

Edinburgh 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.



Edinburgh 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 Edinburgh Community Hub, based at 6 South Charlotte St, operates an open-door policy and provides the public with specialist advice staff as well as an Information Station where they access digital services. Simply put – we help de-stress an already stressed situation by delivering person-centred support.

Our Edinburgh Hub makes Shelter Scotland visible within the local community, making it clear that we are available both locally and nationally. Whilst housing and homelessness problems are a national concern, Edinburgh has its own local concerns and it's essential that Shelter Scotland delivers support in line with these specific issues.



2,986

households were assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness.

3,119

homelessness applications were made



a 12% decrease on 2016/17

95%

of applications were assessed as homeless



far higher than the national average of 82%

5,365

housing options approaches were made



1,380 households in temporary accommodation on 31 March 2018, incl. **1,095** children. These are increases of 11% and 40% respectively



265

households were re-assessed as homeless within the same year



a 20% decrease on 2016/17

37%

of assessments identified an additional support need



a 2% decrease on 2016/17

24%

of households are classed as fuel poor



less than the national level of 34%

290

households slept rough in the 3 months before making an application



a 16% increase on 2016/17

180

households slept rough the night before making an application



a 50% increase on 2016/17

In Edinburgh in 2017/18, there were...

Key Issues and Concerns

Edinburgh is quickly becoming an area of severe concern for Shelter Scotland. Lack of temporary accommodation is resulting in many instances of gatekeeping and breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order (Housing Scotland Act 2004), which we have come to see on a regular basis.

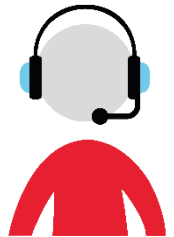
We have a sustained concern that homeless individuals, or those at risk of homelessness, are too often being denied their right to a formal homelessness assessment.



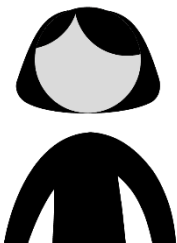
Staff from the Edinburgh Hub take their expert housing advice to the streets

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

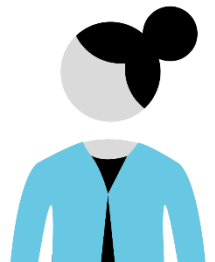
“Local authorities in the areas we cover give insufficient regard to applicants' mental health issues, which are often a major contributory factor in homelessness. They tend to have a punitive attitude towards people who have failed to engage with them, without properly investigating and identifying the underlying causes.”



“Temporary accommodation tends to be of poor quality and prohibitively expensive for applicants who are working and whose housing benefit does not cover the whole of the rent charge.”



“A lack of available temporary accommodation regularly results in homeless families with children being placed in B&B accommodation beyond the statutory maximum of 7 days, or single applicants being turned away without a proper homelessness assessment.”



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

2,201 households from Edinburgh approached Shelter Scotland for help last year

500

(22%) of those were currently homeless / facing homelessness that night

121

(5%) were at risk of homelessness within next 28 days

358

(16%) were at risk of homelessness but not within next 28 days

299

(31%) households who were homeless / at risk of homelessness contained children

Shelter Scotland Case Studies

The following case studies are just a small example of the types of situations our advisors handle on a regular basis and all relate to cases in Edinburgh City Council.

CASE STUDY A

Gerry Kielty is a private renter. He experienced mice, mites, beetles and silverfish in one property, all of which the landlord failed to deal with. After environmental health advised that it wasn't habitable, the landlord agreed to fumigate the property. Gerry would have to leave, but the landlord refused to cancel the rent. Gerry then found out landlord wasn't registered, and moved out as soon as possible.

In another property, Gerry was evicted after protesting illegal letting agent fees.

In a third property, Gerry was unable to afford the heating due to the high ceilings and large windows, and resorted to a make-shift heater of 6 tea lights and two plant pots.

CASE STUDY B

Diane had a great record of paying her rent on time, looking after the property well and getting on with neighbours. However, one day Sheriff's Officers arrived with forms saying she had to leave the flat. She was never given a reason. Diane has a long term mental illness, and was overwhelmed by the need to find somewhere to live, register with a new doctor and a new community mental health team. At one point, her health deteriorated to the point that she was nearly admitted to hospital.

Diane approached the council for help, but was told that if she made a homeless application, the first place she would go was a homeless hostel in Leith. She was so unwell that she felt that she might have taken her own life in that environment.

She struggled to find a property in the private rented sector that would accept a tenant on benefits. She had to ask a friend to be a guarantor, but "it was really embarrassing to ask for that kind of help at my age". She is now settled in a property but cannot afford to heat it properly.

CASE STUDY C

Mary is a single parent of 4 children. She rents from a private landlord. In her flat, there is black mould in 3 rooms, and an unusual white mould on some walls. The damp got so bad that the landlord's furnishings had to be thrown out, and the replacements that Mary bought herself soon got ruined too. Mary has complained to the landlord, but the landlord "just gets somebody out to get that yellow soap stuff on, washes it off and paints it over, that's it".

The flat is also insufficiently sized for the family. Mary shares a bed with the three younger children. As a result of all this, Mary suffers from depression and her daughter often gets bad coughs.

The flat has been inspected by Environmental health, but the damp was deemed to be below the 20% prevalence threshold and is therefore considered habitable. She has been on the council waiting list for some time, but despite the points amassed from overcrowding, is yet to hear of a property available.

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.

Prevention

Statutory guidance on preventing and responding to homelessness should be updated to dovetail better with the Housing Options Guidance and form a coherent body of guidance on implementing the legislation and good practice.

Complex Needs

We recommend that a common definition is developed of what we mean by complex needs, perhaps in line with Chaos Index used by Simon Community Scotland.

We recommend that single managers should be appointed to strategically coordinate the response to people with complex needs.

We recommend that local services focus on the problems that underlie the presenting factors of those with complex needs, and allow for a greater length of time to engage with these individuals.

High Risk Groups

We recommend that, where possible, local authority homelessness teams avoid placing prison leavers in hostels as temporary accommodation.

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