

A National Housing Emergency Action Plan for Scotland



Dear First Minister,

The action needed to tackle the Housing Emergency

On the 15th of May 2024, the Scottish Parliament declared that Scotland is experiencing a housing emergency. MSPs across party lines called on:

“Scottish Ministers to bring forward an urgent housing emergency action plan to tackle the issues raised by the Scottish Government’s own expert Homelessness Prevention Task and Finish Group, including actions that will reduce the number of children stuck in temporary accommodation by the end of this parliamentary session; recognises the need to improve capacity in local government to prevent more local homelessness services falling into systemic failure, and the need to improve delivery for those with specific supported living needs, and calls on the Scottish Ministers to review how national government, local authorities and third sector partners are working together on the shared ambition to end homelessness.”

Since 1999 and the formation of the Scottish Parliament, there has been much to celebrate for housing and homelessness policy. From the removal of priority need for single homeless people to the scrapping of right to buy, big bold policies have improved people’s lives. But, twenty-five years later, there is much more that is needed to address our record levels of homelessness and falling numbers of new build social and private sector housebuilding.

We recognise that the housing emergency we face now is the result of decades of underinvestment in social housing, the failure to build new homes of all tenures and a lack of political will to shift spending from crisis intervention to prevention.

The role of the UK Government in allocating capital resources and ensuring a welfare system that keeps pace with rents must never be overlooked, however, given the devolved nature of housing, this is not the focus of these recommendations.

As a coalition of leading housing and antipoverty organisations, we recognise that the Scottish Government’s *Housing to 2040* and *Ending Homelessness Together* plans set out ambitious aims that should drive change over the long term. Both plans, however, have been fatally undermined by spending cuts at Holyrood and Westminster, the absence of accountability for delivery and a lack of political will to fund and shift towards prevention-based work.

We have no desire for new groups or strategies. We know what must be done - build more homes, prioritising government-subsidised social homes, and invest in helping people keep the homes they have. We need political leadership with the power and money to deliver. We do not

have any confidence that the current structures can deliver unless you are willing to invest your political capital in changing course.

The country's Housing Emergency will not be over until the number of people becoming homeless is falling year on year; no local authority is in systemic failure; and we are building enough homes in the right places to meet the needs of all those living in Scotland. The Housing Emergency impacts rural and urban Scotland alike with different actions needed in different areas.

Proposed reforms to Scotland's broken and unfair housing system in the Housing (Scotland) Bill will not happen in time to make a difference for people who are homeless now.

In the time remaining in this Parliament and in line with your objective as First Minister to eradicate child poverty, we believe that the Scottish Government should prioritise reducing the harm caused by the Housing Emergency on those at greatest risk - Scotland's 10,000 children trapped in temporary accommodation.

A single-minded focus on reducing the harm experienced by children can, we believe, unlock some of the barriers that impact the rest of the housing system.

If declaring a housing emergency was the first step towards ending it, the proposals in this document represent the next few yards along that path. There remains a much further distance to travel until we can say Scotland's housing emergency is in retreat or even close to ending but we believe these are the right next steps.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and the Deputy First Minister to discuss how we can work together to protect Scotland's homeless children and forge a way towards ending the housing emergency.

Alison Watson, Shelter Scotland
Callum Chomczuk, Chartered Institute of Housing Scotland
Chris Birt, Joseph Rowntree Federation
Jane Wood, Homes for Scotland
Sally Thomas, Scottish Federation of Housing Associations
Tony Cain, Association of Local Chief Housing Officers

Changing course

Declaring a National Housing Emergency is meaningless if it only means more of the same. Scottish Ministers should bring forward new approaches to meeting housing need under these four priority areas:

1. Urgently increase the supply of new social homes
2. Make maximal use of existing homes for people in need.
3. Fully fund local homelessness services
4. Maximise affordability across all tenures.

Recognising progress

Whilst this plan is not enough in itself to end the Housing Emergency, Scottish Ministers can demonstrate progress by achieving the following:

- Cutting the number of children in temporary accommodation by 25% compared to 2024.
- Eliminating breaches of the failure to accommodate duty in local homelessness services.
- Reducing the use of households being kept in temporary accommodation which is unsuitable to their needs for longer than 7 days.
- Reducing the average time that households with children spend in temporary accommodation.
- Optimising the number of social homes allocated to homeless households.
- Increase the number of newly built homes of all tenures started and completed by 10% year on year.
- Increase the number of new social homes being started to at least 5,500.

Urgently increase the supply of new social homes

SCOTTISH MINISTERS SHOULD:

1. Fully reverse the 37% cut to the Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP) over the last two years by pausing spending on other capital projects if necessary.
2. Prioritise the building and buying of larger properties specifically for households with children trapped in temporary accommodation for more than a year where needed.
3. Directly fund the cost of achieving net zero in social homes to free up rental income for new build and maintenance of existing stock.
4. Publish monthly delivery updates on how many homes, of what type and in which areas have been delivered through the AHSP.

Maximise the use of existing homes for people in need.

SCOTTISH MINISTERS SHOULD:

1. Publish national guidance on how to 'flip' temporary accommodation into permanent homes when it is in the express interest of the tenant.
2. Take action to address lengthy delays by energy suppliers in replacing or updating meters, so that void social homes can be brought back into use.
3. Create a match fund for local authorities to scale up existing empty homes teams to bring 3,000 private empty homes per year back into use. This should be supported by 100% funding for acquisition of such homes and support to bring homes up to standard.
4. Introduce emergency legislation to amend the pre-action requirements for eviction in the private rented sector, to give the local authority a first right of refusal to purchase the home with the tenant in situ.

Fully fund local authority homelessness services.

SCOTTISH MINISTERS SHOULD:

1. Target additional revenue funding specifically at local authorities identified as experiencing or being at heightened risk of, systemic failure in their homelessness services where people are denied their right to safe and suitable accommodation.
2. Support registered social landlords to maintain their wider remit investment in prevention services such as welfare rights, tenancy sustainment and housing support for those with wider care and support needs.
3. Create a new Homelessness Prevention Fund accessible to local authorities, RSLs and the third sector for tenants across tenures.
4. Commit to maintaining funding for Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans until the end of this Parliament and provide clarity on future funding plans for subsequent years.
5. Ensure that accurate data on households' needs is shared so that offers to homeless households can be made quickly.

Maximise affordability across all tenures.

SCOTTISH MINISTERS SHOULD:

1. Require all directorates in Government to make the delivery of homes of all tenures across Scotland the top national infrastructure priority to increase overall supply and directly improve affordability.
2. Review the planning and consenting system in light of the national housing emergency to increase the scale and pace of development across all tenures.
3. Review regulatory timelines across the next five years and publish deliverable route maps in accordance with the principles of the Scottish Government's Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment to ensure Scotland is an attractive location for investment.
4. Provide clarity for investors by publishing in 2024, proposed exemptions to rent controls contained in the Housing (Scotland) Bill.

Scotland's Housing Emergency in Numbers

- 693,000** – Scottish households identified as being in some form of housing need¹
- 250,000** – people waiting for a social home²
- 9,860** – children in temporary accommodation – a 138% increase in 10 years³
- 95** – MSPs voted to declare a national housing emergency
- 347** – the average number of days a couple with children spend trapped in temporary accommodation
- 45** – children become homeless every day⁴
- 35** – percentage fall in new social homes started since 2022⁵
- 18** – percentage fall in new social homes completed in 2023⁵
- 16** – the number of minutes every day a household becomes homeless
- 14.3** – percentage rent increase for a 2-bed home in the private sector⁶
- 10** – local authorities' homelessness services identified as being in systemic failure⁷
- 8** – councils have declared a housing emergency⁸
- 5** – house prices are more than five times the average wage⁹

¹ [Existing Housing Need in Scotland - Homes for Scotland](#)

² [Scotland in 'social housing emergency' as 245,000 on waiting list | STV News](#)

³ [Temporary accommodation - Homelessness in Scotland: 2022-23 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

⁴ https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/official-report/search-what-was-said-in-parliament/meeting-of-parliament-15-05-2024?meeting=15859&job=135399#orscontributions_M4934E351P846C2587562

⁵ [Social sector new housebuilding - Housing Statistics for Scotland Quarterly Update: New Housebuilding and Affordable Housing Supply to end December 2023 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

⁶ [Private Sector Rent Statistics, Scotland, 2010 to 2023 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

⁷ [Find a landlord | Scottish Housing Regulator](#)

⁸ Argyll and Bute, Edinburgh, Fife, Glasgow, Scottish Borders, South Lanarkshire, and West Dunbartonshire.

⁹ [Average house prices in Scotland are 5.1 times typical earnings \(scotsman.com\)](#)