SHELTER SCOTLAND BRIEFING: SCOTTISH LABOUR HOUSING DEBATE, 26 APRIL 2023

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.

Scottish Labour is bringing forward a crucial debate on housing and homelessness in the wake of the recently published report of the Scottish Government's Task and Finish group on temporary accommodation. The recommendations of this expert group should be implemented as soon as possible. They are designed to tackle the growing housing emergency in Scotland, which leaves far too many people trapped in temporary accommodation, many for years, and without a safe place to call home.

Scotland's Housing Emergency

- **Record numbers of children (9,130) trapped in temporary accommodation – a 120% increase since 2014**
- **Rising homelessness with a 40% increase in households (14,458) having to live in temporary accommodation compared to 2014[1]**
- **Homelessness services 'at emerging risk of systemic failure', according to the Scottish Housing Regulator[2]**

If urgent action is not taken, we will be unable to address child poverty and will not improve health, education and employment outcomes.

Social justice cannot be achieved if people do not have a home they can thrive in.

We believe the structural solutions to the housing emergency are clear and our recommendations are supported by the recent report of the Scottish Government's Temporary Accommodation Task & Finish group, and the Scottish Housing Regulator's report on homelessness services in Scotland.

Shelter Scotland's Scottish Housing Emergency Action Plan[3]

- **Buy and build at least 38,500 social homes by 2026 to reduce housing need[4]**
- **A national acquisition programme should be introduced to support local authorities to quickly procure new social housing stock where it is most needed**
- **Fully fund local government and local homelessness services, including carrying out a full audit of existing homelessness spend**
- **Create a new Homelessness Emergency Fund to direct money where it is most needed**
- **Guarantee the right to a home for everyone experiencing homelessness**

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[1] [Homelessness in Scotland: Update to 30 September 2022](#)
[2] Scottish Housing Regulator, [Homelessness Services in Scotland: A Thematic Review](#) (2023)
[3] [Scottish Housing Emergency Action Plan](#)
[4] 38,500 social homes by 2026 would mean the Scottish Government delivering 50% of its longer-term target of 110,000 affordable homes, at least 70% of which are for social rent, by 2032.

The HPSG Temporary Accommodation Task and Finish Group report

The previous Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government, Shona Robison, appointed Alison Watson (Director, Shelter Scotland) and John Mills (co-chair of ALACHO and Head of Housing at Fife Council) as co-chairs of a Task and Finish group on Temporary Accommodation.

This group brought together a range of experts from across the sector and individuals with lived experience of the housing emergency to put forward recommendations on how to reduce the numbers of households and the numbers of children stuck in temporary accommodation.

The lives and futures of thousands of children are being damaged by the fact they are being denied their right to a stable, secure and affordable home.

The commitment outlined by the First Minister last week to reduce the number of people living in temporary accommodation[5] is welcome, and we are calling on the Scottish Government to now take forward the recommendations of their own expert group to tackle this emergency.

The group's report was published at the end of March[6], and outlined 15 key recommendations which they believe must be taken forward across three priority areas:

1. New supply of social homes
2. Maximal use of existing housing stock
3. Providing the support people need to move on

The group agreed that "for decades the reality of our broken housing system has been obvious to those on the frontline. Too many people denied the means to keep the home they have and too few social homes to provide a secure, affordable, and stable future."[7]

The solutions outlined in the report are strikingly straightforward: We need more social homes; we need to use the homes we have more effectively, and we need to fund homelessness services properly to treat people with dignity and respect.

Although the solutions are straightforward, they need to be ambitious and require significant resource behind them. This is intentional. Significant structural change is necessary to address Scotland's broken and biased housing and homelessness system and ensure that everyone currently stuck in Temporary Accommodation can move on to a safe, secure and affordable social home.

We cannot end the housing emergency or tackle the crisis in temporary accommodation without the delivery of enough social homes to reduce housing need. The Scottish Government must urgently take forward these recommendations in full.

Scottish Housing Regulator report

The recent report by the Scottish Housing Regulator[8] provided confirmation of the situation facing local authorities. **The Regulator said that homelessness services in Scotland are at "emerging risk of systemic failure"** due to the pressure on the system, with local authorities increasingly unable to meet their statutory duties. The Regulator argues the "Scottish Government may need to consider what further urgent measures it can take to support

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[5] Scottish Government, Equality, Opportunity, Community: New Leadership – A Fresh Start (2023), p.15.
[6] Scottish Government, Temporary Accommodation Task and Finish Group: final report and recommendations (2023)
[7] Ibid, p.3-4.
[8] Scottish Housing Regulator, Homelessness Services in Scotland: A Thematic Review (2023)

councils to respond to the immediate challenges they face in delivering services for people who are homeless." It also identifies throughout that **the solution to the problems we are facing is a rapid increase in the supply of social homes**.

The Scottish Government must heed these warnings if they are to prevent Scotland's homelessness system from failing.

Delivering the homes we need

The latest housing statistics show **starts and approvals for new social house building are slowing down. 2022 was the worst year for approvals for new social house building since 2015 and fell by 21% compared with 2021. Starts for construction of new build social homes fell by 19% in 2022 compared to 2021, and are at the lowest level since 2016.**[9] With less funding and increased costs we can only expect that downward trend to continue.

Failing to deliver the 38,500 social homes, whether that's through building them, through acquisitions or bringing empty homes back into use, will keep Scotland in the grip of this devastating housing emergency.

Planning for fewer social homes means planning for higher child poverty rates, more homelessness, more families in temporary accommodation for longer periods of time, more children falling behind at school, worse health outcomes, and missing out on potential economic benefits[10].

The Scottish Government's own commitment to delivering an enforceable human right to adequate housing will also be undermined if we don't deliver the homes needed to underpin that right.

That is the cost of not investing adequately in delivering quality social homes.

The experts are in full agreement on what the Scottish Government needs to do if we are to reverse the housing emergency in Scotland. It's up to the new First Minister, Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Minister for Housing to take action.

The real lives behind the statistics – experiences from our clients

- Our client, W, has been **living in temporary accommodation since summer 2021**. The hostel suffered with **rodent infestation**; the manager switched off the hallway lights at night-time in order to save on electricity, making it hard for our client to navigate; a flickering bathroom light posed a significant health risk for client W, who suffers from epilepsy; and when they first arrived **they had to clean blood from the mattress and walls**. At one point, the manager **locked everyone inside the hostel for three days** before the police were called and forced to knock down the door. Despite the awful living conditions and impact on W's mental health, they had nowhere else to go.

- Client R was fleeing violence and had to move to a new area and make a homeless application with their young family. The local authority **told the family they were not homeless** and that instead they should return to their unsafe situation, which wasn't an option for R. Client R was **forced to sofa surf and wander the streets** while their kids were in school. R appealed the decision and was eventually placed in a B&B however this broke the law as it was so unsuitable for the family. The situation has had a **severe**

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[9] Scottish Government, Quarterly Housing Statistics, March 2023.
[10] The New Economic Case for Social Housing (2020).

impact on the mental health of R and their family, with the school raising concerns over the impact of their situation on the children. The local authority finally moved them to different temporary accommodation and accepted their duty to find permanent housing for the family. R now has to wait until a home that meets their needs can be found.

- Client G had been bidding for a social home since 2017, not realising their priority points for social housing had been removed in 2018. G's situation deteriorated and they became homeless, and in September 2022 they were offered a place in a hostel, with the local authority suggesting **they would be stuck in the hostel for around two years before getting a new home,** despite this breaching their legal rights to suitable accommodation. Client G didn't feel they could accept the offer and returned to sofa surfing. The situation **has worsened G's mental health**, with their GP needing to intervene due to attempted suicide.

All of these situations would have been different if there was a sufficient supply of social homes in the right places. Sadly, this is the reality faced by thousands of people in Scotland every day.

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