a test and demonstration approach to providing coordinated, trauma-informed, whole-family support to children in TA and their families, including connecting families to

the right services at the right time to meet their evolving needs. This learning is being supported by The Poverty Alliance to develop a scalable *Team Around the Home (TATH)* model which identifies the core components of a rights-respecting child homelessness journey where this is unavoidable. This will be launched in 2027.[35]

Other areas have taken similar approaches to supporting families. For example, Falkirk Council have employed a dedicated support worker, funded by RRTP funding but hosted by children's services, to work with families in TA.[36] Learning from this approach and the *TATH* model should be scaled up and ultimately incorporated into the updated homelessness Code of Guidance.

Close the loophole that means families in TA can lose out on Scottish Child Payment

Families in TA who need support with their housing costs have these paid by Housing Benefit, rather than Universal Credit. As Housing Benefit is not a qualifying benefit for the Scottish Child Payment, this means that if a family moves into TA and stops receiving Universal Credit, they also lose their entitlement to SCP. This can trap families in poverty, effectively penalising them for being in TA. The Scottish Government should close this loophole by making Housing Benefit a qualifying benefit for SCP, which Child Poverty Action Group estimates would benefit 3,700 children.[37]

INCORPORATE INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS TREATIES

Re-enact homelessness legislation to bring it in scope of the UNCRC Act

Children in TA are being denied their rights – including to an adequate standard of living,[2] education, privacy, and play.[3] While local authorities should already be making best use of all their powers and responsibilities under relevant legislation and frameworks – including the UNCRC and the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 – the Scottish Government could do more to ensure consistent implementation.

The UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act enshrined the UNCRC in Scots law, but it only applies to Scottish public bodies' activities under devolved legislation.[38] Most homelessness legislation in Scotland relies on amendments to pre-devolution laws, so is not in scope of the UNCRC Act, meaning children's UNCRC rights are not protected.

The annual report on the Children's Rights Scheme should be published in November. If progress hasn't been made, the Scottish Government should conduct an audit to support a move to re-enact existing homelessness legislation in Scottish Parliament, bringing it in scope of the UNCRC Act.

Progress with plans to introduce a Human Rights Bill

The latest Programme for Government reiterated the Scottish Government's ambition to introduce a Human Rights Bill to incorporate international human rights treaties into Scots law in this parliament.[39] Preparatory work should be progressed without further delay.

MEASURING PROGRESS

Short-term indicators:

- Funding for homelessness services
- Inclusion of child wellbeing assessments in the homelessness Code of Guidance
- Expansion of holistic whole-family support for children in TA
- Access to SCP for families in TA

Longer-term indicators:

- Number of breaches of the UAO for households with children

DELIVERING THE ROUTE MAP: WHAT NEXT?

Building hope that change is possible

This route map enables everyone to understand the specific actions the Scottish Government must take in the next year to deliver on their commitments to children in temporary accommodation.

We know that if the actions in this route map are not delivered, the statistics will not show the changes we all want to see, and children and their families will not feel the impact.

Page 15 shows the key statistical releases that will provide evidence of the success of government action against the route map and the commitments they have made to children in TA.

Lags in reporting mean that homelessness data covering the first few months after publication of this route map will not be available until September 2027. The February 2028 release will allow a fuller assessment of progress over the year – including the number of children in TA, the length of time spent there, and breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order.

Housing statistics published in March, June and September 2027 will enable us to evaluate progress on housebuilding. Data on acquisitions is not routinely published, but a parliamentary question submitted this August provided data for 2025-26, so we can encourage the same approach to secure data for 2026-27.

However, we will not wait for these publications to begin evaluating delivery. The route map tells us what needs to be done, and by when – allowing us to measure progress at a more granular level, in real time, than national statistics allow us to.

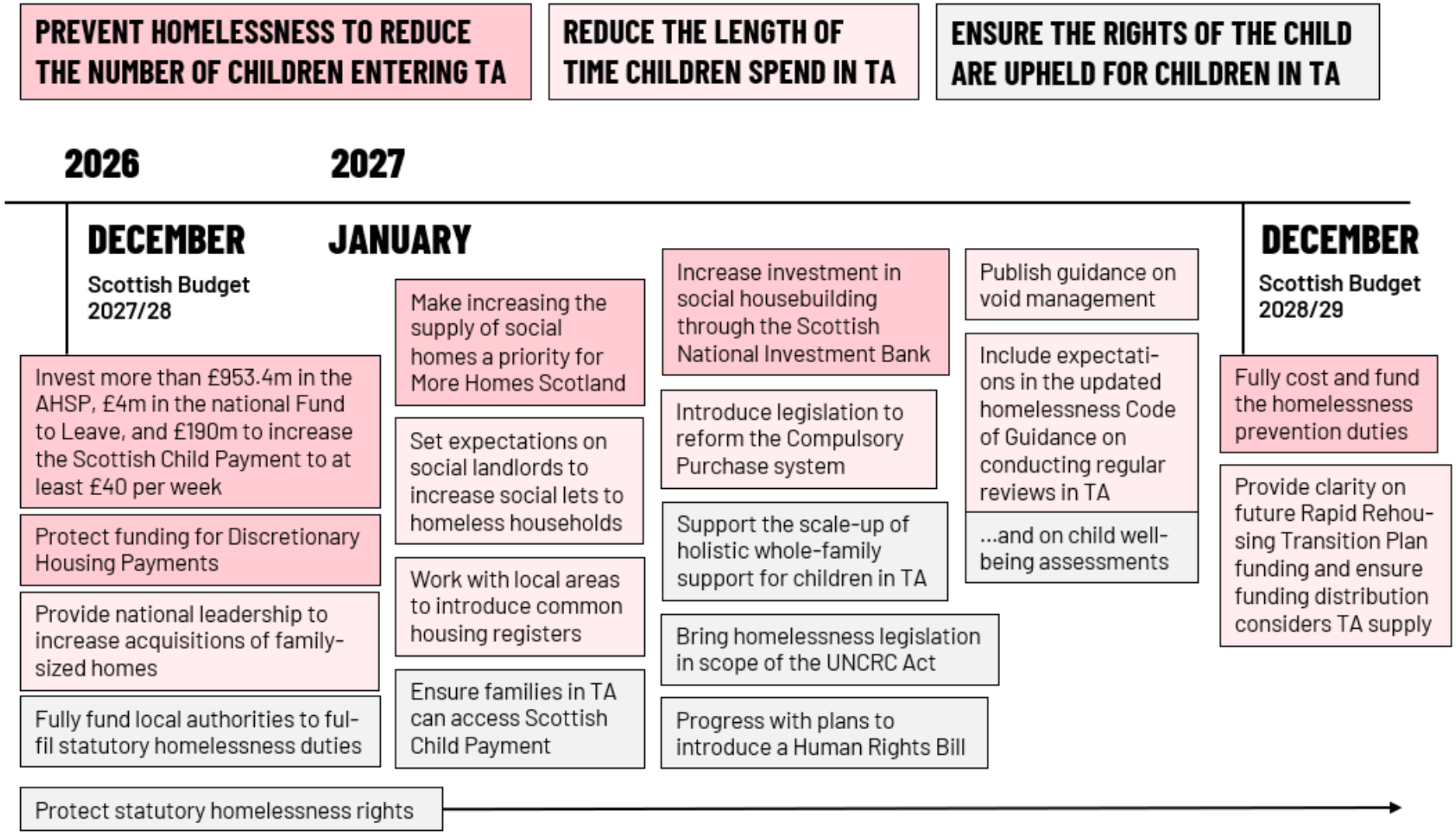
The following page shows a summary route map bringing together actions against all three objectives of the *Building Hope* project: reducing the number of children in temporary accommodation, reducing the length of time they spend there, and ensuring the rights of the child are upheld for children in temporary accommodation.

We will monitor progress against this route map, asking: if actions have not been progressed, why not? What barriers need to be overcome? What mitigations have been put in place to catch up?

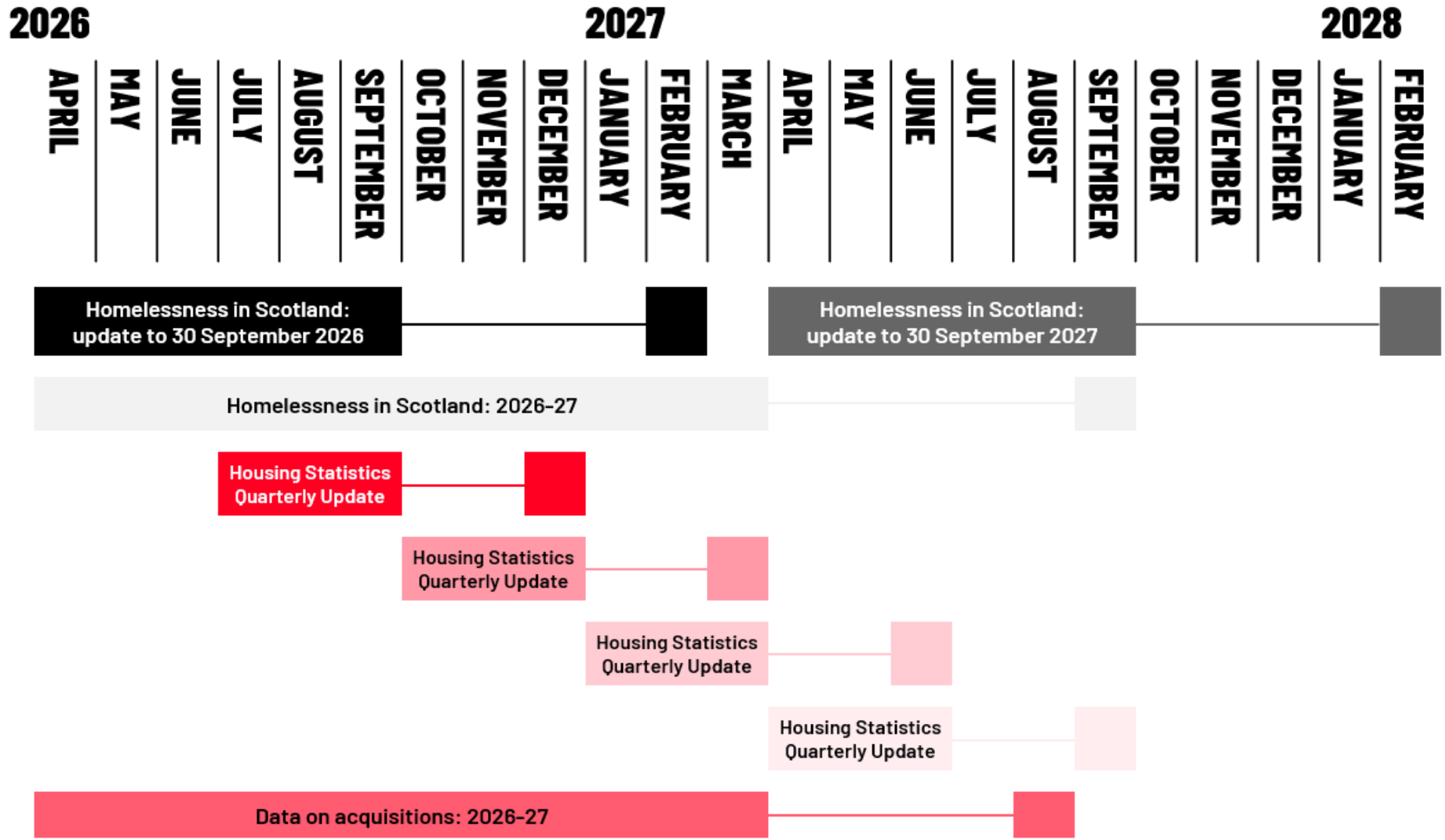
And at the end of 2027, we will convene a discussion to determine where we are, and what needs to happen next.

We have the promises, and we know what needs to happen. Now we need action to deliver real change on the ground: **until every child in Scotland has a place to call home.**

SUMMARY ROUTE MAP



MEASURING PROGRESS: KEY MILESTONES



APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Average length of time households spend in TA

The average length of time different household types spend in TA is as follows:[2]

- Single person: 215 days
- Single parent: 273 days
- Couple: 245 days
- Couple with children: 406 days
- Other: 241 days
- Other with children: 331 days
- Total: 237 days

Couples with children spend longer in TA when the lead applicant is Black or a Person of Colour compared to White Scottish applicants.

- White Scottish: 303 days
- Arabian: 348 days
- African: 420 days
- Asian: 474 days
- Caribbean or Black: 560 days

The same applies to single parent households:

- White Scottish: 255 days
- Arabian: 310 days
- Asian: 317 days
- African: 348 days
- Caribbean or Black: 351 days

Single People of Colour from most ethnic groups also spend longer in TA on average than white single people:

- Arabian: 159 days
- White Scottish: 211 days
- Asian: 240 days
- Caribbean or Black: 236 days
- African: 269 days.

Appendix 2: Children experiencing homelessness who are not in TA

17,506 children in Scotland were experiencing homelessness as of 31 March 2026,[1] of whom 10,715 were living in TA.[2] This project focuses on children in TA, who face a specific set of circumstances. However, measures to prevent children experiencing homelessness will equally benefit those who are not in TA, and measures to move families out of TA more quickly and improve the standards and suitability of TA will mean there are more suitable options available for all families experiencing homelessness.

Appendix 3: Abbreviations used in this document

- AHSP – Affordable Housing Supply Programme
- COSLA – Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
- CPAG – Child Poverty Action Group
- DHP – Discretionary Housing Payment
- LA – local authority
- RRTP – Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan
- RSL – Registered Social Landlord
- SCP – Scottish Child Payment
- SNIB – Scottish National Investment Bank
- TA – temporary accommodation
- TATH – Team Around the Home
- UAO – Unsuitable Accommodation Order
- UNCRC – United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

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We believe that home is everything.

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