

Shelter Scotland Briefing for Scottish Labour Debate: Inequality

Wednesday 24th October 2018

Elaine Smith Motion S5M-14406:

“That the Parliament notes with concern the recent publication of a number of reports that show that deep-rooted poverty and inequality persists in Scotland’s communities; understands that revelations from these reports include that, in the last 12 months, at least 94 rough sleepers died on Scotland’s streets and that at least one in 10 people living in the poorest areas of Scotland ran out of food due to a lack of money, and that life expectancy in Scotland has fallen for the first time in 35 years and remains the lowest of all nations in the UK; believes that, while UK Government changes to the benefit system are a significant driver of poverty, the Scottish Government has failed to use the devolved powers adequately to challenge and address the root causes of poverty and inequality, including those perpetuated by the policies of the UK Government, and, in doing so, calls for an end to austerity in Scotland.”

Shelter Scotland

Shelter Scotland is Scotland’s national housing and homelessness charity. We are here so that no-one has to face bad housing or homelessness alone. In 2017/18 Shelter Scotland helped over 21,000 people through our housing advice and support services – more than ever before¹.

Along with our national helpline, and local projects, we operate four community hubs across Scotland which offer clients support and advice in Scotland’s major cities; Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen. The dominant issue clients came to Shelter Scotland for help with last year was **struggling to pay or afford housing costs**.

Housing inequality

Our services are busier than ever. The Scottish Government’s most recent homelessness statistics show that homeless applications are on the rise again, up to 34,972 in 2017/18². In addition, temporary accommodation use has increased for the fourth year in a row, and households are spending on average 24 weeks in temporary accommodation³. Last year, 14,075 children were in households assessed as homeless. That means that **every day, 38 children became homeless**⁴.

Scotland’s housing system is pushing more households into poverty. Before housing costs, 860,000 people are living in relative poverty. After housing costs, this figure soars to one million people (equivalent to nearly a fifth of Scotland’s population). That means that 140,000 people in Scotland are in poverty because of their housing costs. And when we break it down by age, this gap is widest among children: 19% of children are living in poverty before housing costs, and 24% after housing costs. **That’s an extra 50,000 children in poverty, just because housing costs are unaffordable**⁵.

There is a stark housing divide still in Scotland. Research from Shelter Scotland and Ipsos MORI shows that 1 in 3 Scottish Homes don’t meet the Living Home Standard⁶. This standard is based on five areas people told us mattered to them: conditions, affordability, space, stability and neighbourhood. Too many

¹ Shelter Scotland (2018) [Impact Report 2017/18](#)

² Scottish Government (2018) [Homelessness in Scotland 2017 to 2018](#)

³ Shelter Scotland (2018) [Time in temporary accommodation](#)

⁴ Shelter Scotland (2018) [Children who are homeless 2018](#)

⁵ Scottish Government (2018) [Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2014-17](#)

⁶ Shelter Scotland (2018) [Living Home Standard](#)

homes in Scotland fall short of decent conditions, affordability and energy efficiency, having a dramatic impact on families' health.

Health inequalities

Poor health and homelessness are inextricably linked, people who have experienced homelessness have higher health needs than those who have not⁷. World leading research shows that in Scotland, people who have experienced homelessness have many more interactions with the health service than non-homeless households. The rate of attendance at A&E was almost twice as high for households experiencing homelessness as those from the most deprived areas, and three and a half times higher than those from the least deprived areas.

As a group, people who have experienced homelessness are more likely to have certain health conditions. The rate of admission to mental health services was almost five times higher for households experiencing homelessness than those from the most deprived areas, and 20 times higher than those in the least deprived areas⁸.

Recommendations

- **More homes:** To tackle inequality, we need to build more affordable homes. Scotland is in the grip of the biggest housing crisis we have seen in decades, and at the heart of that is a lack of social housing, meaning people are left without choice. Shelter Scotland welcomes the Scottish Government's 2016 commitment to build 50,000 homes over the lifetime of this parliament⁹, and notes that this target is within reach¹⁰. But these must be the right homes, fitting the local need and high levels of delivery must continue beyond the lifetime of this parliament.
- **A strong safety net:** More and more people are struggling to pay their housing costs. We need attention on economic policies and welfare protection to ensure that people have sufficient means to make ends meet. We need to ensure that there is a strong welfare support in place for people facing homelessness – and that people have access to the right support at the right time. To tackle increasing poverty in Scotland, the Government must scrap the arbitrary benefit cap and lift the freeze on local housing allowance. This will ensure those on low incomes have the best provision to sustaining their tenancies.
- **Fuel poverty:** Shelter Scotland supports the Scottish Government's ambition to eradicate fuel poverty. We need to make sure that the Fuel Poverty (Target, Definition and Strategy) Bill is ambitious enough to ensure that we don't condemn another generation to cold homes.

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⁷ Shelter Scotland (2018) [Health and homelessness topic briefing](#)

⁸ Scottish Government (2018) [Health and Homelessness in Scotland](#)

⁹ Scottish Government (2016) [More Homes Scotland](#)

¹⁰ Shelter Scotland, SFHA & EHRC Scotland (2018) [Review of Strategic Investment Plans for Affordable Housing](#)