

# EXITING COVID AND TACKLING SCOTLAND'S HOUSING EMERGENCY

Shelter Scotland's 2021 Action Plan



# 1.5 MILLION PEOPLE IN SCOTLAND ARE IMPACTED BY THE HOUSING EMERGENCY

That's 1.5 million people struggling with the cost of keeping a home; living in damp, dangerous conditions; overcrowded or in fear of losing their home to unscrupulous landlords<sup>1</sup>.

Our housing emergency has been building for decades. Austerity cuts to local services and an insufficient number of new social homes have widened the gap between the housing haves and have nots.

The pandemic didn't cause the housing emergency, but it has exposed it as never before. Scotland in 2021 is a country where nearly 8,000 children<sup>2</sup> are trapped in temporary accommodation, where homelessness was on the rise pre-pandemic; especially amongst families and where private rents are rising above inflation. These are symptoms of a crisis tolerated for too long.

During the last Parliament, major steps were taken to slow the growth of housing inequality through initiatives that focussed on rough sleeping, homelessness and achieving record levels of social house building before the pandemic hit. But it hasn't been enough. The problem keeps growing.

The emergency impacts on some communities more than others. 130,000 adults report that they had experienced discrimination in the search for their current home and felt it was because of their ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion or disability<sup>3</sup>.

## 8,000

nearly 8,000 children are trapped in temporary accommodation in Scotland in 2021

## 130,000

adults report that they had experienced discrimination in the search for their current home

Our communities cannot continue to tolerate a broken and biased housing system, we must take urgent action to reform and rebuild a Scotland where everyone has a safe home.

As the new Scottish Parliament begins its work to make Scotland a fairer country, it is vital that we set a new ambition to tackle housing inequality.

Our action plan has three key asks:

1. A Covid exit plan for housing **equality**.
2. Pledge to place social **justice** at heart of social house building.
3. **Stronger, better housing rights for all**.

The fight for home will have a role for all of us to play and we need Scotland's elected representatives to be the vanguard of that change. Join us in the fight for home!

**Alison Watson, Director**



# 1. A COVID EXIT PLAN FOR HOUSING EQUALITY

The pandemic exposed and deepened the housing inequalities that exist in Scotland's broken and biased housing system. Implementing a Covid Exit Plan for housing equality can ensure there is continued protection and support for renters and people at risk of homelessness and that the Scotland we rebuild has social justice at its heart.

The plan should include:

1. **Financial support** for those in greatest need, to stop a surge in evictions and homelessness. Many renters have accrued rent arrears because of the pandemic and the existing support is not working for many and is too difficult to access.
  - a. **Replace loans with grants** for those who cannot get support elsewhere.
  - b. Discretionary Housing Payments should be used to **clear Covid-related arrears** for those who are eligible.
2. A new Coronavirus (Scotland) Act should be introduced to extend the provisions beyond September 2021, to ensure that we support people fully through the pandemic and the recovery period. This should include the provision for **all grounds for evictions to be kept discretionary** in the private rented sector (PRS); **notice periods to remain at 6 months** for the majority of grounds across both social and private rented sectors; and **pre-action requirements for the PRS to be made permanent**.
3. The **evictions ban should remain in place for all tiers** to ensure that individuals and families are not at risk of eviction. No one should be made homeless as a result of the pandemic.



## 2. PLEDGE TO PLACE SOCIAL JUSTICE AT HEART OF SOCIAL HOUSE BUILDING

During the last term of the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Government embarked on the most ambitious affordable housebuilding programme since devolution. 50,000 affordable homes were in the pipeline before the pandemic hit, including 35,000 for social rent. But, as Audit Scotland identified, where these homes are built, the quality and cost of these homes and the purpose behind the type of home matter just as much as the overall number.

That is why we believe the success of the new affordable housing programme should be measured not just by how many new homes for social rent are made available, but by whether they have resulted in affordable housing need in Scotland reducing over the term of this Parliament. Additionally, we must be able to measure and monitor the social impact of such a significant investment in our communities at every stage of the process.

Research by independent academics published by Shelter Scotland, Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) Scotland and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA) found that the trigger point at which growth in affordable housing need goes into reverse was a minimum of 53,000 affordable homes over the next 5 years in the places of greatest need, of which **37,100 need to be for social rented homes**<sup>5</sup>.

There is broad cross-party consensus with every party in the Scottish Parliament making affordable and social housing one of their top priorities. The Scottish Conservatives and Scottish Liberal Democrats pledged 40,000 social homes over the coming 5 years, with the Scottish Greens calling for 49,000 and Scottish Labour calling for 60,000. Only the SNP's pledge of 35,000 during this parliament falls short of the academic's measurement.

Building on that cross-party consensus we are calling on all parties to back a new socially just social housing plan including:

1. **Accelerating the affordable housing supply programme**, to ensure Scotland delivers a minimum of **37,100 social homes** over the next 5 year period, targeted to the places of greatest need by front ending planned investment into this current Parliament.
2. Pledging to an annual **Housing and Social Justice** report produced by Scottish Government to Parliament on progress of social housing building against a range of social justice indicators, including existing levels of affordable housing need and access to social housing by marginalised groups such as people of colour and disabled people, and identify local authorities continually falling short of their target.
3. Incentivising planning regulations to ensure social housing **is delivered in the areas of greatest need**. The National Planning Framework (NPF) 3 recognised this need, stating that planning efforts should focus on where the greatest levels of change are expected and where there is pressure for development. It is vital that NPF4 continues to enact this kind of reform to the planning system.



# 3. STRONGER, BETTER HOUSING RIGHTS FOR ALL

The housing emergency has a disproportionate impact on marginalised groups than the majority of people in Scotland. People of colour, disabled people, people with health and dependency issues and the economically marginalised face greater barriers to housing equality than most others in society<sup>6</sup>.

Scotland is rightly proud of the strength of our housing rights framework. We are world leaders on homelessness rights and the commitment to put the United Nations right to adequate housing into Scots Law will be another international landmark. Scotland recognises that we cannot have a fair society when so many citizens are denied the basic right of a safe, secure, warm and affordable place to call home.

We welcome the Scottish Government's focus on rights put forward in the Housing to 2040 strategy published earlier this year.

Rights should guide all areas of housing policy including renter's rights and the rights of people experiencing homelessness.

The Scottish Government should make the human right to an adequate home a reality for everyone in Scotland by:

1. **Taking forward commitments to a new Human Rights Bill** in Scotland and fully incorporating the right to adequate housing into Scots law with robust access to justice; reporting annually on progress to equalise housing rights across all marginalised groups.
2. **Continuing to guarantee every person experiencing homelessness has access to a safe, affordable and secure home from which to rebuild their lives.** Housing First shows us the value of treating people who become homeless as people first. We must build on existing rights and ensure no dilution of the ones we already have.

3. **Progressing the actions to strengthen rights paused due to Covid.** The rights of people experiencing homelessness should not be compromised or forgotten, especially during and in recovery from a public health emergency.

- **Remove the exemptions to the Unsuitable Accommodation Order** to ensure that everyone's right to suitable temporary accommodation is upheld. No one should be forced to stay in accommodation deemed to be unsuitable for more than 7 days.
- **Remove the power to assess local connection** so that every household has the right to choose where they live and are not required to remain in an area that does not meet their needs.

4. **Reforming the grounds for eviction under the Private Residential Tenancy.** All grounds should remain permanently discretionary; this is of particular importance for the rent arrears grounds, which should be considered within the context of the use of Pre-Action Requirements and of the tenant's full circumstances.

- Consideration should also be given to ensuring that where a landlord chooses to sell a property, they must do so with the tenant in situ so that we can prevent house transactions creating homelessness with the public sector left to pick up the tab.
- Evaluate the Pre-Action Requirements with a view to make them permanent and as effective as possible, to provide crucial protection from eviction for private tenants and an important step towards parity of rights for private and social tenants.

<sup>1</sup> Shelter Scotland media release

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government (2021) [Homelessness in Scotland: update to 30 September 2020](#)

<sup>3</sup> Shelter Scotland media release

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/report/affordable-housing>

<sup>5</sup> [Affordable Housing Need in Scotland Post-2021 - Shelter Scotland](#)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-2040-2/> Scottish Government (2021) Housing to 2040

**We exist 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 change at the top.



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