



## EDINBURGH'S HOUSING EMERGENCY

### Key points:

- Edinburgh's housing system has failed.
- The temporary accommodation (TA) system in Edinburgh is broken – record numbers of households and children are in TA in the city.
- Huge increases in the numbers of households and children becoming homeless.
- Homelessness services busier than ever before.
- People are often denied access to TA or given TA which is unsuitable.
- Stark increases in the number of people forced to sleep rough on the city's streets.
- Lack of social housing means that more people are stuck in temporary accommodation for long periods of time unable to move on.
- Edinburgh can and must do more to tackle the housing emergency.

### The national context

Scotland is in the grip of a devastating housing emergency which is damaging the lives and opportunities of thousands of people from every community in the country. This is a national problem – the result of decades of underinvestment in social housing and austerity policies, exacerbated by increasing pressures caused by the pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, and the war in Ukraine.

The Scottish Housing Regulator has said the homelessness system is at risk of 'systemic failure'<sup>1</sup>. The Accounts Commission has warned that housing and homelessness services are at risk<sup>2</sup> and SOLACE has essentially declared a housing emergency<sup>3</sup>.

Whilst the housing emergency affects different parts of Scotland in different ways, it is a challenge that is most acute in our capital city. This briefing sets out what the emergency looks like in Edinburgh, and why the council must take action and declare a housing emergency.

### Increasing homelessness

The latest statistics show large increases in the numbers of people becoming homeless in Edinburgh:

- 3,261 households assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness in 2022/23 – a 28% increase compared to year before.
- 1,596 children associated with applications assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness – a 16% increase compared to the year before.

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<sup>1</sup> Scottish Housing Regulator (2023), [Homelessness Services in Scotland: A Thematic Review](#)

<sup>2</sup> Accounts Commission (2023), [Local Government in Scotland](#)

<sup>3</sup> SOLACE (2023), [Housing in Scotland: Current Context and Preparing for the Future](#)

City of Edinburgh Council's homelessness services are now busier than ever:

- There were 6,373 live homeless applications on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. This is a 17% increase compared with the same date the year before.

## Housing rights are not being upheld.

The increasing pressure on homelessness services means that City of Edinburgh Council is often unable to meet its legal duties to households applying as homeless.

The official statistics show that in 2022/23 there were:

- 420 reported instances of a household entitled to TA not being offered it (there were 445 instances nationally, and so the majority were in Edinburgh).
- 1,490 instances of a household being kept in TA which was deemed by law to be unsuitable to their needs (in breach of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order).

However, there are known issues with the recording of these statistics, and so they are both an undercount and don't give an accurate picture of the scale of the problem. We know from our services that the situation is much worse than the official statistics show.

Our services are seeing unprecedented levels of Unsuitable Accommodation Order (UAO) breaches – 30% of all enquiries to our Edinburgh Communities Team in the last 2 months have been in relation to UAO cases. The council's Annual Assurance Statement (AAS) on Housing Services 2022/23<sup>4</sup> supported this, stating that 25% of TA placements on 31 March 2023 were classed as unsuitable under the UAO.

City of Edinburgh Council is frequently advising people who present as homeless that there is no TA available in the city that day, with TA running out as early as 10am some days.

These increased instances of gatekeeping – people not being offered TA when they have the right to it – are leading to a stark increase in people sleeping rough, with around 80 people found to be rough sleeping on a recent official count. There are countless cases of households being offered accommodation in places such as Newcastle or Birmingham when they are able to access TA.

### Case study: UAO breach

Recently one of our clients was made homeless due to suffering from racial abuse in their previous tenancy.

*A lack of suitable temporary accommodation has led to ongoing rights breaches for the client and her 3 children, who have been **moved from hotel to hotel for a number of months**, including being **sent outside of the city to access hotel accommodation**. They have faced overcrowding with the 3 teenage children being forced to share a bedroom alongside the client, with inadequate cooking facilities and a lack of suitable adaptations for the child who is a wheelchair user. The situation is having a **severe impact on the mental and physical health of the family**, as well as impact on school work. They have been advised they will be unable to access suitable temporary accommodation until mid-November.*

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<sup>4</sup> City of Edinburgh Council, [Annual Assurance Statement on Housing Services 2022/23](#), p.7.

### Case study: UAO breach and gatekeeping

Our client suffered multiple and recurring rights breaches during his wait for temporary accommodation, and he and his family continue to be trapped in temporary accommodation which may be unsuitable for their needs.

*Our client and his wife had been accommodated by the council earlier this year, before returning to their home country to bring their children back to the UK with them. Upon their return, they were **placed in hotel accommodation for longer than seven days**. Once the hotel booking expired, they were then **offered temporary accommodation in Glasgow**, but had to turn it down as it would mean the client was unable to work. He remained unable to work due to having to present to the council for temporary accommodation. The **council said they could not accommodate** and sent the family to a **neighbouring authority**, who sent the family **back to Edinburgh**. The council then **sent the family to Dundee** to accommodate them overnight. They were then again **offered temporary accommodation in Glasgow**, before the wife and children were **accommodated in a hotel in Dunfermline**. Our client was **forced to sleep rough in Edinburgh**, however, so he could go into work the next day. They were finally provided with hotel accommodation in Edinburgh – although this **remains a breach of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order**.*

## Temporary accommodation

The increasing demand on temporary accommodation in the city, combined with a lack of social housing for people to move on to, means that the system is beyond breaking point.

On 31 March 2023 there were record numbers of households and children living in temporary accommodation in the city:

- 3,560 households living in temporary accommodation, this is a 7% increase compared to the year before.
- 2,755 children living in temporary accommodation, this is a 9% increase compared to the year before.

For cases closed in 2022/23 households spent on average 429 days in temporary accommodation, which is significantly higher than the national average. 48% of households currently still living in temporary accommodation in Edinburgh have been living in TA for over a year, 21% for over 2 years and 6% (265 households) for over 3 years.

Households with children are more likely to spend longer in TA than those without:

- For cases closed in 2022/23 households with children in Edinburgh spent on average 604 days in TA.
- For households with children currently still living in TA in Edinburgh, 63% have been living there for over a year, 31% for over 2 years and 11% for over 3 years.
- In 2022/23, 433 households with a child under 5 entered TA, and 860 with a child under 17 entered TA.

Despite these severe issues, only 50% of RSL lets go to homeless households, compared to 71% of council lets.

### Case study: poor-quality temporary accommodation

Recently one of our clients was forced to live in unsuitable temporary accommodation for a prolonged period.

*Our client and their child were placed in **unsuitable temporary accommodation for a period of two months**. There were **no cooking facilities**, and they were instructed to take **drinking water from the shower**. Following intervention from support services, they were moved to a temporary flat, which was also unsuitable due to mobility issues. Further struggles in securing temporary accommodation led to the client **sofa surfing**, before being accommodated in a hotel for a further 3 weeks, before finally being offered **another temporary flat which continues to impair our client's mobility**. However, the client is now so desperate that she is accepting this over another stay in a hotel. The situation has had a **severe impact on the daughter's education**.*

## Lack of social housing

The key structural solution to the housing emergency is building social housing. Building and buying enough social homes can help to clear the backlog in temporary accommodation and give people the secure, settled homes from which they can thrive.

According to City of Edinburgh Council's Strategic Housing Investment Plan<sup>5</sup> they must deliver 1,111 social homes per year to meet the demand for social housing. The latest annual figures show only 451 social homes were delivered between April 2022 and March 2023.

The council's own target to ensure 64% of affordable homes delivered are social homes falls well short of the necessary emergency response, and below the government's own target of 70%. The council continues to support the delivery of Mid-Market Rental properties. This type of housing is unaffordable for those families currently stuck in TA in the city, as well as taking away valuable land that could otherwise be used for social housing developments.

The large number of void properties in the city is contributing to the housing emergency:

- There are 1,416 void properties in the city.
- The average turnaround time of a void property in Edinburgh is 474 days.<sup>6</sup>
- There are 197 bids for every home that becomes available on EdIndex.<sup>7</sup>

The significant supply issues have been exacerbated by the abundance of short-term let properties in the city, and a lack of supply has contributed to the extortionate private sector rents in Edinburgh, which are the highest in Scotland.

- The average rent for a 2-bedroom property in Edinburgh has increased by 78.5% over the last decade.<sup>8</sup>
- At the start of the pandemic, it was estimated that nearly 14,000 properties were available for short-term let on airbnb – including 24% of all properties registered in the City Centre ward.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> City of Edinburgh Council, [Strategic Housing Investment Plan 2018-2023](#).

<sup>6</sup> [City of Edinburgh Council Housing Service Improvement Plan \(October 2023\)](#).

<sup>7</sup> City of Edinburgh Council, [Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan progress report \(August 2023\)](#).

<sup>8</sup> CityLets, [Quarterly Report Q1 2023](#), p.5.

<sup>9</sup> City of Edinburgh Council, [Short-Term Let Control Area - Statement of Reasons Background Report](#), p.5

### **Case study: Lack of social housing**

A lack of social housing has led to our client being stuck in unsuitable private rented accommodation and unable to access suitable temporary accommodation for a prolonged period, or permanent social housing.

*Our client was living with their husband and children in a private rented property with significant **disrepair and overcrowding issues**, owned by a landlord who constantly **threatened eviction and rent rises** if requests for repairs were made. **Infestation and damp and mould** issues had a severe impact on the families' wellbeing and the children's education. However, the council refused to accept a homeless application or provide the family with suitable temporary accommodation, leaving the **family feeling trapped in the poor-quality private rented sector** property. After a prolonged period of the council refusing to offer suitable temporary accommodation to the family, and the landlord failing to carry out the required repairs, they were **finally accommodated in a suitable temporary flat**.*

*Our client's children are excited to finally have their own bedrooms and their own beds.*

### **Declare a housing emergency**

**It is clear that business as usual is not working. It is time for the council to come together, declare a housing emergency, and take the action needed to respond to this emergency situation. People cannot wait any longer.**