



SHELTER SCOTLAND DELIVERY PLAN FOR HOUSING 2026 EVIDENCE PAPER: DELIVERING THE SOCIAL HOMES WE NEED

It is vital that the next Scottish Government sets itself the policy goal of reducing housing need by the end of the next parliament. While social homes have been delivered in recent years, they have not had the result of reducing housing need, as targets are set without having a clearly defined outcome of what is trying to be achieved. That must change.

Despite investment over the past two parliaments, it remains our analysis that this housing emergency has been caused by decades of underinvestment in new social housing. We have seen a long-term decline in our social housing stock, which has allowed for an unsustainable growth in profit-led, often unaffordable private rented accommodation.

This has left people at increased risk of homelessness with wages not keeping pace with rents, and people being increasingly priced out of the highest demand areas, especially in our largest cities.

In turn, we have failed to adequately replace social homes that were lost to the failed Right to Buy experiment, and failed to build the type of houses we need to reflect a changing society, in the places where people both want to, and increasingly have to, live to access jobs and services.

There must be an acceptance that private housing has never and will never meet the needs of Scotland. We need more investment in social housing and a vision of housing as a public good, not a private asset.

If we continue to fail to deliver these homes at the scale and pace needed in the next parliamentary session, we will continue to see homelessness increase, health and education damaged, and the economy suffer.

More families will be stuck in overcrowded conditions, Black and People of Colour will suffer from being disproportionately stuck in the expensive and insecure private rented sector with less access to social housing, and disabled people literally trapped in homes that do not come close to meeting their needs.

We need radical action. The next government must be interventionist and direct both funding and action. The housing emergency does not respect local authority boundaries – that is why we need national co-ordination.

We are calling for action across three priority areas: on new housing supply, on taking national responsibility for reducing affordable housing need, and on making maximum use of existing stock.

These must all be backed by a commitment to reduce housing need over the course of the parliamentary term.

That is the outcome Scotland needs.

We are calling for the next Scottish Government to commit to:

Deliver enough new social homes to reduce affordable housing need.

- Independent academic research commissioned by Shelter Scotland, CIH Scotland and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations has found that in the five years post-2026, the Scottish Government must deliver **a minimum of 15,693 affordable homes every year to begin reducing housing need** – a total of 78,465 over the five-year parliamentary term.¹
- In order to make the maximum impact in reducing housing need, **100% of these homes should be for social rent**, rather than other forms of so-called 'affordable' housing. This will **require investment of £8.8bn** over the parliamentary term.
- Parties must commit to ensuring that homes are delivered in the right places. Our research has shown that **over 50% of housing need is located within the East** region: the next government must commit to ensuring central funding is delivered in a way that reduces housing need.
- Parties must commit to this target as an absolute minimum if there are to be fewer households facing homelessness at the end of the parliament compared to now. Parties must also provide details on the type of housing that will be delivered, where the investment will go, and provide realistic estimates of how this investment will be funded.
- Parties must commit to delivering homes which **meet the needs of Scotland's diverse population – with goals of reducing inequality**, ensuring disabled people are able to access housing that meets their specific needs, and Black and People of Colour do not have their inequality deepened by the systemically racist housing system – as well as putting homes at the heart of well-designed communities with easy access to services.

Take national responsibility for reducing affordable housing need.

- The next Scottish Government should explore and make urgent progress on national and regional housing delivery bodies, including a **National Housing and Land Agency with the ability to bring forward a supply of development-ready sites** in the right places to help reduce housing need in Scotland. This builds on recent work from the likes of Professor Ken Gibb, and the Scottish Land Commission.²
- The new Agency must focus on an outcome of reducing housing need, giving it the remit to **prioritise social housing delivery on new sites**, rather than other forms of housing which do not help to reduce housing need. This would mean prioritising social housing over Mid-Market Rent, Build to Rent, and Purpose-Built Student Accommodation, and other housing schemes which do not work to reduce housing need, when considering land acquisition and planning – an approach currently being brought forward in Spain.³
- Take a new approach to land value capture, to ensure increases in land value due to public investment in infrastructure and land remediation are captured effectively and **reinvested in delivering social new homes**. Public investment must be focused on driving public gain.

¹ Marshall, M., Watkins, C., Keskin, B., Dunning, R., Ferrari, E. (2025) [Affordable Housing Need in Scotland Post-2026](#), commissioned by Shelter Scotland, CIH Scotland and SFHA.

² Scottish Land Commission (2025), [Land for Housing and Development](#).

³ Citizens Advice Bureau Spain (2025), [Housing: The Government is Implementing 12 New Measures](#).

Make maximum use of existing stock:

- All parties should commit to a **substantial National Acquisitions Programme (NAP)**, led by Scottish Government and funding being directed to the areas in greatest need, with the express aim of reducing the number of children trapped in temporary accommodation, barriers on the types of property able to be purchased through the NAP. This would mirror a similar approach adopted in Wales.⁴
- The next Scottish Government should ensure all efforts to bring empty homes back into use are made by providing ongoing support for Empty Homes Officers, bringing forward **the previously promised compulsory sales orders**, and providing local support to tackle void social properties to ensure empty homes are fully utilised. The government should also explore, where appropriate, the potential conversion of non-residential properties into social housing, building on positive recent examples from across Scotland while also avoiding the unsafe and unsuitable practices witnessed elsewhere in the UK.
- In order to ensure existing housing stock is used to reduce homelessness, government should seek to **mandate the use of Section 5 referrals** to ensure a greater proportion of social housing allocations to go homeless households.
- Local authorities must be given the **resources they need to maintain and maximise use of existing stock**. We support the proposed introduction of Awaab's Law in Scotland, and encourage parties to commit to bringing this forward across all sectors as soon as possible, including on temporary accommodation, which research has shown has a severe impact on children's safety, health and education.⁵
- The government should create **renewed guidance and resources for local authorities to incentivise downsizing** where it is in the interests of current tenants, where this will help to free up more larger housing stock.

⁴ Welsh Government (2025), [Standards for Homes Delivered under the Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme \(TACP\)](#).

⁵ Svirydzenka, Prof N. (De Montfort University), Lakhanpaul, Prof M. (University College London), and Williams, Dr J. (De Montfort University)(2025) [In Their Own Words: Children's Experiences in Temporary Accommodation](#). Shelter Scotland.