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Report on Homelessness



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Local Government and Communities Committee

To consider and report on communities, housing, local government, planning and regeneration matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities.



<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/local-govt-committee.aspx>



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Foreword

Homelessness in Scotland is an enduring issue that has challenged successive government over many years. It not a problem unique to Scotland and very few countries have addressed this issue completely. For the past 11 months it has been a focus in the Committee's work programme as we learned from people who have experienced homelessness, those who work on the front line, those who deliver services aimed at alleviating homelessness or decide on local and national policy about the challenges and opportunities that exist to try and tackle it. Our work would not have been possible without people sharing with us their views, comments and experiences of homelessness - we thank all those who helped us and, in particular, those who courageously shared with us their stories.

As we heard, homelessness is often a dreadful outcome arising from a wider range of issues including relationship breakdown, substance misuse, mental health issues, childhood trauma as well as, more recently, welfare reform. It is a not a lifestyle choice.

We heard that the current Scottish Government approaches to tackling homelessness are producing declines in homelessness applications in some local authority areas alongside increases in others. In our report we have therefore recommended ways that the current Scottish Government's Housing Options approach can improve. Greater transparency and evaluation would ensure that the flexibility of the Housing Options approach results in sustainable reductions in homelessness applications. We also make recommendations to provide for a more collaborative approach between the wide range of organisations who seek to tackle homelessness to ensure a whole-systems approach to its prevention.

In Finland, the Housing First approach is delivering long term sustainable reductions in the levels of homelessness. Also piloted in Scotland, this approach provides wrap-around services to each individual which not only provides housing but also addresses the other issues which can lead to homelessness (such as medical and psychological support). We recommend that a Scottish style Housing First approach is implemented in Scotland. We believe that it represents an important piece of the jigsaw which, together with other approaches, would provide for a successful person centred approach to tackling homelessness.

As our report shows successfully reducing homelessness requires that a person's immediate housing needs are addressed alongside any underlying issues that led to homelessness. Everyone should have a home and be able to keep a home - we hope this report and its recommendations will go some way towards ensuring that becomes the reality for more people.

Local Government and Communities Committee

Change of membership

1. The membership of the Committee changed during the course of its inquiry. On 30 March 2017 Ruth Maguire MSP left the Local Government and Communities Committee and Jenny Gilruth MSP joined. On 9 January 2018 Elaine Smith MSP left the Local Government and Communities Committee and Monica Lennon MSP joined.

Introduction

2. In February 2017 the Committee agreed to undertake work on homelessness in Scotland. To inform itself of the issues, it visited charities providing homelessness services throughout Scotland to explore how people access homelessness services and services through the Housing Options approach. The Committee, during those visits, also heard from those at risk of becoming homeless or experiencing homelessness by visiting projects providing support to homeless people.
3. The Committee visited—
 - Streetwork in Edinburgh and met with staff and users of their crisis service;
 - The Simon Community in Glasgow and met with staff and women who are in emergency and temporary accommodation;
 - The Legal Services Agency in Glasgow which provides legal advice, assistance and representation to vulnerable people, including on accessing homelessness services;
 - Churches Action for the Homeless (CATH) in Perth and met with staff to discuss issues relating to homelessness in rural Perth and Kinross; and
 - Members also accompanied development workers from CATH's Outreach and Floating Support teams to rural locations and met with service users.

Committee members meeting with service users and staff at Streetwork in Edinburgh



Source: Scottish Parliament

Convener Bob Doris meeting a service user at the Simon Community in Glasgow



Source: Scottish Parliament

Committee members meeting with staff at Churches Action for the Homeless (CATH) in Perth.



Source: Scottish Parliament

Committee member Andy Wightman meeting service users of CATH's Outreach and Floating Support teams in rural locations in Perthshire.



Source: Scottish Parliament

4. The Committee then took evidence from stakeholders at its meetings on 8 and 22 March 2017 to inform the remit for its inquiry. On the 3 May 2017 the Committee launched a call for views on why people can find themselves homeless or threatened with homelessness and what can be done to tackle this effectively. The Committee received 64 responses.
5. On 20 September, the Committee met with people who had experienced homelessness who were kind enough to share their stories with us.

The Committee meeting with people who have experienced homelessness.



6. On 27 September, 25 October and 1 November the Committee undertook some further oral evidence sessions to explore the issues raised in more depth.
7. The Committee also visited Finland to learn about its approach to tackling homelessness, particularly its use of the Housing First approach which has seen its homelessness numbers decline.

Committee members meeting with representatives from the Ministry for Environment, Finland.



Source: Scottish Parliament

8. All of the papers, including the Official Reports and written submissions, associated with these sessions, are available on the Committee's web-site below.

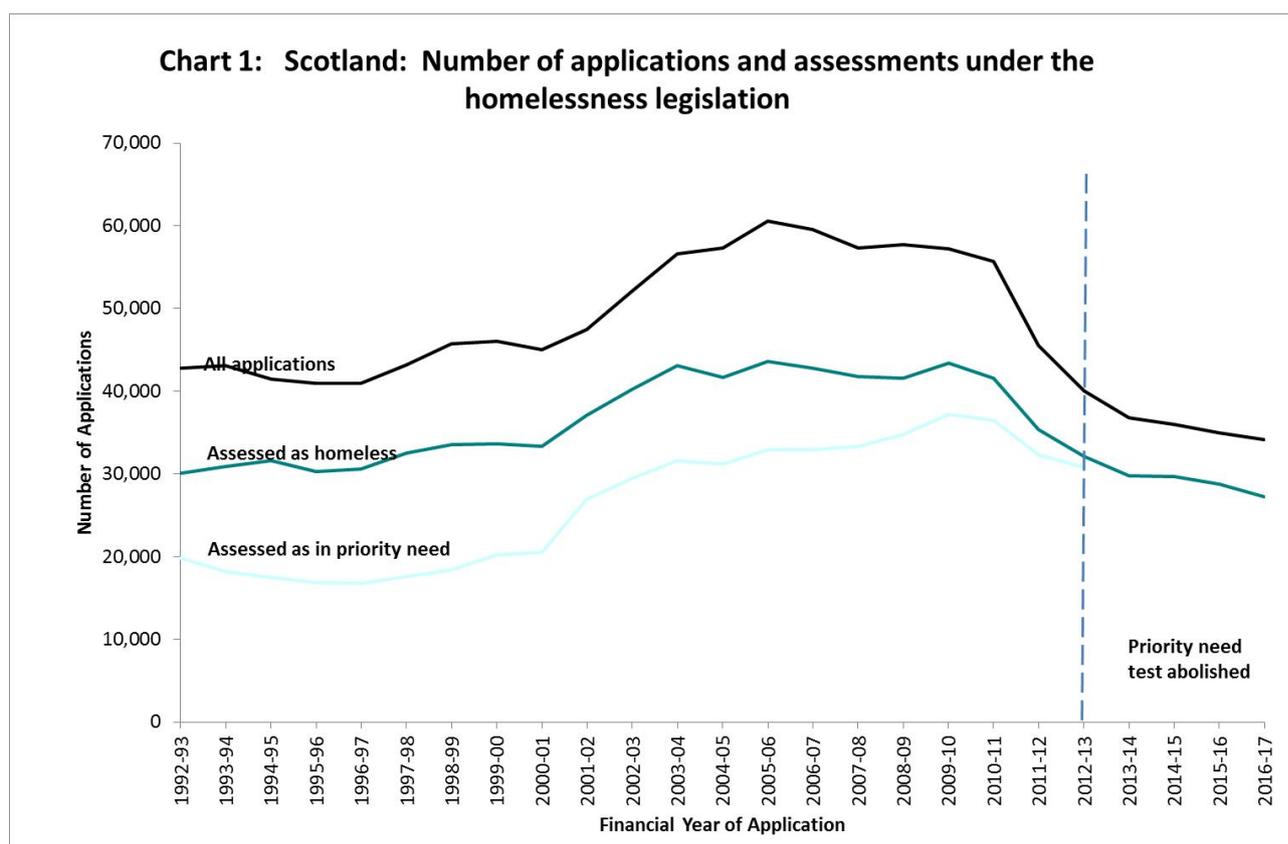
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/103620.aspx>

9. The Committee thanks all those who have contributed to its work which has been vital to informing our recommendations. In particular we thank all those who shared their experiences of being homeless – these first-hand accounts helped us to fully appreciate the impact that being homeless can have on all aspects of people's lives. We also thank all those homelessness services in Scotland and in Finland who opened their doors to us to show us the exemplary services they provide.

Policy background

10. In its most recent statistical bulletin, the Scottish Government states that, as of September 2017, there had been 34,864 homeless applications made to local authorities in the past 12 months. This was 118 applications (0.3%) higher than in the same period to September 2016.¹
11. The statistics show that, between 2002-03 and 2006-07, there was an increase in applications. The Scottish Government says that this is partly as a consequence of changes in legislation which extended local authority duties to non-priority households. A test which identified whether an individual making a homelessness application had a priority need was abolished on 31st December 2012. Recent reductions in the number of applications had been attributed to the impact of Housing Options or homelessness prevention strategies, rather than due to any underlying changes in the drivers of homelessness. The table below, taken from the Scottish Government's statistical bulletin, shows the trends in homelessness applications from 1992-1993 until 2016-17.²

Scottish historical homelessness data from 1992-1993 until 2016-17.



Source: Scottish Government, 2017²

12. The statistics reveal a wide variation between local authorities in the applications made to them. In the 12 month period to September 2017, the number of homeless applications fell in 14 local authority areas. The largest decline, of 447 (8%) from 5,876 to 5,429, happened in Glasgow City. In Edinburgh, applications declined by 333 (9%) from 3,591 to 3,258. Over the same time period, homeless applications

rose in 18 local authority areas. The highest increase happened in Aberdeen City, where applications increased by 407 (32%) from 1,286 to 1,693. ¹

13. In recognition that homelessness still remains a problem in Scotland, there are a number of policy initiatives and developments which seek to end homelessness. For example, Shelter, Crisis and Social Bite all have ongoing and well-publicised campaigns calling on the Government and public sector to take action.
14. Since the Committee instigated its inquiry into homelessness, the Scottish Government announced measures in the 17/18 programme for Government to tackle homelessness. It announced its national objective to eradicate rough sleeping and that it would—
 - establish a short life expert group, chaired by Jon Sparks of Crisis, to make urgent recommendations on the actions, services and legislative changes required to end rough sleeping and transform the use of temporary accommodation;
 - establish a new £10 million a year 'Ending Homelessness Together' fund to support the recommendations of the group; and
 - invest an additional £20 million a year in alcohol and drug services, to help tackle some of the underlying problems which so often drive homelessness.
15. As part of its draft budget 2018/19, the Scottish Government increased its housing budget to include the first £10m of the 'Ending Homelessness Together' fund. ³

The causes of homelessness

16. Homelessness is a long standing issue facing Scotland. It is a challenge that has faced successive governments and as the Committee's report will demonstrate, there is not one solution which will eradicate it. As we heard, there are a number of causes of homelessness, although many agreed that the single biggest contributing factor to homelessness is relationship breakdown, such as with a partner or family. The reasons are complex and varied and usually exacerbated by a number of other underlying issues.^{4 5}

17. ALACHO (Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers) states that homelessness is often the inevitable result of the way the housing system works, rather than an event that happens to the poor and unfortunate.⁶ It told the Committee—

” The rate of homelessness is astonishingly high, and there is an issue about the choices and the routes to accommodation that the housing system offers...Government policy is not going to end relationship breakdown and it will not have an effect on the point at which a young person decides to leave home. The issue is whether the system offers to all those individuals the degree of choice and control that they need to make the decisions that they need to make and secure the housing that they want.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 08 March 2017, Tony Cain (Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers), contrib. 8⁷

18. Many highlighted that other major contributing factors to homelessness were the effects of poverty and financial arrears, which some said had been exacerbated by social security reforms (explored further below). A lack of choice in the housing system was also highlighted as a contributing factor, for example, because of high costs of renting or because of a lack of particular house sizes or styles available. Fife and City of Edinburgh Councils both cited a growing number of homeless applications from the private rented sector, suggesting another at-risk group. Fife Council said this was due to the benefit cap making the private sector unaffordable.⁸

19. Edinburgh Council cited the loss of a private sector tenancy as a major cause of homelessness. Thomas Lyon, who spent many years homeless and sleeping rough, informed us that he became homeless when he lost his private let due to his landlord's bankruptcy.^{9 10}

20. The Legal Services Agency highlighted that most homelessness is caused by factors out with people's control and that the outdated negative perceptions of those who become homeless need to be addressed as part of the solution. It said—

” We need to quash the idea that it is a lifestyle choice. We never hear people at conferences saying, “Oh, homelessness is a lifestyle choice; let's discuss this strange lifestyle,” but I have heard people say that on numerous occasions. That idea needs to be rejected and the reality must be recognised.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Paul Brown (Legal Services Agency), contrib. 123¹¹

21. The Committee also heard that homelessness is often a consequence of long term issues such as mental health, past trauma and disadvantaged childhoods. North Ayrshire Council indicated it was now experiencing second and third generation homelessness as the trauma and often chaotic lifestyle of parents impact on children. ^{12 13 14}

22. Dr Adam Burley explained that looking at tackling homelessness as being solely about the provision of housing risked overlooking the factors that led to it. He explained—

” There is a range of difficulties that relate to housing, but for some of the people whom we are talking about, there are other difficulties too. The best way to think about it is to consider homelessness as a late-emerging symptom. We need to try to understand what has brought somebody to the point at which they cannot, or struggle to, make use of the existing housing service.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Dr Adam Burley (The Access Point), contrib. 6¹⁵

23. It was also highlighted that care experienced people are particularly at risk. The Scottish Care Leavers Covenant noted that for care-experienced people accessing and maintaining accommodation can be very challenging for a number of reasons. For example, many care-experienced people have complex backgrounds and often limited supports which impact significantly on their vulnerability. Furthermore, they move on to live more independently at a much younger age than the rest of the population when they are least equipped to do this successfully. The experience of care-experienced people is explored below. ¹⁶

24. We also heard that former servicemen and women are at greater risk of becoming homeless due to a number of factors. We have not been able to explore this as fully as we would have wished in the time available. ¹⁷

25. The Advisory Group at the Life Changes Trust stated that people leaving prison were more susceptible to becoming homeless and this is also explored further later in the report. We also heard that refugees and asylum seekers were at risk of becoming homeless. For example, the Scottish Refugee Council said that once granted refugee status, refugees have 28 days in which to find accommodation and financial support, following a period in Home Office funded accommodation during their period seeking asylum. Many refugees rely on local authorities to accommodate them under homelessness duties. ^{18 19}

26. In its written evidence, Scottish Women’s Aid argued that gender-based violence is a major cause of homelessness in Scotland. It said that—

” In 2015–16 of the 34,662 applications a “dispute within household: violent or abusive” was the reason given for a homeless application by 4,135 applicants... 72% of applications were made by women and women with children made up 36% of applicants. Research has highlighted that these figures significantly underestimate the scale of the problem, as women may not disclose that they are experiencing domestic abuse when making a homeless application. Many women when forced to leave their home initially rely on friends or relatives for a place to stay and do not make a homeless application until later. Domestic abuse is also closely linked with repeat homelessness. Research has shown that families that experience domestic abuse are four times more likely to lose their home due to arrears.²⁰

27. **The Committee acknowledges the range of causes of homelessness. Their complexity and interconnection makes it more challenging to reduce homelessness. In that regard a one-size-fits all approach to tackling homelessness cannot be taken and approaches to solving the problem need to be centred around individual requirements. We therefore welcome the ambitions of the Scottish Government to eradicate homelessness and rough sleeping.**
28. **The recommendations in this report are intended to support and inform the work of the Scottish Government, the Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group, the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group and other relevant groups in realising their ambitions.**

Care-experienced people

29. We said earlier that many people who have been in care as children are particularly at risk of becoming homeless. The Life Changes Trust highlighted some evidence in its written submission—
 - ” Research has also shown recurring themes, such as leaving care too soon, lack of support, and inappropriate placements, have caused up to 5% of care experienced young people to become homeless as soon as they leave care, with as many as 35% of the care experienced population presenting as homeless to their local authorities before their 25th birthday (Duncalf 2009; Dixon and Stein 2003)¹⁸
30. The Committee met with some people who had experienced homelessness after leaving care. They were kind enough to share their story with us.
31. Saffron Rohan and Simone Smith, are now members of the care experienced advisory group at the Life Changes Trust. The group consists of many individuals that have had their own experiences of being homeless after leaving care that occurred before their 26th birthday.

Saffron Rohan speaking to members of the Committee.



Source: Scottish Parliament

32. Saffron Rohan shared how she was given a tenancy in a two-bedroom supported flat when she left care at the age of 17 but that she felt she was not given enough support. She said that she lost her benefits due to the bedroom tax and felt that a lack of support to manage the changes and maintain the tenancy meant she fell into considerable arrears which she is still paying off today five years later.
33. She highlighted why those who have left care are particularly at risk of homelessness—

” there are quite a lot of challenges for care-experienced young people in particular, because they come from more deprived backgrounds. They also tend to leave care around the age of 17, which—as many of you know—is not really old enough to know what you are supposed to be doing.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 20 September 2017, Saffron Rohan, contrib. 203²¹

Emma Pearce sharing her story with the Committee.



Source: Scottish Parliament

34. The Committee also met with Emma Pearce who had moved with her mother to Dundee from London as a child following a relationship breakdown. Following stints in hostels and Women’s Aid, Emma found herself in several foster placements and also spoke about the lack of support she received when she left care and went into local authority housing. She added—

” although I have been in all these places and stayed with all these families who had all these things in their houses—these perfect family settings—I came away from it at a certain age and I did not get to speak to them. You do not see them at all—you do not see any of them. You are left there.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 20 September 2017, Emma Pearce, contrib. 247²²

35. She added—

” The support that I had in the house and my keeping on top of budgeting and so on were not looked at. Now, as Saffron Rohan did, I have accumulated rent arrears. Saffron has managed to pay hers off, but I am still in arrears.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 20 September 2017, Emma Pearce, contrib. 276²³

36. Simone Smith was also a care-experienced individual who has been in and out of a variety of homeless accommodation seven times between the ages of 17 – 21. She said—

” After I left foster care, I became homeless numerous times and went into different hostels and temporary accommodation, but it was not really a safe environment for me and my daughter. I am here today because I believe that we can make a difference for homeless people.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 20 September 2017, Simone Smith, contrib. 195²⁴

37. She added—

” I remember that, when I presented as homeless, those who dealt with me were not really supportive. They did not really understand that I did not know the areas and I did not know people. They were just like, “Go here, and deal with it.” There should be an allocated person in every local authority, so that people have somebody who can understand what they have been going through. That person should understand that they might have challenges and should support them every step of the way instead of quickly writing them off.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 20 September 2017, Simone Smith, contrib. 213²⁵

Simone Smith speaking to the Committee about her homelessness experience.



Source: Scottish Parliament

38. The Life Changes Trust highlighted that young care-experienced individuals were often placed in dangerous house placements with convicted criminals. It said—

” When care experienced young people get placed into supported or homeless accommodation that is not suitable for them, it can have a major impact on their mental health and wellbeing, as many homeless accommodations are not suitable places for young people to live and feel safe in. ¹⁸

39. The Life Changes Trust called for more Housing Options and support services in all local authority areas. It explained that, by providing vulnerable care experienced young people with crucial living skills such as, how to handle their money, tax and utilities, and how to care for a home, young people could be prevented from building up debt which, in the long run, would prevent them from presenting as homeless before they turn 26 years old.

40. Saffron Rohan highlighted that her situation only improved when she got into full-time education—

” My situation only improved because of the new legislation that meant that if I went to college, the local authority had an obligation to support me, so it started paying for student halls and I was eventually able to move out of the area. However, it took three and a bit years. Like I said, I still have a lot of the debt.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 20 September 2017, Saffron Rohan, contrib. 203²¹

41. The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 was implemented to give care-experienced people the same support and care as those living with their families and sets out the duties and responsibilities for Scottish Ministers and public bodies as corporate parents. Under these duties, the Scottish Care Leavers Covenant explained that:

- a fundamental responsibility of this role is to provide safe, caring and appropriate housing for looked after children and those leaving care under 26;
- corporate parenting requires collaborative working and that improvements could not be made by organisations working alone;
- in practice the responsibility for requesting support under the Act can remain with the young person; but
- that it is critical that young people up to the age of 26 are aware of their rights and entitlements and are provided with appropriate support to access services.

42. While the policy and legislative landscape in Scotland provides an enabling context to eliminating homelessness for looked after young people and care-experienced people, the Scottish Care Leavers Covenant still had concerns that the full implementation of policy into practice exists only in pockets. ¹⁶

43. The Big Lottery fund referred to a study carried out by Street Legal which argues that care-experienced people are not receiving the assistance they need, are not being listened to and are being diverted into adult services. It also argues that there is little awareness for care-experienced people and those working with them of care-experienced peoples' rights and how to challenge where rights are being denied. ²⁶

44. Saffron Rohan highlighted that there are varying degrees of good and bad practice with regard to the experiences of care-experienced people and the extent to which their needs have been addressed by local authorities and the third sector. She said—

” With regard to the third sector and local authorities, there is no accountability—there is no one who investigates examples of bad practice.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 20 September 2017, Saffron Rohan, contrib. 278²⁷

45. The Life Changes Trust echoed this further in its written submission—

” We also believe that the government should investigate all bad practise by developing a team of designated housing officers, including a care experienced worker, that will work across all local authorities to ensure that care experienced young people are looked after by housing associations and their local authorities, as it is their duty as corporate parents to provide safe and accessible accommodation. ¹⁸

46. Shelter Scotland recognised that care-experienced people are overrepresented in homelessness figures and that a more preventative approach should be taken given that it is known when care-experienced people will leave an institution—

” It is much more expensive, aside from being horrendous for the individual, to let people fall and have to keep picking them up again. We should go pre-emptive and try to tackle the issues by getting in there with a homeless application—or, ideally, we should not take a homeless application and should instead provide the housing and support that people need before they go down the homelessness route.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 27 September 2017, Fiona King, contrib. 149²⁸

47. Dr Adam Burley said that, in developing a psychologically informed approach to designing services for those who had been in care, a needs-based approach to support, rather than top-down, should be taken as—

” we would never come up with a time limit for supported accommodation that was just some arbitrary period, such as six or 18 months. There is absolutely no evidence base for such an approach that fits in any way with an understanding of how human psychology works or the length of time and care that might be required to modify somebody’s experiences of relationships, given the sort of background that they may have come from.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Dr Burley, contrib. 18²⁹

48. Glasgow Housing Options Steering Board had developed its services for young people leaving care with Registered Social Landlords, the former council and the Glasgow health and social care partnership. In relation to what worked, it said—

” That best practice has been proven to be—as colleagues have commented—about the right support, such as helping to provide links to college and employment. That has been very successful. The tenancy sustainment levels for those tenancies are 92 or 93 per cent higher than for normal waiting list tenancies.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 27 September 2017, Bridget Curran, contrib. 147³⁰

49. Turning Point Scotland highlighted that smaller local authorities might have less purchasing power in commissioning services specifically for young people who have been in care, compared to Glasgow or Edinburgh. He said that in those cases—

” young people who have been looked after or accommodated become part of another type of service provision. Often, those services are more for people who are affected by homelessness, and sometimes they apply to a different age range. That can be hugely problematic.

I have often thought that one answer might be greater flexibility for spot purchasing across Scotland. One of the local authorities outside Glasgow might identify a good service in Glasgow city, and we should have the flexibility to enable a young person to go to that service.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Patrick McKay, contrib. 19³¹

50. The Minister for Local Government and Housing referred to the ongoing care review, but recognised that action was required now. He highlighted that the Scottish Government has already taken some action to assist young people who are leaving the care system and moving into accommodation. He noted that there had been some barriers created by the removal of housing benefits for 18 to 21 year olds, but the Scottish Government had been able to mitigate this using the Scottish welfare fund. He also stated that the First Minister’s announcement to remove the requirement for young care-experienced to pay council tax would assist further.

51. He highlighted that the Housing Options toolkit would help train front-line staff how to deal with care-leavers and ensure young people move into sustainable tenancies—

” It is not just about getting them a house and it is not even just about the support that is available through the Scottish welfare fund if a rent element is required or about the removal of the obligation to pay council tax; it is about ensuring that other elements are in place to support those folks in tenancies.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 01 November 2017, Kevin Stewart, contrib. 31³²

52. The Minister also referred to peoples' responsibilities as corporate parents towards care-experienced young people—

” I want to ensure not only that elected members in the Scottish Parliament recognise our responsibility, but that councillors recognise their role as corporate parents and ensure that the policies that they are putting in place at council level recognise their responsibility to ensure that care leavers are put on the right path.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 01 November 2017, Kevin Stewart, contrib. 31³²

53. **We are concerned that care-experienced people are disproportionately represented in the figures on homelessness, particularly given it is known that they are a high risk group.**
54. **We recognise that there is some evidence of good practice in relation to the support and Housing Options provided to those transitioning from care into adulthood. We heard, however, from the Life Changes Trust and care-experienced people that pockets of bad practice still exist. It was worrying to hear that vulnerable young care-experienced people are being provided housing in locations they do not know, feel comfortable or safe in, and which left them vulnerable to negative influences and those who pose a threat to their safety and mental well being.**
55. **We were also concerned to hear that full implementation of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 has not yet been achieved and that some public bodies were unaware of the rights of care leavers and their roles as corporate parents. We recommend that the Scottish Government investigates this as a matter of urgency and then confirms to us how it will ensure that all those with duties under the legislation are:**
 - **providing the necessary support to young care leavers; and**
 - **are working collaboratively to prevent homelessness amongst young care leavers.**
56. **We also request further information on how the Scottish Government will—**
 - **work with local authorities to plan their provision of housing to ensure that there are appropriate housing choices available to care-experienced people which recognise their existing community ties and support them to move into an area that they know and feel safe in;**
 - **ensure that local authorities provide care experienced people with the relevant, person-centred and non-time limited support and the appropriate financial and crucial life skills, where necessary, to help them maintain and sustain their lives and housing;**
 - **work with local authorities and the third sector to identify and address what care experienced people and the Life Changes Trust considered to be bad practice; and**
 - **extend the Unsuitable Accommodation Order to ensure that care experienced people do not experience unsuitable accommodation for**

any longer than seven days, in line with the current approach taken with families.

Impact of welfare reform

57. Many of the people the Committee heard from spoke about the impact of welfare reform, benefit caps, universal credit and issues with local housing allowances rates and the risk of homelessness. For example, some commented that delays in receiving payments had resulted in people getting into rent arrears.³³
58. The Cyrenians highlighted that—
- ” People who were previously able to maintain a home have suddenly found themselves hundreds of pounds short of making the rent each month, because they have had their benefits capped. I know that 800 families in Edinburgh were affected by the recent reduction in the benefit cap.
- Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 08 March 2017, Mark Kennedy (Cyrenians), contrib. 12³⁴
59. Shelter said that the roll-out of welfare reforms and universal credit were creating a complicated landscape to navigate and pushing people further into poverty. It felt that young people were being disproportionately impacted and that it was preventing people from moving into permanent lets which impacts on the delivery of systems to address homelessness.³⁵
60. COSLA highlighted that universal credit was also squeezing local authority budgets as they were having to mitigate the impact of welfare reform. More people were getting into rent arrears and that some of the amounts owed were significant. In two of the areas where universal credit has been rolled out (East Lothian and Highland Councils) there had been a 21 per cent increase in rent arrears.³⁶
61. The Legal Services Agency highlighted that increasing rent arrears meant that landlords were taking more cases to court with increasing assertiveness. This not only impacts on the courts and the stress of those facing eviction, but also the health service as more medical reports might be required.³⁷
62. The City of Edinburgh Council agreed that, in areas where welfare reform such as universal credit is implemented, rent arrears increase. Therefore, more people become homeless, there is pressure on temporary accommodation and local authorities budgets as they have to mitigate the impact of reforms. It said—

” The creation of the national task force and the welfare fund will presumably provide an opportunity for sector partners or local authorities to pilot schemes that might be more affordable or which might provide better options for people. However, I would like to see some detail on that, because the funding gap that we are going to have in Edinburgh, which will have been created by all manner of welfare reforms, will be so significant that it will be incredibly difficult and challenging for us to deliver services.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Nicky Brown, contrib. 164³³

63. From April 2017, the management fee for temporary accommodation has been removed from universal credit. The UK Government transferred £22.5 million to the Scottish Government to distribute to local authorities to cover management costs. Many expressed concerns that the additional funding would not cover the funding gap.^{6 38 8}

64. The Scottish Government confirmed that—

” the allocation of the £22.5m for 2017/18 was based on the percentage share of homeless households in temporary accommodation across all local authorities, using a 3-year average (2014-16), based on published Scottish Government “Homelessness in Scotland” data.³⁹

65. Given the concerns raised regarding the adequacy of this funding, the Scottish Government said it—

” has no formal role in monitoring its management and similarly, once the funding has gone to local authorities through the settlement, the local authority decides how it wishes to deploy the money.³⁹

66. The Minister stated that the UK Government had not carried out its due diligence and impact assessments to consider the potential impact of welfare reform and universal credit on homelessness policy and called for the UK Government to rethink measures. On mitigating measures the Scottish Government have taken, he said—

” The Scottish Government can mitigate a number of things—bedroom tax mitigation costs £47 million a year, we have talked a number of times today about using the Scottish welfare fund to ensure that 18 to 21-year-olds whose housing benefit is being withdrawn are still helped and we have put additional money into discretionary housing payments in recent times—but we cannot mitigate every aspect of the cuts that are being made.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 01 November 2017, Kevin Stewart, contrib. 33⁴⁰

67. He highlighted some best practice that was being carried out by Glasgow City Council to mitigate the impact of the benefit cap—

- ” Glasgow City Council has done a piece of work that looks at the families who are likely to be affected by the benefit cap and who might be in rented accommodation that costs a little bit more. It identifies them and gives them the option of moving into social housing, which is often cheaper, thus removing some of those difficulties.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 01 November 2017, Kevin Stewart, contrib. 33⁴⁰

68. **We welcome the action taken by the Scottish Government and local authorities to mitigate the impacts of UK Government policies. Concerns regarding the impact of welfare reform and the roll out of universal credit, however, were a regular theme throughout the evidence we heard about the causes of homelessness. We acknowledge the work of the Session 4 Welfare Reform Committee and the Session 5 Social Security Committee in exploring many of these impacts in more detail than our inquiry has permitted.**
69. **We note the creation of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group and the Ending Homelessness Together fund. But we seek clarification from the Scottish Government on the extent to which these will seek to mitigate the impact of welfare reform on homelessness, including details of any pilots as suggested by the City of Edinburgh Council.**
70. **In particular, we note that Glasgow City Council has undertaken to proactively identify those who may be impacted by the benefit cap so they can be offered more affordable housing. We recommend that the Scottish Government encourages other local authorities to undertake such a proactive approach, where appropriate.**
71. **We note that the Scottish Government has no formal role in monitoring whether the £22.5 million provided by the UK Government and distributed to local authorities will be adequate to cover the removal of management fees from temporary accommodation. It would, however, be prudent to have a national picture of the impact of this funding and we therefore recommend that the Scottish Government considers this approach.**

Preventing homelessness and the "Housing Options" approach

72. Scottish Government policy has encouraged homelessness prevention activities and the development of the "Housing Options" approach to homelessness prevention. Housing Options focuses on people's personal circumstances and helps explore their Housing Options and the issues that can underpin housing problems. Examples of Housing Options services are housing advice, health advice, budget management support and employability support, but the exact approach taken by local authorities will vary from area to area.
73. Five Housing Options Hubs (which receive Scottish Government financial support) have been established to help promote the Housing Options approach to homelessness and to share best practice across all Scottish local authorities. ⁴¹
74. The Committee heard about the benefits, in principle, of Housing Options in homelessness prevention activities when applied appropriately. For example, North Ayrshire Council stated that Housing Options is an effective prevention tool if it is implemented and resourced effectively. It is not prescriptive so there are various pathways and outcomes that can produce a bespoke sustainable outcome. Some respondents cited Housing Options as being responsible for a decline in homelessness applications. The City of Edinburgh Council noted a 38% decrease in applications in its area over the 10 years from 2006-07. ^{8 9 42}
75. Glasgow Housing Options Steering Board highlighted the benefits that the approach had had on the prevention of homelessness in Glasgow. The 2016 evaluation of Glasgow Housing Options model had shown—

” The implementation of Housing Options in Glasgow coincides with a steep decline in homeless assessments (19% in 2013/14), which is substantially greater than experienced in previous years, or for Scotland as a whole. Since then, homeless assessments have continued to decline, albeit at a slower rate with a 5% reduction recorded in 2014/15, followed by a further 6% reduction in 2015/16. Notably this continued decline exceeds the Scottish rate, which could suggest that it is more than just downward trend, and that the Housing Options model is making a positive contribution to preventing housing crisis in the City.

43

Gatekeeping

76. Most who provided evidence to the Committee supported the Housing Options model when applied appropriately. Despite the successes already referred to, the Committee heard that more could be done to improve how effectively Housing Options works in practice. We heard of variable practice and inconsistent delivery of Housing Options which had resulted in variable outcomes.
77. Shelter Scotland, for example, highlighted the work of the Scottish Housing Regulator which had identified that Housing Options is applied differently across local authorities and that it was producing different statistics and impacts. It had

some concerns that it could, in some circumstances, be misused to "gatekeep" homeless services and resources. It emphasised that Housing Options must not be used as a rationing tool for housing.³⁸

78. Shelter added that it had heard anecdotal evidence about people being denied the right to make a homelessness application, which is a statutory right for someone who presents at their local authority—

” That is a statutory right, as is temporary accommodation. Housing Options does not trump that; it should be part of the mix.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 27 September 2017, Fiona King, contrib. 166⁴⁴

79. Glasgow Housing Options Steering Board stated that the West of Scotland housing hub had been essential to the development of its service as it brought it together with its partner local authorities and the Wheatley Group. On how it prevented gatekeeping in Glasgow, it said—

” our steering board actively sought the contribution of Shelter and the Glasgow Homelessness Network so that we could have third sector representation on the board from the start ...We knew that concerns about gatekeeping were legitimate and we knew from the experience in England that, in relation to some of the huge reductions in homelessness that have taken place there, there might have been some concern about gatekeeping, and we wanted to ensure that that did not happen in Glasgow.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 27 September 2017, Bridget Curran, contrib. 172⁴⁵

80. The Committee heard that, in some circumstances, the impact of Housing Options may have been affected by the fact that, following implementation in 2012, no formal guidance was issued and therefore it was implemented in different ways. The formal guidance was issued in March 2016. Shelter Scotland explained—

” The guidance has been rolled out only relatively recently, and it is not statutory guidance. As the Scottish Housing Regulator has highlighted, that allows for different interpretations of how to implement the approach. As has been mentioned, different local authorities have different resources, structures and local priorities, and they have implemented it in different ways.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 08 March 2017, Adam Lang, contrib. 25⁴⁶

81. The Committee welcomes the evidence it received that the Housing Options approach has led to a decline in homelessness assessments. We are, however, concerned to hear that it may also be used to ‘manage’ resources and access to homelessness services.

82. We recognise that the flexibility offered by the Housing Options approach provides for local circumstances to inform local decision taking regarding homelessness applications. We seek clarification, however, as to how the Scottish Government reassures itself that the guidance has been implemented correctly and is combatting ‘gatekeeping’- that is, the practice of deterring someone from making a homelessness application.

Accessing information on Housing Options

83. We heard that knowledge is vital to those who need to access homelessness services as well as those who provide those services. Homeless Action Scotland (HAS) highlighted the level of knowledge a Housing Options worker needs to have on the range of options available in order to provide tailored support and that, as such, a considerable amount of training is required. The Scottish Government started developing a toolkit five years ago which has yet to be rolled out. HAS called for momentum on the development of the toolkit, whilst recognising that it and the training would not be the answer to everything. ⁴⁷
84. We heard that those with specific requirements and protected characteristics, such as the LGBT population, often did not get the support they required through Housing Options. Scottish Women's Aid agreed and cited research from their project in Fife on homelessness as a result of gender-based violence. One of their findings was that those providing Housing Options and homelessness services to women were not confident or consistent in providing the housing information and support that they needed, with this being especially poor where women wanted information to support them to remain in their own home. ^{48 49}
85. Glasgow Housing Options Steering Board agreed that the Housing Options toolkit would drive significant improvements in service provision, confirming that it should be operational from April 2017 and that every local authority had signed up to it. The toolkit will cover a wide range of areas, not just housing advice, including health and well being, resources, and relationships and it would be used across all of the hubs—
-  It will be very helpful in ensuring not uniformity, because that is not the answer, but consistency and high-quality customer-focused advice for people in housing need.
- Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 27 September 2017, Bridget Curran, contrib. 180⁵⁰
86. On the development of the Housing Options toolkit, the Minister said—

- ” The toolkit will have six modules, so that will split it all up. Beyond that, there will be flexibility to look at adding to it at a later date if something else from an organisation hits our radar.

We have listened a lot to local authorities, but we have also listened to third sector partners and others, including folks with lived experience of homelessness, to try to get an approach that is as good as possible. Obviously, we will continue to monitor how well the toolkit is working, and we will take feedback from folks who are being trained on it and who are using it. It would be pointless if we did not do so.

On the listening that has been done, there have been a fair number of discussions involving me, Marion Gibbs [*Team Leader, Homelessness, Scottish Government*] and other folk in her team, and we have picked up on things that we know we might not be getting right in certain places and ensured that information is available to get them right. However, we have not been complacent in waiting for the toolkit; we have disseminated good practice right across the board.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 01 November 2017, Kevin Stewart, contrib. 45⁵¹

87. **The Committee recognises that the development of the Housing Options toolkit could go some way to supporting more tailored support for those presenting as homeless or about to become homeless, albeit it has taken five years to develop and has yet to be launched. It is vital that the toolkit provides front-line staff with the full knowledge and skills to provide advice and support in all circumstances, including those with specific requirements, such as those with protected characteristics and gender-based violence.**
88. **We seek confirmation from the Scottish Government of:**
- **when the Housing Options toolkit will be launched and what training and support will be provided on its use;**
 - **how the Scottish Government will monitor and evaluate the toolkit's effectiveness; and**
 - **how often the Scottish Government will review the toolkit to ensure it remains fit for purpose.**

Extending Housing Options

89. Alongside the development of the toolkit and training, HAS stated that consideration should be given to extending Housing Options to the third sector, so that they could work with local authorities to provide the broadest range of options. It highlighted the challenges for front line staff providing advice in local government—

” For example, does a Housing Options worker have enough knowledge to help someone who has a mental health issue by being able to pick up on that or are they able to give the right direction if somebody is in need of help with their mortgage arrears? It is quite a skill set that we are asking for, so significant input is needed on training. Those are quite diverse topics and it takes a lot of training to have the right skill set to cover all of that. We need to get a bit of momentum on the training and also to bring in the third sector wherever possible, to be upping the skills back and forwards.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 27 September 2017, Jules Oldham, contrib. 169⁴⁷

90. Dr Neil Hamlet suggested that Housing Options should be extended to the health service through the new primary care contracts and that the public health sphere could contribute more to the meetings of the Housing Options Hubs—

” People might be turning up to general practice surgeries with headaches and psychological issues, but the solution might well lie in housing. Giving people directional referrals from Housing Options staff—not just homeless application officers—to health and from health to Housing Options is one of those upstream preventative approaches.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 27 September 2017, Dr Hamlet, contrib. 170⁵²

91. In some areas more collaborate working across a range of agencies is already happening. Glasgow Housing Options Steering Board explained how it had worked alongside RSLs to develop its services as it has no housing service following housing stock transfer. Housing Options officers work alongside colleagues in health and social work across Glasgow, as well as with community homelessness teams and RSLs, to support people. It also shared best practice in its housing hub. It said—

” The fact that we have a steering board that has continued to meet during the five years of the development of the Housing Options approach demonstrates the commitment of the Glasgow health and social care partnership. Homelessness is a key priority in its strategic plan. There has also been commitment from the west of Scotland forum, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, Shelter and GHN to ensure that our approach is robust and meets people’s needs.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 27 September 2017, Bridget Curran, contrib. 172⁴⁵

92. Most recognised that whilst improvements were required, putting Housing Options on a statutory footing might affect its operation. Many agreed that, whilst improvements to Housing Options should allow for it to be applied consistently to ensure standardised outcomes, but also to allow some local flexibility in its application to suit individual local requirements. COSLA said—

” We see success in the Housing Options approach where there is subtlety and a local ability to respond well to those with complex needs in different circumstances. I am yet to see a bit of legislation that provides for that effectively. COSLA’s approach is to use the good practice that we already have and spread it across Scotland, and to ensure that we get consistent processes and data recording so that we know that we are comparing apples with apples. We do not want to use a blunt instrument that is written into statute, as we have not seen such an approach working well in this area to date.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Nicola Dickie (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities), contrib. 13⁵³

93. Shelter agreed some local flexibility was required to reflect the different interplay between housing associations and different geography, people, client groups and job markets in each local area. It also said that the toolkit and Scottish Government monitoring and evaluation would ensure minimum standards. On how improvements could be driven, it said—

” The hubs were supposed to facilitate that and the joint working. There is a lot of best practice sharing, and there have been a lot of conferences, events, papers and evaluations. The best way forward is to continue to share that best practice. Although the models might be different, the regulator has a role in checking for consistency, in terms of a minimum standard and outcomes for individuals.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 27 September 2017, Fiona King, contrib. 176⁵⁴

94. On putting Housing Options on a statutory footing, the Minister stated—

” Housing Options is being done voluntarily, and it has worked particularly well under the voluntary set-up. I know that other jurisdictions are looking at putting the approach on a statutory footing, and I will look at what comes out of that although, as I have said previously, legislation is not always the panacea for everything. Housing Options is working well. If, at any point, it transpired that that was not the case, I would rethink my position. I will also look at what comes out of the work that is being done in other jurisdictions.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 01 November 2017, Kevin Stewart, contrib. 78⁵⁵

95. The Committee agrees that the third sector and health service have a vital role to play in assisting local authorities in their duties in relation to Housing Options. A collaborative approach would ensure a whole-systems approach to the prevention of homelessness so that as wide a range of options and solutions as possible are available to those who present at risk of homelessness or in housing need.

96. The Committee also agrees that the Housing Options Hubs provide an opportunity for grouped local authorities to share best practice but the Scottish Government should go further and encourage the third and health sectors to contribute to those hubs.

97. **The Committee notes that Housing Options should allow for a degree of local flexibility to reflect local circumstances, however, its application should allow for consistent outcomes across the country. The Committee would welcome information on how the Scottish Government will encourage local authorities to share and apply best practice through the Housing Options Hubs.**
98. **The Committee notes comments regarding the risks to local flexibility of putting Housing Options on a statutory footing. We welcome the Minister’s commitment to look at what is happening in other jurisdictions regarding this approach and seek an update on how, and when, the Scottish Government will carry out this evaluation. We also request an update on the outcomes of its deliberations.**

Data Collection and Monitoring

99. The Scottish Government records data on a range of aspects of homelessness. HL1 data records, “the basis of all key statistics on trends in applications, assessments and outcomes; and of the analyses of the characteristics of homeless applicants, reasons for homelessness and outcomes for different groups.” In addition, Dr Neil Hamlet referred to the data linkage work being carried out by the National Records of Scotland which will provide 15 years’ worth of data in relation to health outcomes.^{56 57}
100. Dr Neil Hamlet also highlighted that there is now two years’ worth of PREVENT 1ⁱ statistics, which records local authorities’ performance in relation to Housing Options.⁵⁸
101. Shelter Scotland said, however, that the PREVENT1 statistics do not give the full picture—

” There are concerns about whether, for example, Housing Options recording goes far enough in telling us about the outcomes that people achieve. I believe that, in the current set-up, homelessness is recorded as an outcome, but we need to know more than that; we need to know what happened next. Did the person get the support that they needed to move into permanent settled accommodation? Did they get temporary accommodation? How long did they spend in it? We need to know more. We have only a couple of years of Housing Options data.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 08 March 2017, Adam Lang, contrib. 25⁴⁶

102. The Simon Community agreed that the Housing Options approach should allow for local flexibility, but that this local flexibility could affect the PREVENT1 statistics—

ⁱ PREVENT1 is the case level data collection system used to monitor Housing Options/homelessness prevention in Scotland.

” sometimes local flexibility leads to massive variation in how people are responded to and the way in which data on Housing Options is recorded in the PREVENT1 statistics. There is a major variation in how the data comes through, and we are therefore not able to use that intelligence in an informed way to plan for the future.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Lorraine McGrath, contrib. 12⁵⁹

103. In its written submission, ALACHO stated that the number of homeless applications recorded will rise with the implementation of the new Housing Options guidance and, therefore, the HL1 data will rise. ⁶ The Scottish Government also confirmed that this might be the case in its most recent statistical bulletin—

” "Housing Options work:

The underlying drivers of homelessness have remained largely the same over the past few years. However, the introduction of Housing Options work has resulted in a decrease in the number of homelessness applications. Homelessness applications may increase again due to the implementation of recent Housing Options Guidance by the Scottish Government. The guidance re-iterates that if section 28(1) of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 applies (this is the Local Authority's duty to inquire into cases of possible homelessness or threatened homelessness), the LA must complete a homelessness application and record this on an HL1 return." ²

104. The collection of high quality and robust data is important to monitoring and evaluating the performance and effectiveness of Housing Options. In that regard we recognise that there can be tension between local variability and the ability to compare performance across Scotland.

105. We therefore seek further information from the Scottish Government on how:

- **it monitors the outcomes arising from the Housing Options approach;**
- **it determines whether the causes of variations between local authority areas reflect appropriate local decision taking and circumstances; and**
- **the data collected is being used to inform future decisions regarding how the Housing Options approach is delivered.**

106. The Committee notes that the introduction of the Housing Options guidance may impact on the number of homelessness applications made. We seek further information on how the Scottish Government will reassure itself that any increase in application numbers arises from the more rigorous application of the guidance, rather than an increase in actual homelessness.

Tackling homelessness

107. A common route for those who find themselves in housing difficulty is to present to their local authority housing department as homeless. Local Authorities have statutory duties under the [Housing \(Scotland\) Act 1987](#) (as amended) (1987 Act) to initiate certain services if they suspect someone is homeless.

” When someone approaches the local authority for accommodation, or for assistance in obtaining accommodation, and if the local authority has reason to believe an applicant is homeless or threatened with homelessness then the local authority has a legal duty to inquire to establish whether they are homeless or threatened with homelessness (s 28, 1987 Act).⁶⁰

108. The latest Scottish Government statistical bulletin on homelessness sets out that, when someone presents to the local authority with a homeless application, there is a three stage process for determining further action. In summary, these are—

- ”
1. The Application stage where the household first presents to the council.
 2. The Assessment stage where the Local Authority assesses whether the person is homeless and if so whether it was intentional or not):
 3. The Outcome stage when the type of accommodation the applicant is entitled to is assessed by the Local Authority assessment decision.

Applicants are entitled to temporary accommodation:

- whilst they are awaiting an assessment decision;
- whilst waiting for settled accommodation to be found; or

if they are intentionally homeless, then they are provided with temporary accommodation and advice and assistance to help them secure alternative accommodation.

All applicants must be informed in writing of the local authority's decision, the reasons for it and the right to request a review of the decision (s30, 1987 Act)

56

109. It is at this stage that the local authority is required to fill out an HL1 application as referred to earlier. More information on local authority duties in relation to homelessness can be found in the Code of Guidance available here:

<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2005/05/31133334/33366>

110. The Committee therefore explored how the current statutory approach to homelessness is working.

Awareness of rights

111. Many agreed that Scotland had some of the strongest legislation in the world in relation to the rights of supporting homeless people, or those threatened with

homelessness. However, the Committee heard that some homeless people, or people threatened with homelessness, may not be always be aware of their rights under the legislation and that, in some cases, local authorities were not fulfilling their statutory obligations.

112. In discussion with those who had experienced homelessness, we heard that on becoming homeless, a person almost has to serve ‘an apprenticeship.’ This was in order to become informed of the range of homelessness and housing services available so they can then access those most appropriate to their needs.
113. For example, the Committee heard from Thomas Lyon who had spent six and a half years on the street in Glasgow. He said that he had been “in every hostel in Glasgow, four or five times each”. He was never offered temporary accommodation until he had got support from the Legal Services Agency to get into a temporary furnished flat. He is now back in mainstream housing.⁶¹

Thomas Lyon speaking to the Committee about his homelessness experience.



Source: Scottish Parliament

114. LSA commented that, whilst Scots Law on homelessness was progressive, it can only be effective if people are aware of their rights. It recommended that there should be more systematic information about legal options and where to access rights which should be made readily available to homeless people, people in temporary accommodation and people sleeping rough. That information should be made available in a number of formats, alongside information on the services provided by advisory agencies to ensure that the most vulnerable, in particular, are able to access the information they need. LSA proposed that—

” Linked to this should be a systematic attempt to make sure that wi-fi is available to homeless people in all the places that they may be accommodated in, or attend. If people do not have access to the internet, it becomes very much more difficult to avail themselves of even the most basic services. Of course, information should be available in writing as well and LSA is proud of the attempts we have made in that regard. There is, of course, room for much more.⁶²

115. Many agreed that the provision and availability of this information is particularly important, given that in some instances people had been unable to access their housing and homelessness rights without the support of an advice agency.^{38 63 26}

116. For example, Govan Law Centre said there were systematic failures by many local authorities to meet their statutory obligations to homeless people and those threatened with homelessness, such as:

- Local authorities fail to take a homeless application;
- A local authority takes a homeless application but does not fulfil their statutory duty by offering interim/temporary accommodation whilst a full investigation is undertaken; and
- A local authority does not offer temporary accommodation to people while they are referred back to other local authorities.⁶⁴

117. The Minister highlighted the work carried out by the Scottish Housing Regulator to map the journey of those who present as homeless in Glasgow City Council, the Scottish Government would identify any incidences of 'gatekeeping' or people not accessing their rights. He stated—

” The Scottish Housing Regulator has been looking at the issue closely—I mentioned the journeys that the regulator has looked at. I would be extremely unhappy if that kind of gatekeeping was going on. I would want to know about it and I would want the Scottish Housing Regulator to be made aware of it, too. People have rights in legislation, and no one should be acting as a gatekeeper.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 01 November 2017, Kevin Stewart, contrib.
72⁶⁵

118. The Scottish Housing Regulator confirmed that for this work—

- ” we are looking at the end-to-end journey of a homeless person from the point at which they are referred by the council to an RSL and then, sometimes, back again, so that we can better understand where that works well and effectively and where there are failure points in the process, or barriers to effective solutions.

We are in the midst of that work so it is too early to draw any firm conclusions. We will be feeding back our conclusions to the relevant partners in Glasgow in December, in particular where we identify improvements that are needed by the council or by RSLs to ensure that the process works effectively.

We will also share more widely with other councils and RSLs any positive practice that we find, to ensure that they learn from it, and we will continue to take account of all the information that we gather through that work in how we then engage with RSLs and local authorities.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 15 November 2017, Michael Cameron, contrib. 118⁶⁶

119. On how the outcomes from this work would be actioned, the SHR confirmed—

- ” The work that we are doing will not necessarily deliver a formal report. We are trying to be very agile, and to move quickly and get the right information out. I will be happy to share the conclusions of that work with the committee.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 15 November 2017, Michael Cameron, contrib. 122⁶⁷

120. **The Committee is concerned to note that, even with some of the most robust legislation protecting the rights of homeless people or those threatened with homelessness, there are reports that those rights are being denied.**
121. **Whilst the Housing Options toolkit has been developed to provide information for housing services staff, we consider it is equally important that information on homelessness services and rights is available, accessible and in a format (and location) that best meets the needs of those at risk of or, indeed, already homeless. We, therefore, recommend that the Scottish Government review the format, contact and accessibility of information on homelessness services for the public to ensure it remains fit for purpose.**
122. **It is worrying to hear that any person who is homeless, or at risk of homelessness, has to seek legal advice in order to access services that they are entitled to. At a time of considerable worry and stress, there will be some who either are unable or unaware of such advice and who are, therefore, at risk of needlessly ending up homeless. We seek confirmation of how the Scottish Government intends to monitor and address this issue as a matter of urgency.**
123. **In reviewing the information available we therefore recommend that the Scottish Government works with law centres and other stakeholders to**

ensure that any public information on homelessness best meets the range of needs of those it is designed to support.

124. **We welcome the work carried out by the Scottish Housing Regulator on mapping the journey of homeless people and seek clarification of how any evidence of gatekeeping or barriers to accessing services will be addressed as a matter of urgency, alongside how lessons learned will be used to identify and rectify issues across Scotland. We also seek an update on the outcome of this work at the earliest opportunity.**

Accommodation for homeless people

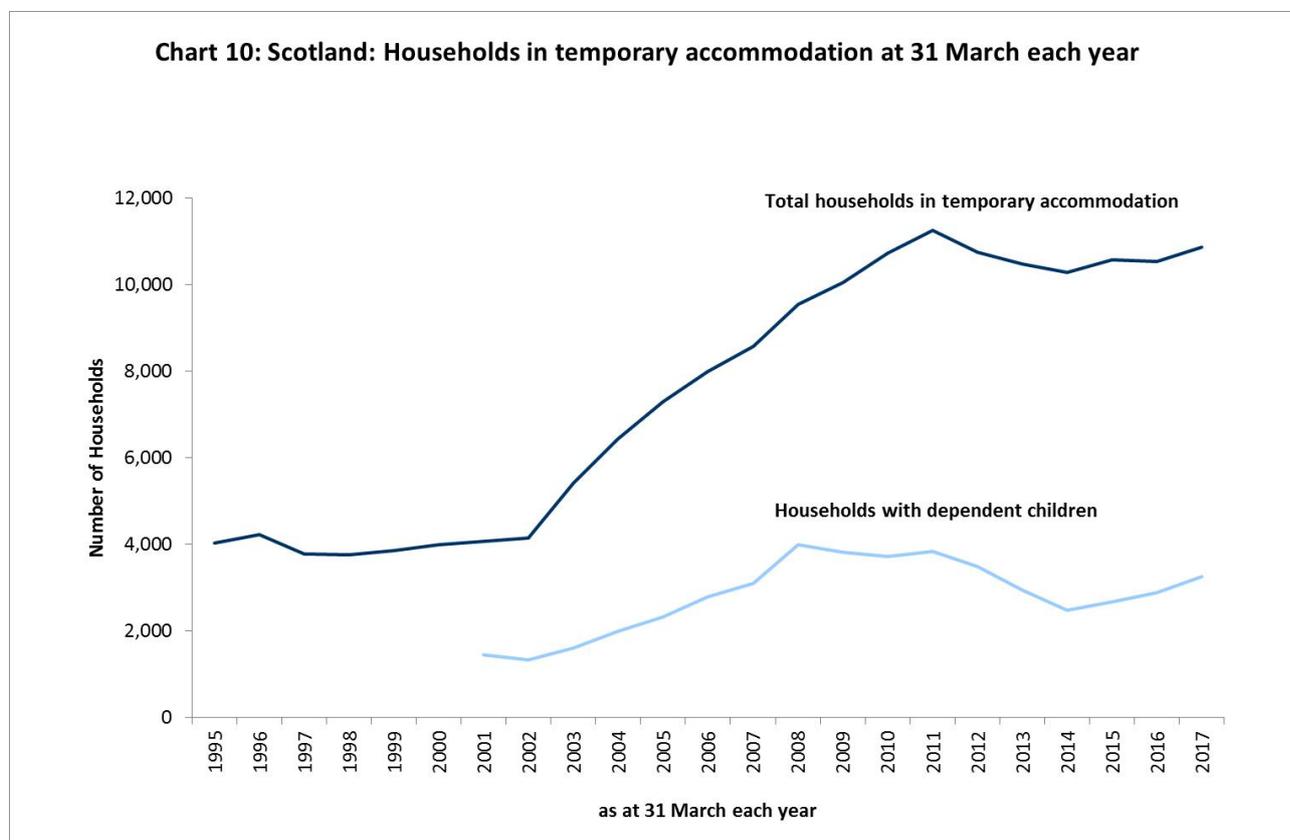
125. In considering how best to support those who are homeless we looked at the different types of accommodation they may be offered.

Temporary accommodation

126. The Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 ensures that local authorities must provide homeless applicants with temporary accommodation in certain circumstances:
- whilst they are awaiting an assessment decision;
 - whilst waiting for settled accommodation to be found; or
 - if they are intentionally homeless, then they are provided with temporary accommodation and advice and assistance to help them secure alternative accommodation.⁶⁰
127. There has been an overall rise in numbers of people staying in temporary accommodation since 2002, reflecting changes in legislation increasing homeless persons' rights. On 31st March 2002, there were 4,153 households in temporary accommodation. At the same date in 2010, this number was around 10,700. Since 2010, this figure has remained relatively stable.
128. At 30 September 2017—
- There were 10,899 households in temporary accommodation, an increase of 139 households (+1%) since the previous year;
 - Of these households in temporary accommodation, 3,426 had children - an increase of 87 households (+3%) compared with one year earlier;
 - There were 6,581 children in temporary accommodation, an increase of 594 (+10%), compared with the same date the previous year; and
 - The majority were housed in local authority or housing association accommodation (61%), with a further 16% in hostels and 10% in B&B accommodation. Others were housed in women's refuge and accommodation

not owned by local authorities, such as private lets, mobile homes and caravans.¹

Table showing historical data on the use of temporary accommodation in Scotland between 1995 and 2017.



Source:

129. Local authorities have their own strategies for how temporary accommodation is provided although many have been reviewing their provision of temporary accommodation strategies. For example, local authorities have looked at rebalancing the type and size of accommodation they provide and the cost profile of provision, particularly in light of welfare reform measures.⁶⁸

Access to temporary accommodation

130. We heard from a number of witnesses that local authorities are not always able to fulfil their statutory duty to provide secure accommodation to those presenting as homeless. ALACHO stated—

” That situation is absolutely not right. Just to make it clear, I say that when a person presents at a local authority and says that they have nowhere to sleep that night, the statutory obligation is for it to make secure accommodation available. That is what should happen, although I acknowledge that it does not always happen.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 08 March 2017, Tony Cain, contrib. 104⁶⁹

131. The LSA confirmed that people were not offered the most basic temporary accommodation, even although there is an obligation to provide it. It said that it had

up to 10 cases a week in which people were not being offered temporary accommodation and that it had had to threaten judicial review.⁷⁰

132. On its fact-finding visits to Streetwork and in evidence from the Simon Community, the Committee heard that accessing temporary accommodation was particularly a problem in Edinburgh, where there was pressure on affordable and social housing.⁷¹

133. The City of Edinburgh Council confirmed that the increased pressure on temporary accommodation services in Edinburgh was due to the increased length of stays resulting from an acute shortage of affordable housing. It said—

” For anyone who is welfare dependent or on a low income, it is incredibly difficult to have any options other than social rented housing, of which there is not enough. That is why the council is looking to build a significant number of homes over the next five years.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Nicky Brown, contrib. 154⁷²

Length of stay in, quality and costs of temporary accommodation

134. Whilst the Committee heard that good quality temporary accommodation could provide an opportunity for people to get the help support and advice they need to move away from homelessness, the reality was that people were spending more time in temporary accommodation. Shelter Scotland said—

” Unfortunately, the average length of time in temporary accommodation is 24 weeks. It is estimated that local authorities provided 3.8 million days of temporary accommodation in 2015-16. While that represents 10,000 households at any one time, it also represents millions of days’ worth of temporary accommodation.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 27 September 2017, Fiona King, contrib. 139⁷³
Shelter Scotland, 2017⁷⁴

135. The Committee heard that that there was mixed picture on the provision and quality of temporary accommodation across Scotland. Alongside the length of time being spent in temporary accommodation, many commented that often, the quality and insecure nature of this type of property was also having an impact. Shelter Scotland said—

” It is incredibly stressful for people to be going in and out of temporary accommodation. It came out very clearly at last week’s evidence session that people are literally going from pillar to post. The system is bafflingly complex. People at the point of crisis are getting two days here and seven nights there. Sometimes they are asked to leave and sometimes they can stay for a long time; sometimes housing benefit covers the cost and sometimes it does not. The provision is not where we would want it to be.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 27 September 2017, Fiona King, contrib. 139⁷³

136. Crisis highlighted that this type of housing could be damaging to vulnerable young people. Those who had experienced homelessness echoed these views. Saffron Rohan told the Committee that—

” Putting a 16 or 17-year-old with 30 or 40-year-old people who have drug or alcohol problems makes them susceptible. It is certainly not a safe environment for young mothers such as Simone and their small children.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 20 September 2017, Saffron Rohan, contrib. 208⁷⁵

137. Rhys Campbell, who had lived experience of homelessness said—

” When people are homeless, at the end of the day they need some place to stay. However, I see people coming in and out of some hostels who I do not think should be in those hostels. I see them coming in there and I see them leaving worse than when they came in.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 20 September 2017, Rhys Campbell, contrib. 215⁷⁶

Rhys Campbell speaking to the Committee about his experience of homelessness.



Source: Scottish Parliament

138. Crisis Scotland stated that people sometimes face up to 18 months in this type of accommodation. It highlighted that single people who are homeless are at risk of becoming trapped in this type of accommodation for long periods of time—

” If accommodation is unsuitable, it is unsuitable for anybody. It is right that we prioritise families, but we need to think about everybody who is homeless. Many local authorities have made good progress towards ending the use of B and Bs; for example, Fife Council and Renfrewshire Council have done a lot of work recently on that.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 22 March 2017, Beth Reid, contrib. 64⁷⁷

139. Crisis Scotland called for the Unsuitable Accommodation Order to be extended to all including single and young people. This Order currently limits the time that local authorities can place families and pregnant women into unsuitable accommodation.
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140. The Committee heard that sometimes those with the most multiple and complex needs end up in the poorest quality temporary accommodation and that this is a factor which leads to their cycles of homelessness. Dr Adam Burley highlighted—

” the temporary accommodation that has been offered to some of the most traumatised and damaged people in our communities has often been a direct replication of the adversity that has brought them into our services in the first place.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Dr Burley, contrib. 26⁷⁹

141. The Simon Community said that an unintended consequence of Housing Options is that a more concentrated population of people with complex needs are coming into homelessness and that they should be put into positive, constructive environments from the first point of contact. It argued—

” The vast majority of people in homelessness now have significant and complex needs. We would not consider placing someone who enters the health system with such mental health needs, physical health needs or long-term, enduring trauma and impacts into the type of accommodation into which we put people who are homeless. Therefore, there has to be a massive agenda around improving the quality of the accommodation, not just its nature.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Lorraine McGrath, contrib. 30⁷¹

142. Many highlighted that the high cost of temporary accommodation was a problem. LSA said the cost was “horrendous”, unaffordable for people who are working and that it was—

” a major problem, and it is due to certain local authorities not implementing the code of guidance on how temporary accommodation charges are supposed to be worked out.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Paul Brown, contrib. 158⁷⁰

143. HAS highlighted that the cost of rent for those in temporary accommodation was only affordable for those on full housing benefits. This, therefore, discouraged some people from moving on to employment.⁸⁰

144. Shelter Scotland agreed that the cost was a problem and called for a repurposing of how temporary accommodation was provided, stating—

” I am not sure that it is doing what we as a community, as social landlords and as people working in homelessness and housing would want it to do. We need to repurpose all of that time, energy and money into providing better temporary accommodation. We need to improve the standard, decrease the length of time that it is used for and make sure that there is support so that people are not left floundering.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 27 September 2017, Fiona King, contrib. 139⁷³

Possible Solutions

145. Shelter Scotland called for better communication, information and support for those who are in temporary accommodation for any length of time to prevent compounding any problems or issues they have and ensure that their time in that accommodation is as beneficial as possible. It also said that temporary accommodation standards should be statutory rather than voluntary, which it said would –

” focus resources in a slightly different way, as new laws tend to do, and would give our front-line workers the opportunity to take forward challenges. At the moment, we are not always able to legally challenge accommodation that is unsuitable. There is the Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2014, which is a strong piece of legislation, but it is a pretty low bar. We want to move towards something that is a bit more aspirational.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 27 September 2017, Fiona King, contrib. 144⁸¹

146. HAS felt that local authorities could make better use of individual premises rather than blocked accommodation, which would allow for the use of more private landlord property. It also felt that, given it is a known issue that people are spending longer in temporary accommodation, there needs to be greater flexibility to convert temporary accommodation to permanent tenancies where it suited certain circumstances, such as maintaining employment and relationships and reducing upheaval. This, it said, would empower people and would open up a temporary let elsewhere.⁸⁰

147. Julie McCallagh, who had experienced homelessness, spoke of the upheaval she and her children faced from being moved in and out of different accommodation and the children being put into eleven different schools. She confirmed that her local authority did not take into account the location of the children's school when offering accommodation—

” I just feel that when kids are at a school and the family breaks down, it is hard enough for them, never mind getting moved away to the other side of the city, put in temporary accommodation and left there for a wee while so that they get settled in a school again, just to get moved. Eleven times is just too much for bairns to put up with.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 20 September 2017, Julie McCallagh, contrib. 230⁸²

Julie McCallagh shares her experience of homelessness with the Committee.



Source: Scottish Parliament

148. Many agreed that it would be beneficial in terms the wellbeing of the tenant(s) and the wider community, where networks and relationships have been made for more temporary accommodations to be made into permanent tenancies, rather than moving in more vulnerable tenants which may not make a success of the tenancy.
149. COSLA highlighted that some local authorities did do that to a certain degree, however a lack of supply of pre-made, furnished temporary accommodation units to replace that accommodation sometimes prevented this. It said—

” Turning those flats into permanent accommodation is the most natural thing in the world to do and it sounds quite simple—and some local authorities do it—but it really depends on the housing market and the needs that present in an area. We are not saying that it is a bad idea; it is just that, although it sounds quite simple, we would need to explore how it would work in practice. We cannot direct it to happen nationally; local authorities have to look at their own housing market and what accommodation is available to them.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Nicola Dickie, contrib. 46⁸³

150. The Minister highlighted that the action group is looking at temporary accommodation, including minimum standards—

” I want to ensure that temporary accommodation is of the best possible standard. Eighty-two per cent of families in temporary accommodation are in mainstream social housing, and I want that figure to grow. I do not want to rely on unsuitable accommodation.

As the committee is aware, the Government has reduced the amount of time that folk can spend in unsuitable accommodation from 14 days to seven days. I would rather that that was zero days, but I am aware—as the committee will be—that in emergency situations something has to be put in place quickly. Beyond that, in rural areas, particularly in smaller places, it is often difficult to give folk temporary accommodation in social housing. Rather than have folk move away to other places, we must have some flexibility. The action group will look at minimum standards in some depth, and we will look at its recommendations.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 01 November 2017, Kevin Stewart, contrib. 70⁸⁴

151. **Temporary accommodation unfortunately remains a part of tackling homelessness and it is a concern to the Committee that, as we heard, it is increasingly being used. What is also clear from the evidence we heard is that a number of challenges regarding its quality, flexibility and suitability remain to be addressed.**
152. **We welcome the Minister’s confirmation that standards of temporary accommodation will be a focus of the action group. We consider that no-one should be placed in the position of having to accept poor quality accommodation just because they are homeless. As such, we recommend that the standards set for temporary accommodation should be statutory rather than voluntary.**
153. **We seek confirmation that the Action Group will address:**
 - **how to reduce the amount of time homeless people spend in temporary accommodation before they move to permanent accommodation;**
 - **the impact on people of being moved to different places of temporary accommodation over short periods of time;**
 - **the extent to which local authority procurement of temporary accommodation can be used to drive up standards of accommodation and ensure that it remains affordable and accessible for all those who require it; and**
 - **how it will ensure greater options and flexibility to convert temporary accommodation to permanent lets where appropriate for the family or individual concerned.**
154. **In relation to costs, we understand that the costs of providing temporary accommodation can be variable and significant in some cases. We recommend that the Scottish Government undertakes a comprehensive analysis of the cost of all types of temporary accommodation to the public**

purpose, and those who require to use it, to determine whether this funding can better support people out of homelessness.

155. **No person should be accommodated in unsuitable temporary accommodation and so, it was worrying to hear from Crisis that young people are being accommodated in unsuitable temporary accommodation particularly as their age may make them more vulnerable to being exploited. We recommend that, as a priority, the Unsuitable Accommodation Order should be extended to young people to limit the time they spend in unsuitable accommodation to no more than 7 days.**

Code of Guidance

156. The LSA said that many issues in relation to the provision of temporary accommodation were due to an outdated Code of Guidanceⁱⁱ as it was published in 2005. It said that the guidance did not adequately address how quickly temporary accommodation should be offered or how long people should be using it for. The guidance also still made reference to priority need, which is no longer taken into account when assessing homeless applications. It called for a full review of the guidance and said —

” That will take a fair amount of work, but it would be worth while. In terms of cost savings, if everything is in one place, we can give the document to people and say, “Read this and you will understand it”. That cannot be said to anyone at the moment because the code is completely misleading on a number of important points. However, it is an important document.

Once that document is updated, section 37 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 should be amended to require local authorities not merely to have regard to the guidance but to comply with it. At the moment, local authorities do not need to comply with it so, once it is updated, that obligation will need to be tightened.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Paul Brown (Legal Services Agency), contrib. 123¹¹

157. The LSA felt that some of the issue lies in the enforceability of local authorities responsibilities and the fact that the only remedy is judicial review which people were not aware of. It highlighted the case of Thomas Lyon as one which happens quite regularly and that no equivalent to the appeal system in England is available—

ii The purpose of this Code is to help guide local authorities in their duties to homeless and potentially homeless people. <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2005/05/31133334/33366>

- ” In England there is a statutory appeal process, but there is no such process in Scotland. Judicial review serves a function but you would have to be fairly sophisticated to know about that. It works quickly once you get going, but one of the issues is that if a local authority is systematically unable to fulfil its statutory functions it can avoid judicial review by giving someone accommodation for one or two nights, and so the problem recurs.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Paul Brown, contrib. 186⁸⁵

158. In England and Wales, if a person is not happy with the outcome of a decision in relation to their homelessness application, then they can appeal to the county court on a point of law.⁸⁶

159. The LSA confirmed that it was considering the use of litigation in relation to equalities legislation with regard to the needs of people with mental health disabilities and protected characteristics and their access to temporary accommodation. It said that, because the code of guidance has not been updated, many local authorities do not know how to provide the reasonable adjustments that a person needs. It described the benefits this approach would bring—

- ” The use of equalities legislation is strategic, because it is possible to claim compensation. That is important to accountability. If somebody is discriminated against unintentionally—normally indirectly—compensation is a useful way of focusing on the fact that action is needed. We will use freedom of information requests to look into how systematic the approach is to various people with protected characteristics.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Paul Brown, contrib. 161⁸⁷

160. On revising the Code of Guidance the Minister explained that—

- ” We will consider what the action group has to say. I am willing to consider most things ... We need to have a good hard look at the current 150 pages of guidance and make any necessary changes, based on not only the recommendations of the action group but the further work that will no doubt go on in the homelessness prevention and strategy group.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 01 November 2017, Kevin Stewart, contrib. 76⁸⁸

- 161. The Committee is concerned to hear that the Code of Guidance has not been updated since 2005 and that it is, therefore inaccurate and a potential barrier to the provision of temporary accommodation. We recommend that the Code of Guidance be reviewed urgently by the Scottish Government to ensure that it is accurate and up to date. Any such review should ensure that any associated guidance and legislation referred to in the Code of Guidance, and terminology used, is relevant and not acting as a barrier to the provision of temporary accommodation.**

- 162. We also recommend that the Minister establishes a regular review mechanism for the Code of Guidance such that it remains relevant, update to date and accessible.**

163. **The Committee is concerned that judicial review is the only mechanism for appeal in relation to the provision of temporary accommodation, given that it only assesses whether the correct procedure has been followed. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government investigate whether a more accessible and independent appeals process should be provided.**
164. **Measures, such as litigation through equalities legislation, to improve the rights of access to people with mental health issues and protected characteristics are well-intentioned but shed light on further problems with the provision of temporary accommodation. We recommend that the Action Group should specifically consider the specific needs of those with mental health issues and protected characteristics to enable a better understanding of the barriers to them accessing accommodation appropriate to their needs.**

The use of shelters for rough sleepers

165. Rough sleeping is an extreme form of homelessness. Many of the people who sleep rough have disengaged from traditional services and may have multiple and complex needs. The Bethany Christian Church highlights—
 - ” It refers to people living on the street, sleeping in the open air on the streets or in parks/cemeteries, doorways, bus shelters, car parks, stairwells, beside rubbish bins, on benches, sheltered over heating ducts or in any other place not meant for human habitation. It is usually a last resort for homeless people. Sleeping rough is a dangerous and traumatising experience. Many people who sleep rough will suffer from multiple health conditions, such as mental health problems and drug and alcohol misuse.⁸⁹
166. The Scottish Government set up the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group to recommend the actions and solutions needed to eradicate rough sleeping and transform the use of temporary accommodation in Scotland.⁹⁰
167. In the big cities, overnight shelters are provided in the winter months largely by faith-based organisations for use by those who are rough sleeping. Many welcomed the vital services these organisations provide, but some questioned whether it is appropriate that such services have to exist and whether they have simply replaced the hostel type accommodation which was in place previously.
168. During its fact-finding visit to Streetwork in Edinburgh, Committee members heard from some services users that they chose to use the shelters rather than sleep in the B&B accommodation which was often offered as temporary accommodation and is unsuitable to their needs. The Committee heard that spaces in these shelters are often limited and that several people in a night may be turned away due to a lack of beds.
169. HAS said that a long-term strategy is required to stop the use of the shelters, although it felt they were still required this winter (Dec 2017) as resources and time are required to put the right type of accommodation in place. It agreed that many

chose to use shelters, rather than take on accommodation offered by the local authority—

” we have got to the point at which bed spaces are available but people are going to the churches. I do not know how that has come about.

I do not think the fact that the shelter is being provided by a religious organisation is the issue. To be honest, it is more about the fact that we are ghetto-ing people in any type of accommodation, particularly in the winter months.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 27 September 2017, Jules Oldham, contrib. 202⁹¹

170. Homeless Action Scotland confirmed that many choose to sleep rough, rather than take on the type of property offered by the local authority. It said that this is usually the most vulnerable who do not want to be in buildings with many other people. If they have addictions, they might want to stay away from places where there are other people with addictions. It stated—

” That is why we say that we should move away from larger accommodation units, particularly on the temporary side. I know that we have, on the whole, moved away from 30-bed hostels. However, when it comes to temporary accommodation of any type—I am not talking about supported housing—it seems to be better if that is individual properties.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 27 September 2017, Jules Oldham, contrib. 200⁹²

171. The Simon Community confirmed that the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group were looking not only at increasing shelter provision this winter, but also the front-line services in order to help those people out of rough-sleeping. It stated—

” Having someone come into a winter night shelter from sleeping rough is a real opportunity, and we have worked really hard in Glasgow in the past few years to build up the service response that goes with the opportunity for people to have a place of safety overnight. We want to provide services that are in-reaching. We want to be there every night and every morning to ensure that as many people as possible are transitioned out of the need for a winter night shelter as quickly as possible.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Lorraine McGrath, contrib. 111⁹³

172. Dr Adam Burley spoke about the use of shelters as a psychologically informed approach to rehabilitation for those who are ambivalent to attachment. For those people the shelters allow them to have a place they can be in, but also leave quickly when they feel they need to. He said—

” we are talking about people who have very big agoraphobic/claustrophobic crises; when they are attached to or detached from people, they feel very distressed. As a result, what night shelters or that sort of accommodation can do is provide a step on the developmental pathway

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Dr Burley, contrib. 113⁹⁴

173. He said such shelters ensure that people are not entirely disengaged from the system and can get the right treatment suited to their needs. He added—

” It is a real skill that care staff have; they are very good at looking at people out of the corner of their eye and not scaring them off by saying, “Right! Let’s do lots of work on addressing your issues!”—which can make them run for the hills—and at the same time not just saying, “They’re just no-hopers; there’s no point in doing anything with them,” and giving up on them. We need to find some balance that allows us to exist in the ambivalence and remain interested in people who both attract and disable our attention. In my experience, the only resistance to night shelters is the ideological one of “Oh, we just don’t like the idea.”

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Dr Burley, contrib. 113⁹⁴

174. Dr Burley highlighted that those who have an inability to form relationships will have issues in getting jobs, living and having good health. He said that is essentially a fundamental health problem and it should be recognised that the provision of shelter is a health intervention that allows a person to start building relationships. He stated—

” It is worth our while to remind ourselves that the average age of death at the Edinburgh access practice over the past five years is 42. The inability to form and maintain human relationships is a really life-limiting condition, and if we could get our heads around it and come to some understanding of what the provision of such shelter means, we might be able to see it as a fundamental health intervention that should form part of our health and social care canon.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Dr Burley, contrib. 115⁹⁵

175. The Simon Community endorsed this approach and suggested that low threshold services for this group could be tested this winter in any of the major cities to ensure—

” that people did not have to jump through any hoops to get accommodation on a particular night. They would just have to be there. They would engage with street outreach to get connected with accommodation, and they would be able to leave the next day without any consequences and come back the next night however many times they needed to in order to build up enough trust and engagement with the staff who worked in and around the service.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Lorraine McGrath, contrib. 116⁹⁶

176. In the context of the use of shelters, the focus had been very much on the use of shelters in cities, but COSLA urged the Committee not to think of rough sleeping as a city-centre problem only—

” It is not, of course, and we need to take a strategic approach and think about local issues as part of that. After all, we know that people will go from a rural local authority area to a centre in Glasgow or Edinburgh, and I ask that that be considered in any strategic approach.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Councillor Parry, contrib. 118⁹⁷

177. The Minister for Local Government and Housing noted his gratitude to the support provided by faith groups and the third sector in supporting rough sleepers and hoped that they would continue with this engagement. In the longer term, he wanted to see more people going into temporary accommodation with the right support, rather than having a reliance on night shelters or hostels. He acknowledged that the Group would make recommendations in relation to cities as well as rural areas as well as having something to say about the services provided by faith-based groups.
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178. Following the Committee meeting, the Minister wrote to the Committee and confirmed that the Scottish Government had provided an additional £262,000 in winter 2017/18 to implement rapid response solutions for the following:

- Increase capacity in temporary and emergency accommodation in Edinburgh
- Increase outreach capacity in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen and explore any need for additional capacity in Dundee;
- Maximise use of Nightstop in Edinburgh and undertake discussion with statutory sector in Glasgow to agree how The Scottish Government implement Nightstop there by January 2018ⁱⁱⁱ;
- Maximise effectiveness of existing and additional outreach capacity by boosting multiagency partnership working; adopting ‘by name lists’ approach and empowering front line workers through direct access to services and dedicated accommodation;
- Make personal budgets and/or flexible emergency funding available for front-line staff to employ in those instances where maximum flexibility is required to meet an individual’s immediate housing needs – as a last resort where other interventions have failed;
- At times of extreme weather, ensure flexible provision is available in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen for anyone who will not use winter night shelters, despite all efforts; and
- Engage with people who are currently homeless and people who have experience of homelessness⁹⁹

179. The Minister for Local Government and Housing further clarified that—

” In light of the visibility and particular challenges of numbers rough sleeping in our main cities, the focus and particular challenges of these recommendations is on those areas of the country. However, the Action Group has already begun to explore its objectives of eradicating rough sleeping and transforming temporary accommodation longer term, which will require the active participation of a range of partners across Scotland and, crucially, of people that have lived experience of homelessness. The Action Group will make recommendations on these broader objectives in the New Year.⁹⁹

ⁱⁱⁱ Nightstop is a service provided by the Rock Trust which places young people who have nowhere to stay in trained volunteers’ spare rooms while it looks for a more permanent solution. <https://www.nightstop.org.uk/nightstop/edinburgh>

180. **We welcome the steps taken and extra resource provided by the Scottish Government to address the needs of rough sleepers for winter 2017-18, especially given that some of the shelter-based services had been at full capacity over recent winters. We acknowledge the Scottish Government’s longer term ambition of eradicating rough sleeping and transforming the use of temporary accommodation. We seek evidence from the Scottish Government of whether the outcomes from the short-term measures implemented in winter 2017-18 have been delivered. We would also seek evidence of how any best practice arising from these measures will inform its longer-term ambitions.**
181. **There is not one solution to the problem of rough sleeping. Services should be person-centred and wide-ranging to suit the requirements of all. In that regard, wrap-around services and outreach, alongside shelter, are also key to ensuring that those who present at shelters can be supported towards longer-term sustainable Housing Options.**
182. **We, therefore, request an update on how the increased short-term measures taken during winter 2017-18 have been used to identify those with higher needs (and who may not have presented before) and to put in place longer term measures, where possible, to aid their transition out of rough sleeping and homelessness.**
183. **We heard that the use of shelters is not a preferred approach for some who seek to address homelessness. In designing future services, however, we consider that the Government should recognise that some, such as those who rough sleep and who have complex needs, may rely on the use of shelters to aid their rehabilitation at their own pace and time.**
184. **The Committee notes that the initial recommendations of the Action Group have a focus on city centres. We recommend that its future work and recommendations should also take into consideration the specific needs of people living in towns and rural communities and who find themselves rough sleeping.**

The number of rough sleepers

185. Recent local authority statistics had noted a decline in rough sleeping over the last 10 years. However, statistics for 2016-17 showed that the number of applicants, who had reported sleeping rough the night before, had increased by 10% from 1,361 the previous year, to 1,500. ¹⁰⁰
186. Shelter Scotland said that there had been a 10 per cent increase in the figures, but said that this was just the “tip of the iceberg” given that it comes from asking those who make a homelessness application whether they had slept rough the night before. It confirmed, and many agreed, that anecdotally there had been an increase in more visible forms of rough sleeping but this increase was unquantifiable. It said—

- ” It is incredibly hard to understand fully the different forms of rough sleeping, and it is also the most complicated area. There are lots of reasons why individuals may not engage with services... Someone who has suffered trauma and who has complex needs may have had negative experiences and may distrust the institutions that we would hope they would engage with.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 27 September 2017, Fiona King, contrib. 206¹⁰¹

187. It said that, whilst more temporary accommodation would help, it would not solve the problem completely—

- ” If people who have had a lot of courage in going to the local authority to make an application are turned away, that could be the one time that they chose to engage with services, and they could then be lost. That is when people get into cycles of repeat homelessness and long-term rough sleeping.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 27 September 2017, Fiona King, contrib. 206¹⁰¹

188. By way of example, it highlighted again the case of Thomas Lyon who shared his story with the Committee—

- ” It is worth reflecting on the fact that he was sleeping in the waiting room and was turned away repeatedly. There was progress only when a legal agency got involved and advocated on his behalf.

Some of the issue is housing, some of it is poor practice on the front line and some of it is people stuff, which is hard to disentangle. Some of it is the baggage that people come with and their complex needs.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 27 September 2017, Fiona King, contrib. 206¹⁰¹

189. The Simon Community confirmed that there was an increased perception of rough sleeping in Glasgow, but that most of those who are on the streets have been known to services for some time. It said that much of this behaviour was due to an increase in street begging which is supported by public generosity and compassionate responses from charitable groups. It said—

- ” Public giving is supporting that to a degree for some, and that will preclude people moving on, particularly if they are heavily entrenched in addiction and that is driving their behaviours. They will choose that opportunity to receive public giving over accessing services.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Lorraine McGrath, contrib. 105¹⁰²

190. It carries out a regular audit of its street begging population and it found that only a third of these known to services are in extreme homelessness circumstances. It said—

” The majority are there for other desperate reasons that vary across the board. For that third, who are also rough sleepers, a big part of what keeps many of them in that situation is that opportunity. Many of them will not have an active benefit claim or active engagement with statutory services, but they will have an active addiction that drives their daily behaviours. That is a difficult thing to break when the opportunity is there.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Lorraine McGrath, contrib. 107¹⁰³

191. City of Edinburgh Council confirmed that it was undertaking a rough sleeping count which was looking not just at counting people, but to understand better what type of support it needs to provide and the barriers to accessing services. It said—

” we will need to monitor carefully what is working for the people we get from rough sleeping into services. Beyond that, if we find that the same people appear in subsequent counts, we will need to learn why they are still rough sleeping as time elapses.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Nicky Brown, contrib. 177¹⁰⁴

192. The SRC highlighted that there were various people who are classified as having “no recourse to public funds” and are, therefore, rough sleeping or otherwise homeless. It stated that many have insecure immigration status, or have been asylum seekers and are now destitute and that local authorities need to do more to establish why this group are sleeping rough. ¹⁰⁵

193. Similarly, the LSA said that the number of young women rough sleeping had increased. ⁶² When asked why that was the case, it said—

” It is quite difficult to say. It is difficult for people to access temporary accommodation. You can track that quite easily in our practice, although we do not collect very sophisticated statistics, because things change when the night shelters open in the winter. There is no doubt that the night shelters serve a very important function.

I do not know why the number of non-traditional rough sleepers has increased. The reasons change, and I speculate that the vulnerability of people in private rented sector accommodation changes. Some of the people have no recourse to public funds or think that they have not. Sometimes they are care leavers or people with mental health problems.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Paul Brown, contrib. 181¹⁰⁶

194. The Minister agreed that the figures do not necessarily match the anecdotal accounts of an increased visibility of rough sleeping. He was not entirely convinced of the need for a further audit. He said—

” An audit would be very difficult to undertake, and I am not sure how accurate the ones that have been done in the past have been. I would rather that efforts were put into actions to get folk off the streets and into accommodation. That is where the focus lies, and it is what the action group has been tasked to look at and to offer recommendations on. If the action group were to come up with a recommendation to carry out an audit, I would obviously consider it. However, the key thing for all of us here is not to argue about the number of folk who are on the streets on any one night but to provide those folk with the accommodation that they need.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 01 November 2017, Kevin Stewart, contrib. 22¹⁰⁷

195. On the rise of begging, the Minister said—

” In certain places in Scotland, there has been a rise in the amount of begging or, at least, an increased visibility of begging. Some of that might be down to the fact that changes in legislation by the UK Government have meant that many folk have no recourse to public funds. The UK Government must look at and address that issue, because we are creating crises for people every day because of that situation.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 01 November 2017, Kevin Stewart, contrib. 26¹⁰⁸

196. The true level of rough sleeping is unclear and, without the right information, it is difficult to ensure that appropriate services are in place to assist people out of rough sleeping. The Committee agrees that more accurate information on rough sleepers will assist in identifying what works and the barriers to supporting people into accommodation.

197. The Committee, therefore, requests further information on the extent to which the Scottish Government works with local authorities in auditing the numbers of rough sleepers. Such audits would allow a greater understanding of the needs of those who present as homeless, as compared to those who do not engage with services. It would also provide a better understanding of those most at risk of rough sleeping, such as people with certain protected characteristics, those with complex needs and those with insecure immigration status. We also seek an update of how the Scottish Government will support the sharing of best practice between local authorities on how to effectively monitor rough sleeping levels to better inform local solutions.

Future homelessness service options

Multiple and complex needs

198. The Committee heard that traditional services often fail those with the most complex and multiple needs. A study carried out by Glasgow Housing Options Steering Board confirmed that, following consultation with service users and third sector organisations the Housing Options model did not serve people with the most complex and multiple needs, “as their immediate focus is on survival and the associated consequences of the problems that they face”.⁵⁰

199. The Simon Community agreed that the Housing Options approach was not suitable for this group as —

” It is not easy for those people to engage with the approach—for example, they do not find it easy to keep appointments or respond. The flexibility in our current support arrangements does not necessarily allow us the significant amount of time that it would take to work through the process with someone in that situation.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Lorraine McGrath (Simon Community Scotland), contrib. 5¹⁰⁹

200. Dr Burley agreed, highlighting that service providers often discharge people with the most multiple and complex needs or they are prevented from accessing services. This is because the service providers may have a lack of understanding that these individuals are engaging in an ambivalent way due to the adversity they have experienced and the difficulties they face engaging with traditional services. He said—

” We assume that everyone can make use of care and that, if someone does not make use of care, it is because they do not want it, because they are not engaging or because of some other thing that is located in them rather than in us and how we set up our services.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Dr Burley, contrib. 57¹¹⁰

Housing First pilots in Scotland

201. Turning Point Scotland highlighted that those with multiple and complex needs often end up in B&B accommodation, which is not suitable for their needs given that they often have issues living alongside other people. Those with the most complex needs should, therefore, be put in a Housing First model with an appropriate level of support.¹¹¹

202. Many of the organisations the Committee received evidence from and met with during its scene-setting evidence sessions and fact-finding visits agreed that Housing First is the most suitable method for supporting homeless people with multiple and complex needs. Those with alcohol or other substance addictions, significant and complex mental health issues or offending behaviour were often highlighted as suitable groups for this approach.

203. The model is being operated or piloted in a small number of areas in Scotland and there is growing interest in developing the model across Scotland, including from Turning Point, the Glasgow Homelessness Network and Crisis. The basic premise behind this model is that those who present as homeless and have multiple and complex needs are provided with a house and a permanent tenancy unconditionally. They are also provided with the right level of support and care to keep them successfully in the tenancy.^{112 113}
204. Turning Point Scotland, which was one of the first organisations to implement the model in Scotland, highlighted that the major difference between this and other methods of providing homelessness services is that the service is not a staircase model, i.e. the individuals who present as homeless do not have to show commitment to maintaining a tenancy or give up any of their addictions, if that is relevant to their case, before they are given a permanent tenancy. They are given a Scottish secure tenancy and the right level of support.

Staircase vs Housing First Model

Turning Point Scotland diagram demonstrating the difference between traditional staircase approaches to tackling homelessness and housing first.



Source: Reproduced by permission from Turning Point Scotland

205. It said that the support provided needed to be assertive, regular and not finite. Given that those with the most complex needs have difficulties in engaging with services, an element of outreach is needed to identify those who might need the

service. This could be visiting begging sites or, as those who use their services were most often substance misusers, where they go to collect their methadone. It also said it was important that the support is provided separately from housing so the support continues even if the person loses their tenancy.

206. Whilst their services are tailored to those with substance misuse issues, the method was being used elsewhere in the world for people with complex mental health issues. Turning Point highlighted that many of their clients also have complex trauma and personality disorders. He also felt a key element of the service was through the use of peer support workers with lived experience of homelessness, which brought a, “level of authenticity and authority to the relationship, which can be genuinely transformative for people.”^{114 115 116}

207. The Committee heard from Thomas Lyon, who had lived experience of homelessness about how important his support assistant, who had also experienced homelessness, was to his recovery—

” On the housing situation, there should be people in there with lived experience. Personally, I would not be in the place where I am without Julie McCallagh having lived experience. She took me to the casework team and fought for my rights with me through Shelter. I took to her right away—we clicked and I listened to her. People with lived experience are more understanding.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 20 September 2017, Thomas Lyon, contrib. 260¹¹⁷

208. Turning Point Scotland said that a Heriot-Watt University study of its Housing First pilot had shown that a quarter of people had stopped their substance misuse, even although they had not been told to do so.

” When people have a house, they can achieve basic things such as having a registered address. That means that they can have a general practitioner for the first time, which gives them access to all kinds of other services.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Patrick McKay, contrib. 69¹¹⁴

209. Since the pilots started five years ago it had only had one eviction, three were supported to give up their tenancies as it was a better option and the others had sustained their tenancies or moved onto better accommodation. As the pilot took place in Glasgow which has no social housing stock of its own, Turning Point Scotland said that it was challenging to get RSLs to provide houses to people with substance misuse issues. However, after some RSLs came on board for the initial pilot which had demonstrated success, other RSLs became involved.^{115 116}

Learning from Finland

210. Given the success of the pilots in Scotland and the calls to roll the Housing First model out wider across Scotland, the Committee was keen to learn from a country which had used the policy more widely.

211. In March 2017, Feansta (European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless) published its *Second Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe*.

It noted that evidence from across Europe pointed to a worsening homelessness situation. Finland was the only exception, showing the effectiveness of implementing a long-term homelessness strategy, based on the Housing First model, which it had mainstreamed into national homelessness policy. ¹¹⁸

212. The Committee travelled to Helsinki to meet with key leaders and organisations to explore how it had used the policy to reduce homelessness. A report of the Committee’s key meetings and observations in Helsinki is available here:

http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S5_Local_Gov/Inquiries/20171025HelsinkiReport.pdf

213. Mr Jan Vapaavuori, who is currently the Mayor of Helsinki, was the Minister for Environment (which has responsibility for housing) was credited as a key driver for the implementation of the Housing First policy in Finland.

214. When the Committee met with Mr Vapaavuori, he confirmed that the programme required a significant upfront financial investment in terms of the provision of housing and employing support workers with health or social work backgrounds or cross-cutting expertise were employed to support individuals. It also required creative thinking and a systematic approach. In his 2016 book he said—

” “We changed our mind setting: starting point in Housing First –principal is that first of all you have to provide for a person with many problems a permanent apartment, home, which brings better opportunities to solve other problems. We took also a strong operative attitude in implementing the programme. We made contract with biggest cities on several thousand new flats, integrated housing and social and health care services in the same complex, we were determined to make a big transformation and we were quick in intervening in slips” ¹¹⁹

Committee members meeting with Mayor Vapaavuori, who was the former Housing Minister for Finland.



Source: The Scottish Parliament

215. As part of the programme, Finland had converted most of its shelters and hostel type accommodation to blocks of individual housing units for use for housing first. It also provided some tenants with scatter flats, however there were less of these available due to the desirability of one bedroom flats in the city centres.
216. The Committee also heard in Finland that the approach allowed people to focus on getting employment and that there were opportunities to get paid work experience provided by the housing and support providers allowing them to learn new skills and receive an additional income which would not affect any welfare benefits they received.
217. Much of the evidence the Committee received in Finland very much supported the evidence it had heard from the respondents to its inquiry. For example, it heard that the Housing First approach had generated dramatic improvements in individuals' health and well-being and in tenancy retentions. In many cases, it was found that for those who had had problems with substance and alcohol misuse, their using reduced dramatically or stopped when they were given a secure tenancy and the right support.

A Scottish model of Housing First

218. HAS said that it supported the Housing First model, but that it should only be used for those with multiple and complex needs who meet the requirements of the model. It said—

” were it to be used for those who do not meet the model requirements, it would become diluted and would not have the effect that it should. We are all for it, but we should proceed with caution to ensure that it benefits those whom it is intended to benefit.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 27 September 2017, Jules Oldham, contrib. 184¹²⁰

219. Shelter Scotland supported a comprehensive roll-out of Housing First as “part of the solution, but not the panacea to homelessness”. It cautioned, however, that it requires a greater amount of choice and flexibility in housing provision and support than is currently available if it was to be extended more widely. It said—

” To replicate the outcomes of the models and pilots of Housing First, we would effectively need to provide non-time-limited 24-hour support, and at the moment we are struggling to supply basic housing support.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 27 September 2017, Fiona King, contrib. 186¹²¹

220. Dr Adam Burley confirmed that the housing first method is a psychologically informed approach to homelessness, in that it provides people with a stable environment to rely on to address substance abuse and mental health issues, rather than an insecure one—

” people present with a range of symptoms, such as homelessness, drug use and mental health problems. We keep trying to address those symptoms without addressing the fundamental ailment that has led the person to develop them in the first place, which is often where the person started from. Housing first aims to provide not a restart but something that has been absent: a secure base that they do not have to worry about.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Dr Burley, contrib. 75¹²²

221. Should Scotland choose to adopt a Housing First model, many spoke about the need for developing a model which fits into the context of Scotland. For example, the Committee heard that the Finnish model relies quite heavily on congregated blocks of flats, rather than scattered accommodation.

222. The Simon Community agreed that being put into scatter housing would be of value for most people. It said, however, that for some who could not sustain a traditional housing first tenancy in a scatter flat, more congregate living would be appropriate and that Scotland’s hostels are mostly of a smaller nature (8-15 people) compared to Finland’s large-scale hostels. ¹²³

223. Turning Point Scotland felt that whilst there was evidence of good practice in Finland, some of their units felt temporary and there was an expectation that people would move on. It agreed with the Simon Community that smaller congregate living where people have greater security of tenure was, however, appropriate—

” Interestingly, Sam Tsemberis, the architect of Housing First, would agree with that.

For me, the default model must always be that people are given a house. Even if it is not housing first, it should be housing led. There is a group of individuals who, when there is a perception of support, are always put into a staircase model, in which they have to demonstrate various things. We have to stop doing that.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Patrick McKay, contrib. 80¹²⁴

224. To implement Housing First, we heard that new funding models would be required to break down silos and provide the finite support that is required to make the policy a success. Some suggested that such models could be sustained by incorporating savings generated in other departments due to the implementation of housing first.

225. For example, Turning Point Scotland confirmed that, if people have a home and register with a GP, then their use of acute services will diminish demonstrating a saving that could be redistributed. Dr Burley pointed out that the security of a home for some people led to a reduction in the extent of their hospital admissions, ambulance call-outs, accident and emergency attendance and days in hospital, court and prison.^{125 126}

226. COSLA felt that many agencies agree with the concept of preventative spend and breaking down silos until they are asked to move a portion of their budget into preventative spend budgets. It commented—

” there is not an awful lot of money sloshing about in the system to move into preventative spend. We will see the benefits eventually, but we have to be aware that we do not have stuff that we can lift off the shelf to do what we are talking about. It would be interesting to examine the Helsinki model and how much the authorities put in at the start to stimulate it so that we could start to get into preventative spend.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Nicola Dickie, contrib. 88¹²⁷

227. The Minister for Local Government and Housing referred to the evaluations of the various pilots of Housing First which have taken place, he confirmed that it has produced positive outcomes. He felt that the complete Housing First model didn't have to be used, as long as the approach taken was psychologically informed—

” Instead, it is about having a person-centred approach that ensures that all the elements that an individual requires to be able to sustain a tenancy, and the help behind that, are in place.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 01 November 2017, Kevin Stewart, contrib. 50¹²⁸

228. The Minister for Local Government and Housing agreed that preventative spend measures should be used going forward. He referred to the cost benefit analysis work in Renfrewshire which had shown the benefits of preventative measures in dealing with homelessness—

- ” Without a doubt, however, without necessarily having all the figures behind it, we can clearly see from the evaluation of Housing First by Turning Point Scotland that individuals’ lives have changed and that a huge amount of spend on crisis, which is always the most costly element, is not happening.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 01 November 2017, Kevin Stewart, contrib. 63¹²⁹

229. **We heard clear evidence from those who had undertaken pilots in Scotland, as well as from international comparisons that Housing First leads to positive outcomes. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government, in partnership with local government, implements a Scottish Housing First policy.**
230. **In looking the adoption of Housing First, the Scottish Government should consider:**
- **how elements of best practice from previous pilots, such as the Turning Point experience and international examples, could inform policy development for an approach that fits Scotland’s context;**
 - **how budgets from different agencies (such as health, local government and justice) can be aligned to fund preventative measures, the wrap around support and extra homes required that may be required to accommodate permanent tenancies under Housing First; and**
 - **how it will provide the strong leadership and guidance required to drive key partners to work together and buy-into the this approach and to support the practical changes required to effectively implement the Housing First model.**

Multi-agency working

231. Many have acknowledged that, in order to address homelessness, there is a requirement to stop thinking about homelessness as just a housing issue, rather to look at it as a whole systems issue. The reasons that people find themselves homeless is due to number of complex and varying issues and homelessness itself is, therefore, the result, rather than the cause. Many called for a more multi-agency approach to the prevention and treatment of homelessness and, therefore, it was necessary for all public agencies to join up different priorities and work together.
232. We heard some evidence of good practice of multi-agency working in the treatment and prevention of homelessness. For example, COSLA highlighted—

” we are now seeing integration joint boards and local authorities beginning to work incredibly well with housing services. It will take some time to see data about the results of that approach, but anecdotal evidence tells us that it is working. There is also the work that the Scottish Prison Service is doing, along with community justice partnerships and local authorities, which is already achieving incredible results. We know that preventative measures definitely work.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Councillor Parry, contrib. 53¹³⁰

233. Glasgow Housing Options Steering Board set out its practical approach to homelessness prevention, which was centred around tenancy sustainment and shared responsibility between the relevant agencies. It has an active referral system that involves named contacts in health, social work, housing benefit, the Scottish Welfare Fund and the third sector who are empowered to make decisions. ¹³¹

234. The Simon Community's City Ambition Network Initiative (CAN) in Glasgow, which it runs alongside Turning Point Scotland, empowers front-line staff by devolving the freedom to engage, make decisions and act across multiple agencies in the interests of the individual. ¹³²

235. The Simon Community said that the commissioning of homelessness services needs to change to ensure a more integrated response to homelessness. Homelessness services in Glasgow are provided by the health and social care partnership and the Simon Community highlighted that changing services is more difficult when homelessness is part of the housing agenda rather than the health and social care agenda —

” The other thing that we are doing in Glasgow, building on the principles of the CAN, is moving to an alliance contracting position for all commissioning of homelessness services. If we get that right, it should empower the type of working whereby organisations come together to look at who is best placed to do what around a grouping of people or an individual in order to get the best possible response.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 25 October 2017, Lorraine McGrath, contrib. 52¹³²

236. Shelter Scotland agreed but said that it had received evidence that, in some circumstances, different departments of the same council had not been working strategically together and were protecting their own key performance indicators, outcomes and budgets. COSLA added that multi-agency working was often hampered by resource issues which created barriers to preventative spend or issues with the legislation which caused barriers to joint working. ^{133 130}

237. HAS agreed that this was a problem in some areas, highlighting that it is often difficult for people with different budgets to collaborate in supporting those with a range of needs—

” We do not want to continue with the situation in which, because of the way in which budgets work, people have to go from pillar to post in order to get the right support. We have to ensure that people and their budgets work together to provide accommodation and support.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 27 September 2017, Jules Oldham, contrib. 127¹³⁴

238. We heard from health professionals who said there was a requirement to join up housing, wellbeing and health in order to take a more upstream approach to tackling homelessness. Dr Adam Burley said that housing is not engineered, geared, organised, designed or funded as a healthcare intervention presently, but that the home is where many vulnerable people spend much of their time and that their fundamental healthcare is often provided by housing. Dr Hamlet agreed and said that there was an opportunity to reengage public health with housing through the new public health body in Scotland. ^{135 136}
239. We heard that a more joined up multi agency approach was required to properly address the needs and requirements of those leaving prison as they were at high risk of becoming homeless. The Committee heard of some good practice in that regard. The Criminal Justice Voluntary Sector Forum, for example, is part of a public social partnership that provides accommodation and wrap-around support for people leaving prison. The planning for that person’s discharge happens when they are still in prison. When they are released, they are given a fully furnished flat and the right support to keep their tenancy, very similar to the Housing First model.
240. The Criminal Justice Voluntary Sector Forum said that the model works well and they can often negotiate with the housing association to keep their property or take another property in the same area. The system breaks down quickly, however, if there are too many complications in the system and the individual has to go through a “number of hoops” (e.g. has had to deal with a number of different agencies) or is offered unsuitable accommodation, such as a hostel, which will increase their chance of reoffending. ^{137 138}
241. ALACHO’s written submission highlighted that, in the longer term, there should be consideration given to—
- ” Extending statutory obligations to homeless households and those at risk of homelessness to a wider range of public agencies including Education, the Scottish Prison Service, Health, Social Work and the Integrated Joint Boards ⁶
242. The Minister agreed that services were not always joined up the way they should be, but that he had also witnessed some good examples of cases in which local authorities and others had adopted a joined-up, person-centred and preventative approach to tackling homelessness. He highlighted that best practice, such as the service in Dundee City Council which had brought together homelessness teams, Scottish Welfare Fund and energy efficiency staff, should be shared through the Housing Options Hubs and across the country. He also highlighted how the work carried out by the Scottish Housing Regulator on mapping the journey of homeless people would identify where joint working is not happening and identify areas for improvement. ¹³⁹

243. The Committee explored whether pooled budgeting or extending the statutory obligations on homelessness beyond local authorities to a wider range of public agencies would aid better joined-up working. The Minister confirmed that he would listen to the recommendations of the action group, however he did not necessarily agree that the issue was down to budgeting or changing statutory duties. He added—

” I think that it is about bringing together people on the front line to make sure that they are taking a person-centred approach to individuals. We often find that, although we might get elements of the help that we provide people with absolutely spot on, the element that we get wrong is the one that drives them back into a homeless situation... We need services that are tailored to deliver on every aspect of the needs of an individual or a family so that they continue to retain a secure tenancy.

Source: Local Government and Communities Committee 01 November 2017, Kevin Stewart, contrib. 9¹⁴⁰

244. The Committee agrees that all public agencies and relevant third sector agencies have a role to play in the prevention and solution to homelessness and notes that there is some good practice in that regard. There is clear evidence that best outcomes are achieved when all the relevant agencies and their staff have the flexibility to make decisions and are empowered to act in the best interest of those facing homelessness.

245. Whilst best practice exists, it is not always implemented across Scotland. We therefore recommend the Scottish Government ensures that all the relevant agencies adopt whole-systems approaches to tackling homelessness, including—

- **how it will encourage agencies to collaborate on renewed strategies to ending homelessness, based on approaches which produce the best outcomes and put the interests of the individuals needs at their core.**
- **how it will identify and eradicate any financial, structural or attitudinal barriers which may prevent multi-agency working;**
- **how it will ensure that best practice, such as those examples we heard, are embedded in local authority areas; and**
- **consider extending statutory duties beyond local authorities.**

Annex A - Extracts from the Minutes of Committee Meetings and Links to Oral Evidence

8th Meeting 2017 (Session 5), Wednesday 8 March 2017

1. Homelessness: The Committee took evidence from—

- Adam Lang, Head of Communications and Policy, Shelter Scotland;
- Tony Cain, Policy Manager, Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers;
- Lee Clark, Manager, Conflict Resolution Service, and Mark Kennedy, Manager, Homeless Prevention Service, Cyrenians;
- Jan Williamson, Head of Services, Streetwork.

2. Consideration of evidence (in private): The Committee considered and noted the evidence heard at agenda item 1.

[Official Report of the meeting](#)

[Meeting papers](#)

9th Meeting 2017 (Session 5), Wednesday 22 March 2017

1. Homelessness: The Committee took evidence from—

- Margaret Ann Brünjes, Director, Glasgow Homelessness Network;
- Eddie Nelson, Day Centre Manager, Churches Action for the Homeless;
- Beth Reid, Policy Manager (Scotland), Crisis.

3. Consideration of evidence (in private): The Committee considered and noted the evidence heard at agenda item 1 and will consider its approach to its work on homelessness at a future meeting.

[Official Report of the meeting](#)

[Meeting papers](#)

12th Meeting 2017 (Session 5), Wednesday 26 April 2017

3. Work programme (in private): The Committee considered its work programme and agreed to issue a call for views as part of its work on homelessness.

22nd Meeting 2017 (Session 5), Wednesday 20 September 2017

4. Homelessness: The Committee took evidence, in a roundtable format, from—

- Saffron Rohan and Simone Smith;

- Rhys Campbell, Thomas Lyon, Julie McCallagh and Emma Pearce.

[Official Report of the meeting](#)

[Meeting papers](#)

23rd Meeting 2017 (Session 5), Wednesday 27 September 2017

2. Homelessness: The Committee took evidence from—

- Bridget Curran, Glasgow Housing Options Steering Board;
- Fiona King, Campaigns and Public Affairs Manager, Shelter Scotland;
- Jules Oldham, Head of Policy and Operations, Homeless Action Scotland;
- Dr Neil Hamlet, NHS Health Scotland.

4. Consideration of evidence (in private): The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the evidence heard at agenda item 2 to a future meeting.

[Official Report of the meeting](#)

[Meeting papers](#)

Supplementary Written Evidence

Following the meeting on 27 September 2017, Glasgow Housing Options Steering Board forwarded a copy of the Glasgow Housing Options Evaluation 2016 to the Committee:

[Glasgow Housing Options Evaluation 2015](#)

Shelter Scotland also shared with the Committee its recommendations for action to the Scottish Government's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group:

[Shelter Scotland's Recommendations to the Scottish Government's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group](#)

24th Meeting 2017 (Session 5), Wednesday 25 October 2017

2. Homelessness: The Committee took evidence from—

- Cllr Kelly Parry, Spokesperson for Community Wellbeing, and Nicola Dickie, Policy Manager, COSLA;
- Patrick McKay, Operations Manager, Turning Point Scotland;
- Dr Adam Burley, Consultant Clinical Psychologist, The Access Point;
- Lorraine McGrath, Chief Executive, Simon Community Scotland;

and then from—

- Joe Connolly, Criminal Justice Voluntary Sector Forum;
- Paul Brown, Chief Executive, Legal Services Agency;

- Nicky Brown, Homelessness and Housing Support Senior Manager, City of Edinburgh Council;
- Jamie Stewart, Housing Development Officer, Scottish Refugee Council.

3. Homelessness (in private): The Committee considered the evidence heard at agenda item 2.

[Official Report of the meeting](#)

[Meeting papers](#)

Supplementary Written Evidence

COSLA and the Legal Services Agency provided follow-up correspondence to the evidence sessions on 25 October 2017:

[Correspondence from COSLA to the Clerk of 25 October 2017](#)

[Correspondence from the Legal Services Agency to the Clerk of 3 November 2017](#)

Simon Community Scotland also provided details of Rough Sleepers and Vulnerable People's street census of begging undertaken on 20 May 2017, following up the evidence session on 25 October 2017:

[Rough Sleepers and Vulnerable People Street Census of Begging](#)

25th Meeting 2017 (Session 5), Wednesday 1 November 2017

1. Homelessness: The Committee took evidence from—

- Kevin Stewart, Minister for Local Government and Housing, David Signorini, Head of Better Homes, and Marion Gibbs, Team Leader, Homelessness, Scottish Government.

8. Homelessness (in private): The Committee considered the evidence heard earlier in the meeting and agreed to consider a draft report in private at a future meeting.

[Official Report of the meeting](#)

[Meeting papers](#)

Supplementary Written Evidence

The Minister for Local Government and Housing wrote to the Committee on 13 November 2017 with follow-up information from the evidence session on 1 November 2017:

[Correspondence from the Minister for Local Government and Housing to the Convener of 13 November 2017](#)

The Minister for Local Government and Housing wrote to the Committee on 29 November 2017 in relation to recommendations on actions to minimize rough sleeping from the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group:

[Correspondence from the Minister for Local Government and Housing to the Convener of 29 November 2017](#)

2nd Meeting 2018 (Session 5), Wednesday 17 January 2018

5. Homelessness (in private): The Committee considered a draft report and agreed to consider a further draft at its next meeting.

3rd Meeting 2018 (Session 5), Wednesday 24 January 2018

6. Homelessness (in private): The Committee considered a draft report and agreed to consider a further report at its next meeting.

4th Meeting 2018 (Session 5), Wednesday 31 January 2018

3. Homelessness (in private): The Committee considered and agreed a draft report and agreed the arrangements for its publication.

Annex B – Written Evidence submitted to the Committee

The [written submissions of evidence](#) received by the Committee are available online:

- Submission from Christine Campbell
- Submission from Michael
- Submission from Living Solutions
- Submission from Dr Adam Burley
- Submission from Combat Stress
- Submission from Aberdeenshire Council
- Submission from Dumfries and Galloway Council
- Submission from Govan Law Centre
- Submission from Smile4life, University of Dundee
- Submission from Marie Curie
- Submission from North Ayrshire Council
- Submission from the Big Lottery Fund
- Submission from NHS Health Scotland
- Submission from YouthLink Scotland
- Submission from Professor Tom McMillan, University of Glasgow
- Submission from North Lanarkshire Council
- Submission from Police Scotland
- Submission from Community Resources Network Scotland
- Submission from Rachel Gollan
- Submission from the Chartered Institute of Housing Scotland
- Submission from Turning Point Scotland
- Submission from Julie Jackson
- Submission from South Lanarkshire Council
- Submission from Engender
- Submission from the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland

- Submission from the Advisory Group at the Life Changes Trust
- Submission from the Legal Services Agency
- Submission from Falkirk Council
- Submission from the Scottish Care Leavers Covenant
- Submission from SOLACE Scotland
- Submission from Homeless Action Scotland
- Submission from Positive Prison? Positive Futures
- Submission from NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Directorate of Public Health
- Submission from Citizens Advice Scotland
- Submission from Rowan Alba Limited
- Submission from Edinburgh Women's Aid
- Submission from Bethany Christian Trust
- Submission from the Cyrenians
- Submission from LGBT Youth Scotland
- Submission from the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors in Scotland
- Submission from COSLA
- Submission from Simon Community Scotland
- Submission from Shelter Scotland
- Submission from the Criminal Justice Voluntary Sector Forum
- Submission from Glasgow Homelessness Network
- Submission from Angus Council
- Submission from Glasgow Housing Options Steering Board
- Submission from Debbie McNab
- Submission from East Lothian Council
- Submission from Crisis
- Submission from Scottish Women's Aid
- Submission from Action for Children Scotland
- Submission from Street Soccer Scotland
- Submission from the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers

- Submission from Dr Rebecca Forrester and Dr Gemma Findlay
- Submission from the Salvation Army
- Submission from the Scottish Refugee Council
- Submission from the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations
- Submission from Aberdeen City Council
- Submission from Fife Council
- Submission from Highland Council
- Submission from Ruaridh Dean
- Submission from the City of Edinburgh Council
- Submission from Midlothian Health and Homelessness Steering Group
- Submission from Aid & Abet

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- [4] Local Government and Communities Committee 08 March 2017, Adam Lang (Shelter Scotland), contrib. 5, <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=10834&c=1982033>
- [5] Local Government and Communities Committee 27 September 2017, Jules Oldham (Homeless Action Scotland), contrib. 123, <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11118&c=2026821>
- [6] Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers. (2017, June). Written Submission. Retrieved from http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S5_Local_Gov/Inquiries/20170615_Homelessness_ALACHO.pdf
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