

Scottish Government debate: COVID-19 Next Steps (Communities)

Shelter Scotland briefing

Shelter Scotland welcomes the action already taken by the Scottish Government to protect renters and people at risk of homelessness during this crisis – including the six-month ban on evictions for most households and the £350m package of funding to support communities, which has amongst other welcome changes, effectively ended the majority of rough sleeping during the pandemic.

However, the support cannot end there. The pandemic is, by any forecast, set to cause significant, long-term economic damage to communities across Scotland – and the short-term impact is already being keenly felt by people across the country.

What more needs to be done?

In the longer term this is an opportunity to reset the housing and homelessness agenda, building on the progress to date, with no step backwards. As we look to the immediate recovery plan and how to support people, we need to recognise that for many the crisis is already having a significant impact, and we are likely to see an ever-increasing number of households struggling, especially as emergency measures are lifted such as the furlough scheme.

A range of measures will therefore be required to ensure that people are protected.

- **Extension of powers in first coronavirus bill**

Shelter Scotland is therefore continuing to call for the powers in the first coronavirus emergency bill to be extended for as long as possible, to protect tenants from eviction beyond the current period of six months. This must be a key priority if we are to avoid a cliff edge where families will be at risk of eviction and of overwhelming the homeless system.

- **Protect tenants at risk of homelessness**

Protection must also be given to those tenants who entered the eviction process before the 7th April. To evict those tenants, who may have been struggling with rent arrears pre-pandemic, will be pushing them into a situation where they will, due to the pandemic, likely be struggling to keep or find a job, and finding another home will be problematic.

- **Grounds to be made discretionary**

Shelter Scotland also calls for the majority of the grounds for eviction in the Private Rented Sector, in particular rent arrears, to remain discretionary post-pandemic and for consideration to be given to them becoming discretionary on a permanent basis.

- **Building social homes**

The Scottish Government must also commit to kickstarting the current social house building programme as soon as it is safe to do so and commit to a radical and transformative social house housebuilding programme beyond 2021. This will help with social and economic recovery, deliver jobs to communities, tackle child poverty and help meet Scotland's ambitious carbon reduction targets, as well as meeting housing need. Shelter Scotland, CIH Scotland and the SFHA are [launching a joint piece of research regarding Affordable Housing Need in Scotland 2021-2026](#) with a webinar on Wednesday 10th June.

- **VOIDS and empty properties, holiday accommodation**

Ensuring that all available properties are brought back into use for households who need a home is vital. This must be on the understanding that they are providing a home, and cannot for example return to being a holiday let once lockdown measures are lifted. This is an opportunity to create a different model where we focus primarily on providing the homes needed by people living in each community.

- **Temporary accommodation**

We cannot accept a return to the previous situation of families and individuals living in unsuitable temporary accommodation and vulnerable people sleeping on Scotland's streets. Local authorities must be supported to provide the suitable temporary accommodation required for these households. Suitable emergency temporary accommodation must also continue to be provided especially during the coming winter months, with no return to the use of winter night shelters.

- **Creating an adequate safety net**

Shelter Scotland has joined with colleagues south of the border to call on the Chancellor to raise Local Housing Allowance to the 50th percentile to cover the average cost of rents, and to scrap the benefit cap. We will continue to campaign for greater welfare support for people across the country to provide an adequate safety net and call on the Scottish Government to make similar representations to the UK Government.