

Homelessness: Far From Fixed

Why Scotland
needs a National
Homelessness
Strategy

September 2016

CONTENTS

Foreword	3
Chapter 1: Executive summary	4
Chapter 2: Introduction	7
Political and Social Context	7
Chapter 3: Why does Scotland need a National Homelessness Strategy now?	9
Strategic Groups	10
Strategic Direction	11
Chapter 4: What should a renewed national focus on homelessness address?	12
Homelessness rights	12
Guidance	13
Housing Options	14
Homelessness Prevention	14
Lessons from Wales	16
Homelessness Prevention Pathways	17
Use of Temporary Accommodation	18
Funding of Temporary Accommodation	19
Rough sleeping	20
Gatekeeping	21
Chapter 5: Delivering a National Homelessness Strategy	22
Person-centred services, service user involvement and co-production	22
Joined-up Thinking	23
Housing Strategy	24
Ongoing monitoring	25
Chapter 6: Conclusion	26

FOREWORD

Scotland leads the world in tackling homelessness. That claim has been a source of pride over the last 15 years. But it has always needed to be earned rather than simply asserted.

Back in 2002 the landmark Homelessness Task Force report certainly set new standards in breadth and ambition. A lot has been achieved since then: most significantly, reform to homelessness law in Scotland, to give all homeless people similar rights: the right to a settled home.

However, homelessness is far from fixed. The best legal framework is only as good as the way it provides people with the help they need. Across the country services are uneven. 10,000 people are in temporary accommodation: the right to a home is not the same as getting a home. Meanwhile, 150,000 households on council house waiting lists show the wider strain on the system.

That is why it is time to re-forge a commitment to tackling homelessness, building on the gains of the last decade and a half but also recognising the areas where progress has been patchier. Scotland needs also to recognise the changing shape of welfare, the shifts in population and the evolving institutional landscape.

So that re-commitment is not just one for housing campaigners and housing practitioners. It is for political leaders at all levels, political parties; members of the public and users of housing services.

A refreshed homelessness plan and programme would re-invigorate current expert and practitioner groups. It would set new horizons for homelessness services and deliver on other top-ranking national priorities: improving social justice, bridging the attainment gaps in schools and focusing public spending on prevention work.

Most of all, it would allow that claim – that Scotland leads the world on homelessness – to be backed by evidence of real progress, real change.

The 2002 homeless commitment was the product of a new infant parliament, eager to show the world that new forms of institution could make a real difference. As Scotland's Parliament grows into a new, more mature phase there is no better focus than homelessness to show why that matters.

Graeme Brown, Director, Shelter Scotland

CHAPTER 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Shelter Scotland wants the Scottish Government to commit to delivering a new National Homelessness Strategy. This is our overarching and most important ask of the Scottish Government at this time. A new Homelessness Strategy should be a national, cross-departmental action plan which shows renewed commitment to tackling homelessness and becomes the cornerstone of successfully preventing and responding to homelessness in Scotland in all of its forms. We want clear leadership and accountability to be attached to this, and for the action plan to be considered a priority for the Scottish Government, especially considering the high cost of homelessness¹ against continuing cuts to public funding.

We believe that a new strategic action plan should be co-produced with a range of stakeholders and partners, including people who have experienced, or are experiencing, homelessness. As such, we have not set out a detailed blueprint for this, rather we have identified areas that we think a new strategy should cover and set out a series of recommendations to be considered.

As part of developing such a strategic plan, we would like the Scottish Government and stakeholders to review our recommendations for further action set out in this paper in order to reinforce existing practice and the legal framework around homelessness in Scotland. Adopting a national plan that is co-produced and committed to across national and local government and the third sector is at the heart of our vision, however, we think that a new National Homelessness Strategy should give priority to the following areas:

1) **Prevention:** Excellent work has been done in recent years, with the introduction of Prevention and Housing Options guidance. Around 55% of approaches for assistance were helped to resolve housing problems with Housing Options advice and did not go on to make a homeless application in 2016² according to the most recent statistics. However, we must ensure that people are being given appropriate Housing Options, are aware of their housing rights and are not being wrongly deterred from making a homeless application. We want the existing Prevention guidance to be reviewed and updated accordingly and an investigation into the potential

¹ Nicholas Pleace (2015); [At What Cost? An estimation of the financial costs of single homelessness in the UK](#); Crisis

² Housing Options (PREVENT1) Statistics in Scotland: Annual Update 2015/2016 [DOCX, 1574.5 kb: 23 Jun 2016] <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0050/00502034.docx>

merits of introducing a statutory prevention duty similar to the Welsh duty now in place. Local authorities should also be encouraged, facilitated and collaborated with to develop and share effective Prevention solutions.

2) Temporary Accommodation: Across Scotland, there are currently over 10,000 households living in temporary accommodation, including over 5,000 children. Temporary accommodation is a lifeline for vulnerable households and a cornerstone of the response to homelessness in Scotland. We need to ensure that this accommodation is good quality and most of all, affordable, especially for working households, and that there is a clear plan for moving on from temporary accommodation for every household. Currently too many people are spending far too long in temporary accommodation.

Shelter Scotland wants the Scottish Government to commit to a review into the current use and funding of temporary accommodation in light of Shelter Scotland research which showed that households with children collectively spent one million days in temporary accommodation in 2014-15. The use of B&Bs should be particularly addressed with the overall aim of finding ways to sustainably fund a sufficient level of good quality and suitable temporary accommodation across Scotland. Additionally, we want to see an end to the systemic challenges which lead to incidents of gatekeeping in certain local authorities.³

There is a large variation in the cost of temporary accommodation across Scotland. Changes to the way in which housing benefit will pay for the cost of temporary accommodation puts the provision of funding for this vital homelessness service at risk.⁴ With an estimated shortfall in funding for temporary accommodation in excess of £20m, the Scottish Government and local authorities must, as a matter of urgency, review the provision of temporary accommodation to ensure that it can continue to be provided in a way that is affordable for both the social landlord and occupant, and is not compromised by the uncertainty of future cuts to funding.

3) Multiple and complex needs homelessness: We want the Scottish Government to pay particular attention to the rising number of homeless applicants who have multiple and complex needs and who make up the majority of rough sleepers in Scotland. Analysis of the most recent national homelessness statistics tells us that, while homeless applications are reducing, there is a growing number of individuals with complex support

³ Shelter Scotland (2016) [The use of temporary accommodation in Scotland](#); Scottish Housing Regulator (2014) [Housing Options in Scotland, A thematic enquiry](#).

⁴ Anna Evans Housing Consultancy (2016) [Funding Homelessness Services in Scotland](#)

needs.⁵ The lack of proactive and innovative thinking around how best to prevent or end homelessness for these individuals has led to high costs to the public as local authorities struggle to find cost effective, sustainable solutions with very little guidance and sharing of best practice.

The general homelessness services that are currently available cannot ably meet the needs of these clients in an effective way and this must be addressed. Local authorities must be facilitated and encouraged to be innovative, to work jointly with appropriate partner services and to share best practice locally and nationally.

⁵ Scottish Government (2016) 'Homelessness in Scotland: 2015 – 2016' Edinburgh: National Statistics

CHAPTER 2: INTRODUCTION

From 2012 all unintentionally homeless households in Scotland have had a right to settled accommodation.⁶ Since then the main focus for local authorities has been on developing and embedding a ‘Housing Options’ approach, which focuses on preventing homelessness where possible and finding alternatives to a household making a homeless application. Despite the far broader group of people that authorities have had a statutory duty to assist, the number of homeless applications and acceptances have been steadily declining since 2012. In 2015/16, 34,662 households applied as homeless, 4% fewer than the year before and a 24% reduction on 2011/12.⁷ This decline can be attributed to the effectiveness of the Housing Options approach, rather than any reduction in the number of people in housing crisis approaching authorities.⁸

However, despite these positive top-line figures, there remain significant challenges in responding to homelessness in Scotland. Long delayed guidance on the delivery of Housing Options issued in March 2016 has stressed that local authorities should be recording a homeless application from everyone that has a concern about homelessness, rather than only doing so where prevention has not been possible.⁹ Many local authorities predict that this change in process will result in a significant increase in the number of statutory homeless cases over the coming year and will be a challenge for some operational teams. Other issues include pressure on temporary accommodation for many local authorities, the ability to move households on to settled accommodation, the increasing proportion of people with complex needs and the need to make appropriate services available for this group.

Political and Social Context

The broader context for responding to homelessness in Scotland is also challenging. Local authorities have been subject to several years of austerity, with homelessness services and temporary accommodation – and subsequently their voluntary sector partners – facing increasing cuts for the foreseeable future through changes to the social security system.¹⁰ This is against a context of political and economic uncertainty across the

⁶ Homelessness (Abolition of Priority Need Test) (Scotland) Order 2012

⁷ Scottish Government (2016) ‘Homelessness in Scotland: 2015 – 2016’ Edinburgh: National Statistics

⁸ Fitzpatrick, S. et al, (2015) ‘The homelessness monitor: Scotland 2015’ London: Crisis

⁹ COSLA and the Scottish Government (2016) ‘[Housing Options Guidance](#)’

¹⁰ Anna Evans Housing Consultancy (2016) [Funding Homelessness Services in Scotland](#)

United Kingdom with a recent vote to leave the European Union, significant change in the leadership of Westminster parties and the Scottish Parliament once again contemplating an independence referendum and ongoing constitutional change. Whilst the long term impact of these simultaneous changes is uncertain, one thing we can be sure of is that the poorest and most vulnerable are consistently hit hardest by social and political instability. This makes it all the more important that the new Scottish Government follows through on its commitment to create a 'Fairer Scotland'¹¹, which must include preventing and alleviating homelessness.

The Holyrood elections in May 2016 have led to the appointment of a new Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities, and new Ministers for Local Government and Housing as well as a new Minister for Social Security. This restructured Cabinet leadership is accompanied by a reorganisation of the Parliamentary Committees in Holyrood and presents an opportunity for fresh thought, momentum and action to tackle homelessness.

¹¹ <https://fairer.scot/about/>

CHAPTER 3: WHY DOES SCOTLAND NEED A NATIONAL HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY NOW?

Given the repeated public statements made by the previous Minister for Housing and Welfare¹² about the priority of preventing homelessness, it is notable that the Scottish Government has not committed to a renewed strategy to tackle homelessness. Strategies are important because they demonstrate political commitment, galvanise action, express a common vision and goal, and set out responsibilities for various parties. From a civil society perspective, such strategies allow the public and stakeholders to assess and monitor action and progress.

Strategies are a common approach to setting out government commitment and galvanising action. In the last Parliament (2011 – 2016), the Scottish Government developed strategies on the economy, land use, quality in healthcare, beating cancer and parenting, to name but a few. Shelter Scotland, along with other organisations in the homelessness sector^{13 14}, called for a new National Homelessness Strategy in our manifesto for the current Parliament and was therefore delighted when on 5 April 2016 during a hustings in Edinburgh, representatives from all political parties publicly agreed that a homelessness strategy would be a positive step forward for the next Government in Scotland.¹⁵

The adoption of such a strategy is strategically appropriate at this time as it links closely with a number of the Scottish Government's National Outcomes, and it comes at a time of opportunity with increased powers coming to the Scottish Government. A well-planned, cross-departmental homelessness action plan will contribute to outcomes around tackling inequalities, improving health, building strong communities and improving the quality of public services, among others.

Within this context, this paper outlines the areas that Shelter Scotland believes should be addressed by a strategic plan and makes the case for

¹² E.g. Scottish Parliament (8 October 2014) [Official Report: Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee Session 4'](#)

¹³ Shelter Scotland (2016) [Manifesto for Homes](#)

¹⁴ Crisis (2016) [Crisis' Manifesto to End Homelessness](#)

¹⁵ Scottish Housing News (2016) [Blog: Unanimous support for a new homelessness strategy secured at Scotland's Housing Hustings](#)

why fresh leadership, direction and accountability are important for homelessness in Scotland at this time.¹⁶

Strategic Groups

The main group with responsibility for providing strategic leadership for homelessness in Scotland is the Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group (HPSG), jointly convened by COSLA and the Scottish Government.¹⁷ The HPSG developed out of the earlier 'Joint 2012 Steering Group', which had overseen progress towards meeting the 2012 Commitment to end priority need in homelessness assessments. The HPSG has met three or four times a year since 2013 and is attended by the Minister for Housing at roughly every other meeting. A work plan for the HPSG in 2015/16 was published but actions or progress have not been noted. The inclusion of standing items on the agenda, such as youth homelessness, has not led to any specific actions or decision making by the group but has served as more of a reporting function. In the view of Shelter Scotland, the group operates as a sounding board that hears about developments happening regarding homelessness across Scotland, rather than a strategic leadership group that works with Government to effect change.

The Joint Housing Policy and Delivery Group (JHPDG) published a five year plan in June 2015. The JHPDG brings together a wide range of stakeholders and takes a collaborative, co-production based approach to delivery. The main focus of the group has been on ensuring new housing supply, but the action plan of the JHPDG was referred to by the previous Minister for Housing and Welfare when questioned by the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee on whether an action plan for homelessness is needed.¹⁸ Only one of the 34 actions in the plan deals specifically with homelessness and is very broad: '*Providing targeted advice and support to cover a wider range of housing journey pathways for those at risk of homelessness*' (Action 29). As we set out in this paper, this action is only a small part of what should be included in a new national strategy for the prevention and alleviation of homelessness.

¹⁶ This paper builds upon People Not Process: An action plan for the delivery of Scotland's homeless commitment (2013), which outlined the principles that should sit behind any strategic planning.

¹⁷ Membership includes: COSLA (Chair), Scottish housing Network, Shelter Scotland, Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, Homeless Action Scotland, NHS Health Scotland, Scottish Public Health Network, Scottish Government, SOLACE and ALACHO

¹⁸ Scottish Parliament (8 October 2014) [Official Report: Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee Session 4](#)

Other smaller working groups exist in Scotland that could be said to contribute to the strategic development of practice. Most notably, the 'Health and Homelessness Group', jointly convened by NHS Health Scotland and Scottish Government has also recently emerged as an important body in the development of responses to homelessness in Scotland. Although it is a longstanding group, it has had a more significant voice in recent months as a result of the work of ScotPHN, who published 'Restoring the Public Health response to Homelessness in Scotland' in 2015.¹⁹ This rise of health and homelessness up the strategic agenda is welcome but it should be regarded as an organic move, the result of investment in the homelessness agenda by public health, rather than as a strategically co-ordinated national development.

Strategic Direction

The final report of the Homelessness Task Force in 2002 provided concrete recommendations, which were the foundation of a clear strategic direction for homelessness in Scotland.²⁰ The momentum of this work culminated in the abolition of priority need in 2012. The context has significantly changed since the Homelessness Task Force presented its final report, notably with a different political and economic environment. However, the important themes identified in the final report are still very relevant today and homelessness in Scotland has been far from fixed in the intervening years.²¹ Given the current opportunity of the new Scottish Government taking up increased powers through the period of this parliament, we now find ourselves at a key moment to refresh the momentum of the Task Force and revisit and revise their original recommendations.

¹⁹ Hetherington, K. and Hamlet, N. (2015) ['Restoring the Public Health response to Homelessness in Scotland'](#). Scottish Public Health Network.

²⁰ Scottish Executive (2002) ['Helping Homeless People: An Action Plan for Prevention and Effective Response, Homelessness Task Force Final report'](#)

²¹ Shelter Scotland (2011) [Progress and Drift: A Review of the Homelessness Task Force Recommendations.](#)

CHAPTER 4: WHAT SHOULD A RENEWED NATIONAL FOCUS ON HOMELESSNESS ADDRESS?

Homelessness rights

The Homelessness Task Force produced a series of 59 recommendations in 2002 following a review of the 'causes and nature of homelessness in Scotland'.²² These recommendations served as a blueprint for a systematic shake-up of the way services to homeless people were delivered: addressing legislation, policy and culture across the sector.

The most significant recommendation set out a 10-year timeframe for the removal of the 'priority need' test when a homeless application was made. Under the Homelessness Etc. (Scotland) Act, 2003²³, a timetable was set to abolish the test of priority need when a homelessness assessment was made. This meant that all households who found themselves homeless through no fault of their own had the right to be housed permanently by their local authority, provided they lived or worked in the area they were applying as homeless to. This represented a radical change and challenge for local authorities, but put Scotland's response to homelessness at the forefront of progressive policy. The expansion of this rights-led approach rightly received national and international acclaim. The framework was also laid to remove the intentionality and local connection tests but this has never been implemented. The failure to commence other parts of legislation on 'local connection' and 'intentionality' has never been reviewed or explained.

In 2013 a duty for local authorities to provide housing support^{24 25} was introduced. This new duty ensured that local authorities would have to provide a housing support needs assessment to all unintentionally homeless households and ensure anyone in need of additional housing support received it.

Scotland should be proud of the strong housing rights that it affords its citizens and its legislative recognition of the need for support for some

²² Scottish Executive (2002) 'Helping Homeless People: An Action Plan for Prevention and Effective Response' [Homelessness Task force Final Report](#)

²³ Shelter Scotland (2003) [Fact sheet: The Homelessness etc. \(Scotland\) Act](#)

²⁴ Shelter Scotland (2012) [Supporting Homeless People: Implementing the housing support duty](#)

²⁵ Scottish Government (2013) Housing Support Duty To Homeless Households - [Guidance For Local Authorities](#)

homeless households. However, with two-thirds of the original legislative package from the Task Force currently lying dormant, and ongoing challenges in delivering the new rights in practice, we are far from meeting the central ambitions of the Homelessness Task Force²⁶.

Shelter Scotland recommends that a new National Homelessness Strategy should take a fresh look at the legislative framework and the rights that have not yet been implemented in Scotland.

Guidance

Sitting behind the legislation to guide practitioners in its application are the Code of Guidance on Homelessness²⁷ and the Preventing Homelessness Guidance.²⁸ In response to recommendations from the Scottish Housing Regulator, Housing Options Guidance²⁹ has now also been issued, although, as it is not statutory guidance, there is not the same level of accountability around adherence to it. The introduction of this non-statutory guidance has highlighted that sections of the statutory Code of Guidance are now out of date, largely due to changes in connected legislation such as benefits and immigration. Also, with the development of the Housing Options approach, some of the language used in the statutory guidance does not translate to the way that services are now structured and delivered. Alongside other colleagues across the sector, the experience of Shelter Scotland frontline advisers is that the outdated nature of sections of the statutory guidance undermine its validity and coherence as a whole and has led to reports of bad practice in areas such as Glasgow. For example, failure by homelessness caseworkers in Glasgow to assess cases and provide temporary accommodation³⁰. The practical outworking of this is that frontline advisers find that the Code is no longer an effective tool with which to hold agencies accountable.

Shelter Scotland recommends that as part of delivering a refreshed action plan on homelessness, the statutory guidance on preventing and responding to homelessness should be updated to dovetail better with the Housing Options Guidance and form a coherent body of guidance on implementing the legislation and good practice.

²⁶ Shelter Scotland (2011) Progress and Drift: A Review of the Homelessness Task Force recommendations. http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_library/policy_library_folder/progress_and_drift_a_review_of_the_homelessness_task_force_recommendations

²⁷ Scottish Executive (2005) 'Code of Guidance on Homelessness'

²⁸ Scottish Government (2009) 'Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities on Preventing Homelessness'

²⁹ COSLA & Scottish Government (2016) [Housing Options Guidance](#)

³⁰ Glasgow Homelessness Network (2015) [Annual Homelessness Monitoring Report April 2014 – March 2015](#)

Housing Options

The development of the Housing Options approach in Scotland should be viewed as the most significant strategic development in homelessness in Scotland in the past six years. Housing Options was led by the Scottish Government at its introduction in 2010, but since then the Government has encouraged local authorities to apply the approach to their own local context and development has happened ‘from the ground up’. The main vehicle of support for implementing the new approach to meeting housing need has been through five regional Housing Options ‘Hubs’ of local authorities sharing good practice. Local authorities have also been heavily involved in the development and production of the national Housing Options Guidance and the planned Housing Options training toolkit. The strength of the local authority led, collaborative ‘ground up’ approach has been that Housing Options is closely linked with the reality of services on the ground and that there has been – broadly speaking – collective buy-in to what has been developed. The Guidance and the training toolkit are both significant in the development of priorities and delivery of homelessness services.

However these positive steps forward regarding Housing Options cannot be equated to a strategic approach to homelessness in Scotland. Housing Options does not respond adequately to the needs of all homeless people or every aspect of homelessness. In particular, it has been recognised that people with complex needs including rough sleepers can fall outside the scope of those helped by this approach and the focus on Housing Options has led to a lack of response to this highly vulnerable group.³¹ Other pressing issues for the homelessness sector, such as the changes in funding to temporary accommodation are also not addressed by a focus on delivering Housing Options.

Homelessness Prevention

Homelessness prevention activity has undoubtedly increased in Scotland as a result of the Housing Options approach. This is apparent in the downward trend in homeless applications despite the number of people approaching local authorities with reasons related to a risk of homelessness remaining relatively constant.³² This trend is showing signs of levelling off, however, and the drive to improve prevention measures

³¹ Shelter Scotland (2016) [Complex needs: Homelessness services in the Housing Options East Hub](#)

³² Shelter Scotland (2015) [Statistical Analysis Report: Homelessness and prevention through Housing Options in 2015 - what does the data show?](#) Edinburgh: Shelter Scotland

should never lie stagnant. There are specific areas of concern to which further attention must be given such as the increase in social sector evictions, tackling homelessness for those leaving prison³³ and the disproportionately slow reduction in the number of young people becoming homeless.³⁴ The research conducted for the 'Homelessness Monitor: Scotland 2015' compares the 'light touch' approach to Housing Options in Scotland with the 'activist' prevention approach in England.³⁵

In the context of budgetary pressures there is a real risk that investment in important preventative work will be reduced at a local level.³⁶ Aside from the personal distress that an episode of homelessness will cause, not preventing homelessness where it might have been possible to do so can ultimately be costly for the public purse. A new national strategy could safeguard against that risk and ensure that prevention measures in Scotland continue to improve.

The publication of the 'Prevent1' statistics for the past two years has given a helpful insight into the level of prevention work that does go on across Scotland. Predominately the Prevent1 statistical analysis has shown that there is wide variation in the help that is offered to households at risk of homelessness in Scotland.³⁷ This is one reason why consideration of a prevention duty, similar to the Welsh model, may be helpful for Scotland. For 45% of Housing Options approaches from January to March 2016 the outcome recorded was that the household made a homelessness application. However, Shelter Scotland argue making a homeless application is not an outcome, but a step along the way to an outcome. In order to understand what is happening to homeless households it would be more helpful to know what eventually happens when people have gone through the Housing Options route as opposed to making a homelessness application. It would also be helpful for strategic development of effective prevention interventions if there was more analysis of outcomes next to specific types of prevention intervention, such as debt advice or landlord negotiation, rather than solely levels of engagement in terms of level of activity (recorded as Types I, II & III).

Shelter Scotland recommends that continued prioritisation of homelessness prevention should be supported by ongoing analysis

³³ Shelter (2015) [Preventing Homelessness and Reducing Reoffending](#)

³⁴ Fitzpatrick, S. et al. (2015) 'The homelessness monitor: Scotland 2015' London: Crisis

³⁵ Fitzpatrick, S. et al. (2015) 'The homelessness monitor: Scotland 2015' London: Crisis

³⁶ Evans, A. (2016) '[Funding Homelessness Services in Scotland](#)' Edinburgh: Shelter Scotland

³⁷ Scottish Government (2016) '[Housing Options \(PREVENT1\) Statistics in Scotland: 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2016](#)'. Edinburgh Official Statistics

and strategic oversight of statistics to increase understanding of effective prevention interventions.

Lessons from Wales

In 2014, the Welsh Parliament introduced legislation that made prevention of homelessness a statutory duty.³⁸ Initial analysis of the impact of this has spurred the Westminster Government to investigate whether a similar model in England should be adopted.³⁹ The context and reasons for investigating the implementation of Welsh-style legislation would be different in Scotland, but there is good reason to consider the Welsh approach here too.

Since the introduction of Housing Options a dynamic has arisen between the positive aspects of preventing homelessness and the right to housing afforded to anyone who is unintentionally homeless in Scotland. Local authorities tread the line between these two approaches, with variation in how this is approached across the country. Following the input of the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR), the Housing Options Guidance has made it clear that all households who are at risk of homelessness should make a homelessness application, with prevention of homelessness happening alongside. For some authorities that had been chronologically prioritising preventative approaches, this will be a significant change in practice. At the moment, the prevention element of the Housing Options approach is not statutorily prescribed in the same way as legislation that covers housing and homelessness rights, and therefore is not subject to the same level of scrutiny by the SHR. A legal duty to prevent homelessness may further incentivise local authorities to innovate their prevention measures. A report commissioned by Crisis⁴⁰ details the need for more robust prevention as well as 'squaring the circle' of the role of prevention within a rights based framework.

Shelter Scotland recommends that as part of a National Homelessness Strategy there should be an investigation into the merits and impact of introducing a prevention duty to Scotland.

³⁸ The Housing (Wales) Act 2014

³⁹ Communities and Local Government Committee: Homelessness inquiry
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/communities-and-local-government-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/inquiry1/>

⁴⁰ Fitzpatrick, S. et al, (2015) 'The homelessness monitor: Scotland 2015' London: Crisis

Homelessness Prevention Pathways

As with the broader development of Housing Options, the development of prevention activity in local authorities has been organic in response to local contexts and needs, leading to varied availability of prevention approaches. The recent introduction of 'Prevent1' statistics have demonstrated the broad range of prevention responses that people will receive depending on where in Scotland they present as homeless. From a nationwide perspective, a more consistent, strategic approach to prevention could tie together, strengthen and build on good practice that already exists. A re-conceptualisation of prevention activity in terms of 'prevention pathways' for particular vulnerable groups could re-invigorate and consolidate prevention approaches. This builds on language used in the JHPDG action plan for 'housing journey pathways'. A pathways framework is useful for:

- strategically aligning services and resources
- engaging wider partners
- identifying responses to emerging challenges for particular groups
- training staff
- strengthening referral pathways
- determining local gaps in provision.

A pathways approach to prevention has been promoted in England, notably in terms of youth homelessness with approximately half of English local authorities developing this approach⁴¹. It would be logical to align pathways to the groups identified as particularly at risk of homelessness in the Housing Options Guidance:

- people who have experienced family or relationship breakdown
- young people
- looked after young people
- liberated prisoners
- people leaving the armed forces
- people being discharged from hospital
- people fleeing abuse or violence
- people with addictions issues

⁴¹ <http://www.homeless.org.uk/connect/blogs/2015/sep/23/positive-pathway-for-young-people> . A copy of the youth homelessness pathway is included in Department for Communities and Local Government (2012) '[Making Every Contact Count: A joint Approach to Preventing Homelessness](#)' London: Department for Communities and Local Government

-
- people with financial difficulties
 - people with mental health issues
 - refugees
 - people with complex needs

Shelter Scotland recommends that to promote continued development of prevention and innovation at a local level, local authorities should be encouraged and supported to develop ‘prevention pathways’ for each of the identified groups and best practice models should be developed at a national level for authorities to draw on.

Use of Temporary Accommodation

Despite the downward trend in homeless applications and acceptances in recent years, the number of households in temporary accommodation (TA) across Scotland has remained relatively stable. In many areas, it is getting harder to move people on from TA and therefore households are spending longer without settled accommodation. This includes increasing numbers of children in TA. There were 5,224 children living in TA on 31 March 2016, an increase of 13% on the previous year. Children living in TA is of particular concern as time without a settled address can be harmful for development.⁴² Research by Shelter Scotland into the use of TA also found that in 2014-15, households who used TA stayed there for an average of 23 weeks, and that on average, households with families spent more time in TA than households without children. Overall, households with children spent just under 1 million days in local authority provided TA in 2014-15.⁴³

Shelter Scotland recommends that based on new information available through the collection of HL3 stats, the problem of length of stay in TA is analysed and a strategic approach is taken to reducing the length of time in temporary accommodation (where appropriate for households).

Limited availability of social housing lets is one of the main reason for the rise in the use of TA, and therefore continued close strategic links between the JHPDG and a new National Homelessness Strategy will be important. The Scottish Government’s commitment to building 50,000 new affordable

⁴² Hogg, S. et al, (2015) [‘An Unstable Start’](#) NSPCC

⁴³ Shelter Scotland (2016) [The use of temporary accommodation in Scotland](#)

homes over the lifetime of this Parliament, with three quarters for social let, is particularly welcome to address the use of TA.⁴⁴

Shelter Scotland recommends that a new National Homelessness Strategy should inform the development of new social housing to meet the needs of homeless households

Funding of Temporary Accommodation

Several changes to the way that temporary accommodation is subsidised and paid for since 2010 pose a significant threat to local authorities' ability to fund temporary accommodation without making large demands on other areas of council funding. In practice, this has resulted in authorities taking steps such as redesigning their temporary accommodation portfolios and re-evaluating rent charges.⁴⁵ Despite the positive actions this has achieved, the further tightening of funds to a resource that is already under pressure in many areas is of serious concern. Some local authorities predict that the quality of the temporary accommodation they provide will reduce and it is likely that the support available to people in temporary accommodation will also be cut back. This is of particular concern because Scotland does not currently have the safeguard of guidance on minimum standards in temporary accommodation for all.⁴⁶

The Scottish Government has encouraged local authorities to reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation. In recognition of the problems associated with the use of B&B, the Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2014 limits the use of this type of accommodation for pregnant women or families with children to 14 days, unless under exceptional circumstances. The order also sets certain standards that accommodation for this group must meet. However, due to the lack of security and often low standards, B&B accommodation should not only be considered unsuitable for pregnant women and children but also highly vulnerable people.

Shelter Scotland recommends that there must be a review of the funding of temporary accommodation in Scotland leading to a new model that is not solely reliant on the levels of housing benefit or

⁴⁴ Based on research published by Shelter Scotland, CIH Scotland and SFHA, Scotland must build 60,000 new homes each year to meet identified need for affordable housing. Shelter Scotland welcomes the Scottish Government commitment to build 50,000 new homes a year, but note that this falls short of what is required to meet need and demand. Powell, R, Dunning, R, Ferrarri, E, McKee, K (2015) [Affordable Housing Need in Scotland](#)

⁴⁵ Evans, A. (2016) ['Funding Homelessness Services in Scotland'](#) Edinburgh: Shelter Scotland

⁴⁶ Shelter Scotland & CIH (2011) [Temporary Accommodation Guidance](#)

Universal Credit housing element available via the Department of Work and Pensions.

Shelter Scotland recommends that a National Homelessness Strategy should set targets and approaches to the reduction of B&B use for all local authorities, particularly for vulnerable households.

Rough sleeping

In 1999 the Scottish Government set a target of ensuring that by 2003 no one should have to sleep rough in Scotland. This led to a programme of activity under the title “Rough Sleepers Initiative”.⁴⁷ Now, 13 years on from the ending of this initiative, there are strong anecdotal reports of an increase in rough sleeping from (at least) Edinburgh and Glasgow’s winter night shelters. There is also increasing recognition of, and concern for, the most vulnerable homeless people who have multiple and complex needs. There is a large overlap between this group and those that sleep rough. It has been shown that general homelessness services are not often designed to meet the needs of this group⁴⁸ and the Scottish Government has acknowledged that there is a need for outcomes for this group to be improved.⁴⁹ Indeed, there are many factors that have aligned to make the current context fertile for positive change such as the Integration of Health and Social Care, work following the publication of ‘Restoring of Homelessness as a Public Health issue’⁵⁰, increased understanding of Adverse Childhood Experience and the gradual increase of Housing First projects across Scotland.

Shelter Scotland recommends that the need to improve services and outcomes for homeless people with complex needs across Scotland should be a focus for a new National Homelessness Strategy. The Scottish Government should recommit to the target of reducing rough sleeping and commit to concrete actions based on the ‘key factors for change’ identified in Shelter Scotland’s recent research on the services for people with multiple and complex needs.

⁴⁷ Scottish Government (2005) Final Evaluation of the Rough Sleepers Initiative: [Chapter 3: The implementation and effectiveness of the RSI from the perspective of local authorities and national level agencies](#)

⁴⁸ Shelter Scotland (2016) [‘Complex Needs: Homelessness Services in the Housing Options East Hub’](#)

⁴⁹ Scottish Government paper to HPSG (21 May 2015) ‘HOMELESSNESS IN SCOTLAND: Rough sleeping, multiple exclusion and complex needs’

⁵⁰ Hetherington, K. and Hamlet, N. (2015) [‘Restoring the Public Health response to Homelessness in Scotland’](#). Scottish Public Health Network

Gatekeeping

In 2014 the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) published a thematic enquiry into the delivery of Housing Options⁵¹. The SHR voiced concerns that, at that time, rather than being a model of positive prevention practice, in some places Housing Options was being used to prevent households accessing their statutory right to homelessness assistance. In most cases, gatekeeping is prompted by a lack of availability of temporary accommodation stock. Shelter Scotland frontline advisers unfortunately continue to receive reports that this is still happening in some areas, with Glasgow City being notable and of particular concern. When challenged with a threat of judicial review on individual cases by organisations such as Shelter Scotland, local authorities tend to respond promptly and positively negating the need to continue to challenge in Court. As a result there have not been any cases brought to successful judicial review to publicly highlight poor practice in this area.

Shelter Scotland recommends that in recognition of concerns in this area, a National Homelessness Strategy should commit to the elimination of gatekeeping practices and tackling the systemic challenges ongoing in certain local authorities in meeting their homelessness commitments.

⁵¹ Scottish Housing Regulator (2014) '[Housing Options in Scotland: A thematic enquiry](#)'.

CHAPTER 5: DELIVERING A NATIONAL HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

Just as important as what a strategic action plan should contain is a commitment to how it should be delivered. Shelter Scotland would like to see our recommendations above considered in the content of a new Strategy, but we also recommend below how such a Strategy should be developed and delivered.

Person-centred services, service user involvement and co-production

Since the publication of the Homelessness Task Force report, Housing Options and homelessness services have – in the main – moved beyond a traditional, process driven, housing focussed role. The Housing Options approach not only promotes prevention but also is based on the principle of being person-centred. This has resulted in services across the country finding new ways of putting individuals' contexts, aspirations and choices at the centre of the work that is done to respond to risk of homelessness. An important element of this is the consideration of the holistic needs of each household, embedded in the Housing Support Services (Homelessness) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 that came into force in 2013.

Alongside this person-centred approach is an increasing momentum across voluntary and public sector homelessness organisations to involve service users in the design, delivery and evaluation of services. In 2016 the Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services published "Change the Frame: a project about journeys out of homelessness"⁵², which details innovative projects that incorporate people with lived experience. Change the Frame highlights the crucial role that service user involvement and co-production has in developing effective responses to homelessness.

Shelter Scotland recommends that in drafting and monitoring a new strategy or action plan, the Scottish Government should build on this existing good practice and include consultation and co-production with people with lived experience of homelessness.

⁵² Change the Frame: a project about journeys out of homelessness <http://blogs.iriss.org.uk/homelessness/>

Joined-up Thinking

As a policy area, homelessness does not sit in a vacuum. In fact, there is significant overlap with multiple other areas that impact on, and are impacted by, homelessness. This was evidenced by the Commission on Housing and Wellbeing⁵³, and is particularly true in the individual life experiences of people in housing crisis. For example, in a relatively common and simple scenario, a household might become homeless as a result of a mistake in the administration of the benefits system and, through the stress of the situation, lead to a decline in mental health. Thus, for a single household, systems, processes and decisions made by housing, benefits and mental health will impact their life. In order to ensure that the right services are available for individuals when they are needed, productive joint-working needs to exist at every level: national strategy, local plans and service delivery.

A positive example of movement towards joined-up strategic thinking has been through the inclusion of an NHS Health representative on the HPSG. The Housing Options Guidance also highlights the need at a local authority level for homelessness to be corporately owned and understood. There is also helpful joint working emerging between housing and the prison service. However, the opportunity for housing and homelessness to be better linked with key partners in Health and Social Care through the joint integration boards has not yet been maximised in most localities, which makes the need for strategic, high-level linkage around homelessness, via a new national strategy, even more important. Unfortunately, there is still a significant challenge in a lack of joined-up working between departments and opportunities for preventing homelessness are missed through lack of wider buy-in.

In England, the Ministerial Working Group on Preventing and Tackling Homelessness has brought together the Department of Communities and Local Government, Home Office, Ministry of Justice, Department of Health, Department for Work and Pensions, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Department for Education and Ministry of Defence. Over the past six years, this group has produced three major strategic documents that have been significant in progressing the approach to preventing and tackling homelessness in England and, importantly, led to innovations such as joint funding initiatives. For example, in 2015 the Department of Health invested £55million to upgrade hostel accommodation and create new low-rent homes for young people. Far

⁵³ Commission on Housing and Wellbeing (2015) [A Blueprint for Scotland's Future](#)

more must be done to ensure that similar joined-up working with multiple strategic partners is achieved in Scotland.

Shelter Scotland recommends that a new National Homelessness Strategy should be truly cross-departmental and ‘owned’ across multiple governmental departments to ensure a commitment at every level to joint working for the prevention and tackling of homelessness.

Housing Strategy

As mentioned above, currently homelessness is contained within the strategic housing plan of the JHPDG. Although this gives insufficient priority and direction to homelessness, it is important that the connection with housing supply and wider housing strategy is recognised.

The Scottish Government commitment to building 50,000 new affordable homes during the next Parliament is very welcome, as is the priority being given to socially rented housing within this. The lack of affordable housing in most areas of Scotland is a significant challenge for effectively preventing and tackling homelessness. Without social stock available, some local authorities struggle to meet demand for temporary accommodation. Households that are in temporary accommodation are spending increasing lengths of time there as they wait for appropriate settled housing to become available. The affordable housing that is built must meet demographic demand at a local level in order to truly meet the need that exists, rather than being determined by the economic demands of developers.

There will soon be a strategic review of the classification of housing associations in Scotland, following their reclassification in England. Given the issues outlined above, and the important role that housing associations can play in homelessness prevention, it will be important that the perspectives and concerns of homeless households are represented during this review.

Shelter Scotland recommends that a new National Homelessness Strategy should ensure that strong links are maintained with wider housing strategy, keeping pressure on the development of housing agenda inasmuch as they impact on prevention and routes out of homelessness.

Ongoing monitoring

A vital part of ensuring the success of a strategic approach is to ensure that responsibility for monitoring delivery and progress against a new strategy sits with a Ministerial led group. A reinvigorated Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group might be well placed to provide central oversight of the development and delivery of a new homelessness strategy.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Scotland has a strong track record in tackling and preventing homelessness. Building on the significant steps taken by the Homelessness Task Force, the introduction and embedding of a Housing Options approach has led to an increase in prevention activity and a downward trend in statutory homeless applications. The recognition of the importance of person-centred services and increased opportunities for service user involvement are encouraging and are leading to inspiring examples of good practice. New strategic linkages with health colleagues are promising. But even with this progress, homelessness in Scotland is far from fixed.

The organic nature of these – and other – developments, has led to change without clear coherent direction, important developments often being significantly delayed and increased understanding not leading to improved practice. Scotland cannot afford to let the progress over 10 years and more of implementing a new approach to tackling homelessness slip away. A new National Homelessness Strategy is needed to galvanise action, and to pull together and push forward the good work that has been started but has not fulfilled its potential.

The HPSG needs to be reformed and refocussed in order to move homelessness policy in Scotland beyond the plateau that it has reached. Previously, the HPSG evolved from the ‘Joint 2012 Steering Group’, which itself had emerged from the ‘Homelessness Monitoring Group’ when the task at hand changed. Now is the time to continue this precedent, recognise that the response to preventing and tackling homelessness in Scotland needs to be reinvigorated, and evolve the group again. Without a step-change in leadership, accountability and direction for homelessness Scotland risks losing its world-leading status in responding to people in housing crisis.

In order to lead development of the cross-cutting, comprehensive strategy that is needed, the Scottish Government should convene a Ministerial Working Group to give strong leadership to the joint working that is necessary in meeting the challenges facing homeless people today. Without a new push to prevent and tackle homelessness in Scotland, the Scottish Government cannot deliver and will ultimately fail in its vision of a fairer, healthier, safer and stronger Scotland.

Shelter Scotland helps over half a million people every year struggling with bad housing or homelessness through our advice, support and legal services. And we campaign to make sure that, one day, no one will have to turn to us for help.

We're here so no one has to fight bad housing or homelessness on their own.

Please support us at shelterscotland.org

RH7439. Registered charity in England and Wales (263710) and in Scotland (SC002327)

Shelter Scotland
Scotiabank House
6 South Charlotte Street
Edinburgh EH2 4AW

shelterscotland.org