

Media Briefing

Contact: Nicola Baxter, Amanda Howie 0844 515 2442 (connects to out of hours service)

SHELTER SCOTLAND: Media briefing on 2012 homelessness commitment and the 2009 interim target

- 1. How big is the problem of homelessness in Scotland?** In 2008/9, nearly 41,914 households were assessed as homeless. There were around 22,000 children living in households accepted as homeless (1). (*These figures are the last full year figure available from the Scottish Government's Statistical Bulletins*). The best way we have to measure the scale of the problem is by looking at how many people are actually assessed as being homeless by their local authority. Whilst these households may have a roof over their heads, they are often living in inadequate temporary accommodation like hostels or bed and breakfast hotels.
- 2. Why do people end up homeless?** About a quarter of people or families can't continue to live with their friends or relatives. A quarter of people have had their relationship break down. The third most common reason is people being evicted or having their homes repossessed.
- 3. Who is homeless?** Two thirds are single people. Just under a third are families with children. Just one in twenty are couples without children. Historically families with children got the most help as homeless people. In recent years more support has been given to single people. But by 2012 these distinctions will be ended and the right to a home will be based on the housing needs of the individual and not how they are labelled.
- 4. How is it decided if people are homeless?** The following questions are currently asked to decide if someone is homeless. Currently, the answers to these questions will determine how your application is treated and what help you're entitled to:
 - 1. Are you homeless?** – Meaning: do you have somewhere to live for less than the next two months
 - 2. Are you in 'priority need'?** – Meaning: do you fall within a prescribed list of people who will be helped. For example are you a family with children

3. *Are you intentionally homeless?* – This question aims to understand how reasonable/appropriate it was or is to stay in your current accommodation. For example if you are escaping violence or threats from neighbours you may have to leave – even though you technically have a house you could stay in.
4. *Do you have a local connection to the area?* – Meaning: have you moved from somewhere to apply as homeless away from where you lived before.

5. What is the 2012 commitment? In 2003 the Scottish Parliament passed groundbreaking legislation stating that everyone who is homeless would have the right to a home by 2012. The 2003 legislation (Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003) means that local authorities will have to abolish the current rationing system of deciding who is in ‘**priority need**’ for permanent housing. (**See Question 3 – How is it decided if people are homeless?**)

6. Why is it important? By 2012 everyone should be entitled to a permanent home. This is the underlying principle behind the legislation. However, the challenge remains to ensure there are enough decent affordable houses for people to live in. There’s no point giving people the right to a home, if it doesn’t mean a chance of actually living in one.

Scotland has been recognised as having the best homelessness legislation in Western Europe. In 2006 Scotland’s “great mission” to end homelessness was praised at an international conference on homelessness. See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/4834902.stm>.

The target to give all people the right to a home by 2012 is widely-regarded as at the cutting edge of progressive reform of social law in Europe. Already Scotland has had visits from and been invited to speak in Ireland, France, the Basque Country and Finland, as well as Australia and North America. France, in particular, has recently agreed its own 2012 target, inspired by Scotland.

7. What was the 2009 interim target and did we meet it? The legislation states that by December 31, 2012, all local authorities will have to give equal priority to all homeless people. But councils were required to meet a target to get “halfway” to 2012 by March 2009. So, for example, across Scotland as a whole, last year, councils were assessing on average 83% of applicants as being in priority need but as a nation, we needed to assess on average 86.5% (i.e. halfway between the 2003 national average of 73% and 100 per cent in 2012). The same calculation can be done for each local authority, so they need to be halfway from where they were in 2003 and 100 per cent in 2012.

8. What needs to be done to meet the commitment? By 2012 people won’t be assessed on the category they fall into – the most important thing will be their individual needs. Local authorities are already working on this and we are keen that this progress continues. But that change alone won’t make the real difference Shelter Scotland wants to see. To reduce the actual numbers of homeless people we need improved ways of preventing homelessness happening in the first place and to build more decent affordable places for people to live.

9. Can we meet the commitment? Yes we can. Many local authorities are making good progress in those areas where the 2012 commitment is a priority for councillors and politicians at a local level. For this momentum to continue, the key thing required is political will at local and national level. Local authority's ability to meet the commitment depends on how much scope they have to both prevent homelessness and provide more homes. That's why Shelter Scotland continues to call for building more homes and making best use of those we already have to be a top priority for Scottish politicians.

Scottish Government annual homelessness statistics:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/08/31093245/3>

For more information about Shelter Scotland, visit <http://scotland.shelter.org.uk>

For more information or to set up interviews, call the media office on 0844 515 2442
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