
CONCLUSION

The statistics laid out in this paper paint a harsh picture; but they are just that - a picture. We mustn't forget that behind each statistic are very real people struggling every day just to get by, and being pushed into the trauma of homelessness.

But there are solutions, and these statistics give an insight into where we can focus those solutions. National and local government have core roles to play in the fight against homelessness and poor housing. Shelter Scotland therefore welcomes the current political commitment to tackling homelessness, and we welcome the austerity mitigation work, such as the rejection of the bedroom tax, from the Scottish Government.

But last year, homeless applications rose for the second year running: it is clear that current action on homelessness is not going far enough, or quickly enough. In order to effectively tackle the crisis that is homelessness, we need a long-term commitment to preventing it from occurring in the first place, as well as continued investment in good quality social housing in Scotland. In short: we must stem the tide of people flowing into the homelessness system and for those who enter it, there must be good quality, affordable homes to unblock the bottleneck in temporary accommodation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Temporary accommodation standards

On 31st March 2019, there were 10,989 households in temporary accommodation: the fifth year running that this figure has increased. Even more worryingly, households are spending longer in temporary accommodation: households who left temporary accommodation in 2018/19 spent, on average, 180 days there. The corresponding figure for households with children was 219 days. A shocking 2,925 households spend more than a year in temporary accommodation.

It is well documented that extended periods in temporary accommodation have adverse effects on a person's life, especially children's.²⁹ It is therefore vital that households who use temporary accommodation as a stepping stone on their way to a permanent home stay there for as short a time as possible.

Furthermore, action should be taken to ensure that temporary accommodation is consistently of a good standard: legally enforceable minimum standards of temporary accommodation should be implemented as soon as possible.³⁰

Local connection and intentionality

Intentionality is a key determiner of a homeless household's housing outcome: 71% of households assessed as unintentionally homeless went on to secure settled accommodation, compared to just 25% of households assessed as intentionally homeless. Shelter Scotland regularly works with clients who have received a decision of 'intentionally homeless', and are usually successful in overturning that decision (meaning the household is owed full homelessness duty). We believe that both local connection (for which there are no statistics available) and intentionality are used as rationing tools to prevent or delay households from accessing the services they need to resolve their homelessness. **We therefore advocate removing the local connection and intentionality tests entirely, to enable local authorities to effectively assist everyone to move on from homelessness.**

Gendered nature of homelessness

Young women are more likely than young men to apply as homeless, and women are vastly over-represented within the number of single parent families making a homeless application. Single mothers are more likely to be affected by the benefit cap, which leads to households having difficulty affording housing

²⁹ Shelter Scotland (2013), [Temporary accommodation standards: campaign briefing](#)

³⁰ Shelter Scotland (2019) [Shelter Scotland response to the Scottish Government Consultation on Improving Temporary Accommodation Standards](#)

costs and facing eviction.³¹ Domestic abuse is the leading cause of homelessness for women and children. In August, Scottish Women's Aid released guidance³² for social landlords to help prevent women and children's homelessness. **Shelter Scotland welcomes this guidance, which brings a more consistent approach to the issue of domestic abuse and homelessness, and would like to see widespread take up.**

Repeat homelessness

6% of all households assessed as homeless in 2017/18 had already been assessed as homeless within the same year. Homelessness is disruptive and traumatic for the people involved, and incredibly expensive for local government. Vulnerable households which are already known to local authorities should not find themselves pushed into homelessness again – let alone within the same year. **Greater investment in post-assessment support is needed to prevent repeat homelessness.**

Mental health and other support needs

Households who identify at least one support need now make up 49% of all those assessed as homeless: of these, over half identified a mental health condition. In terms of the reasons why people become homeless, one in four households applying as homeless said they failed to maintain their prior accommodation due to mental ill health. Our advisors here at Shelter Scotland report similar experiences: more of our service users have increasingly complex mental health issues. Furthermore, the individuals behind the statistics in this paper only represent those who accessed support services, and we know that mental health needs can prevent people from seeking help. **Given the volume of people who are affected by this issue, profound consideration and accompanying investment should be made into how mental health needs and homelessness interact, and how statutory services can best support people with mental health needs who experience homelessness, both at the point of making a homeless application and beyond.**

Housing support and the role of local authorities

It is frequently said that Scotland has some of the strongest homelessness laws in the world.³³ However, this good policy does not always translate into practice: Government statistics show that local authorities are failing to comply with their legal duties on an increasingly regular basis, and Shelter Scotland advisors see even more instances of this, which do not make it into official statistics. While we welcome the increased commitment from national government to tackle homelessness, it is clear that local authorities are struggling to fulfil their

³¹ Shelter Scotland (2018), [Shelter Scotland response to the Work and Pensions Committee inquiry on the benefit cap](#)

³² Scottish Women's Aid (2019), [Domestic abuse: a good practice guide for social landlords](#)

³³ Housing Minister Kevin Stewart: <https://www.gov.scot/news/housing-support-made-easier/>

obligations. **Local authorities have a key role to play in delivering housing support to prevent homelessness, and support people out of homelessness where it does occur; but this must be accompanied by proper resource and support to deliver these duties.**

Prevention

If the Scottish Government is to achieve in its aim of ending homeless, we cannot just wait for homelessness to occur before dealing with it: proactive prevention work must take a critical role. Some work has already been done in this area, such as the introduction of Housing Options. However, Shelter Scotland believes more work can be done further upstream, by early intervention and identification of people at particular risk of homelessness. **The Scottish Government should also assess the learnings from the introduction of the Welsh prevention duty, and consider whether a similar approach could work in Scotland.**

Supply

Supply of good quality social housing is absolutely key to tackling homelessness and bad housing in Scotland. The length of time households are spending in temporary accommodation is increasing, causing a bottleneck of households with no permanent home to move on to. Shelter Scotland welcomes the current Government's commitment to – and success to date in – building 50,000 affordable homes by the end of this parliament, 35,000 of which for social rent. However, at present, we are facing a cliff edge in terms of housing investment post-2021. **All political parties in Scotland must commit to long term investment in high levels of safe, decent and affordable homes in places and communities where people want to live.**