

# Homelessness in Scotland

## Topic Briefing

July 2019

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## KEY POINTS

- Last year Shelter Scotland helped thousands of people across Scotland who were homeless or facing homelessness. We are increasingly concerned about the distressing situations some of our clients are in and particularly the barriers they are facing in accessing the services and accommodation they are legally entitled to.
- This briefing considers the recent developments in the homelessness system and puts forward Shelter Scotland's position on these, bearing in mind the experiences of our clients.
- In 2018-19, 36,465 homeless applications were made to local authorities, which is the second rise in ten years.<sup>1</sup>
- This suggests that the impact of the Housing Options approach to prevent homelessness is ceasing to have an effect, and that the cause of people's homelessness is increasingly due to structural problems such as affordability and supply.
- The use of temporary accommodation is also rising: on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019, there were 10,989 households in temporary accommodation, including 6,795 children. This is an increase of 56 and 180 respectively, compared to the same date in 2018.
- Households are spending longer periods of time in temporary accommodation, on average 180 days.
- The Scottish Government included homelessness as a priority in its Programme for Government in 2017<sup>2</sup> and shortly after convened the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group in September 2017.
- The Local Government and Communities Committee also carried out a year-long inquiry into homelessness<sup>3</sup> which began in February 2017.
- The Scottish Government condensed the recommendations from these two workstreams and alongside COSLA, eventually produced the Ending Homelessness Together High Level Action Plan<sup>4</sup> in November 2018. This is the strategy for how they intend to effectively end homelessness in Scotland.
- Shelter Scotland believes that the following areas are absolutely critical to successfully tackling homelessness:
  - bold actions on the **prevention** of homelessness
  - the improvement of **temporary accommodation**
  - the provision of good quality **support**, and
  - a **strong, sustained programme of affordable housebuilding**.

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<sup>1</sup> Scottish Government (2019); [Homelessness in Scotland 2018-19](#)

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government (2017); [A nation with ambition: the Government's Programme for Scotland 2017-2018](#)

<sup>3</sup> Local Government and Communities Committee (2018); [Report on Homelessness](#)

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Government and COSLA; [Ending Homelessness Together High Level Action Plan](#)

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## BACKGROUND

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.

Every day, people across Scotland experience homelessness and bad housing. Last year, 36,465 households made a homeless application, but this is only one aspect of the problem; families are spending far more time in unsuitable accommodation than the law allows, people are being turned away from being able to access homelessness services, and people are living in accommodation which doesn't meet their needs or can even endanger their health. For more information on the picture of homelessness and housing, we publish a yearly analysis of the available statistics.<sup>5</sup>

In 2017-18, a wave of momentum grew across Government, the public sector and third sector to sustainably address and solve homelessness in Scotland, starting with the Scottish Government highlighting homelessness as a priority in its Programme for Government in 2017. Shelter Scotland is delighted that homelessness is rightly being recognised as a key policy area, particularly as in 2016, we published our Far From Fixed policy paper,<sup>6</sup> which called for a national strategy on homelessness, with a particular focus on prevention, multiple and complex needs and temporary accommodation.

Shortly after the Programme for Government was published, the Scottish Government assembled the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group<sup>7</sup> (on which Shelter Scotland was represented), which produced 70 recommendations for action. At the same time, the Local Government and Communities Committee carried out an inquiry into homelessness and produced a report of their findings in February 2018.<sup>8</sup> In November 2018, the Scottish Government and COSLA produced their Ending Homelessness Together High Level Action Plan<sup>9</sup> which pulls together the evidence and recommendations from the HARSAG and the Local Government and Communities Committee, and condenses them into 49 actions over the following six broad areas:

- Ending homelessness by embedding a person-centred approach across our public services
- Ending homelessness by preventing it from happening to people in the first place
- Ending homelessness by prioritising settled housing for all

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<sup>5</sup> Shelter Scotland (2018); [Getting behind the homeless statistics: update for 2017-18](#)

<sup>6</sup> Shelter Scotland (2016); [Homelessness far from fixed - Why Scotland needs a National Homelessness Strategy](#)

<sup>7</sup> Scottish Government; [Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group](#)

<sup>8</sup> Local Government and Communities Committee (2018); [Report on Homelessness](#)

<sup>9</sup> Scottish Government and COSLA; [Ending Homelessness Together High Level Action Plan](#)

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- Ending homelessness by responding quickly and effectively whenever it happens
  - Ending homelessness by joining up planning and resources
  - Other actions to support the work

These actions are being supported by a £50 million Ending Homelessness Together Fund, for a period of five years.<sup>10</sup> We believe that the Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan is in line with our call for change and addresses many important areas.

Further, the Plan calls for cross-sector involvement and we feel that this agreement that sectors must work together to ensure that homelessness is rare and short-lived is extremely important. Homelessness can not be meaningfully addressed by housing functions alone, and to achieve the aspirations in the Scottish Government's plan, the involvement of health education, social work, justice and others is critical.

This paper sets out Shelter Scotland's position on key homelessness issues in this changing context. These issues are those which we believe will have greatest impact on our clients' lives, and the ones which we will focus our energy on in the coming months and years. These are **prevention, temporary accommodation, support, and supply.**

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Chapter 1: <sup>10</sup> The Big Issue (2017); [Scottish Government announces £50 million fund to tackle homelessness](#)

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## PREVENTION

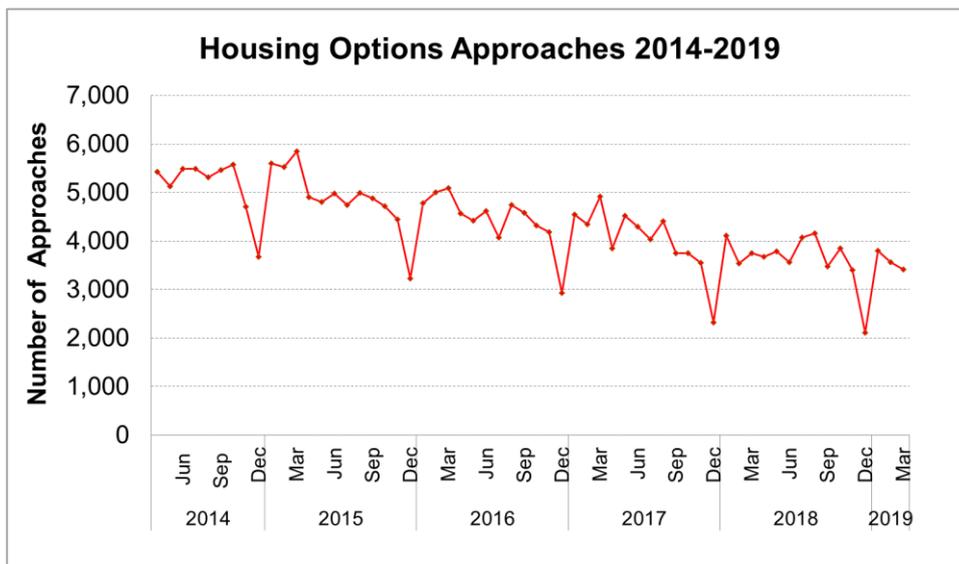
Proactive prevention work is critical to the aspiration of reducing homelessness across Scotland and the success of many of the Scottish Government priorities for Rapid Rehousing. Over the past 10 years there has been extensive work by local authorities and partners across the sector to consider more proactive and impactful partnership working to prevent homelessness. The emphasis on prevention was reflected strongly by participants of GHN's Aye We Can collaboration project,<sup>11</sup> in every location that consultations were held. It is important with the current focus on what happens to people when they are already in crisis, that we do not dilute the investment or priority put on prevention. It is vital that advice, support and positive interventions are available to all those facing homelessness as early as possible. We need strong interventions when someone is in crisis but it is far better if people never experience homelessness at all.

As part of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, local authorities have a duty to “prepare strategies for preventing and alleviating homelessness”. As a result, local authorities opted to use the Housing Options approach from approximately 2009 onwards.<sup>12</sup> The reduction in homelessness applications since the introduction of Housing Options suggests that this approach has helped local authorities recalibrate their services and prevent a significant amount of homelessness from happening. However, as outlined previously, the latest statistics appear to show that the impact of Housing Options is slowing and this approach alone can no longer sufficiently address the level of homelessness in Scotland and indeed cannot address systemic problems around affordability and supply which cause homelessness. There is therefore a need for a different and more proactive approach to prevent homelessness before it occurs.

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<sup>11</sup> GHN (2017); [Aye We Can December 2017 Update](#)

<sup>12</sup> Scottish Government (2019); [Housing Options \(PREVENT1\) Statistics in Scotland: 2018/19](#)



**Source:** Scottish Government (2019); [Housing Options \(PREVENT1\) Statistics in Scotland: 2018/19](#)

Shelter Scotland believes that a significant amount of homelessness in Scotland could be prevented through early intervention and identification of people at particular risk of homelessness. This particularly includes those who are leaving care, prison or hospital and creating “pathways” out of homelessness for people will be central to avoiding homelessness.<sup>13</sup>

A thematic report into Housing Options by the Scottish Housing Regulator in 2014 raised concerns about differing practice across local authorities.<sup>14</sup> The report recommended that one solution was that enhanced guidance and training tools should be produced to assist local authorities. As such a Housing Options Training Toolkit has been in train since the publication of the report, and according to the Ending Homelessness Together plan, its first modules will finally be delivered in early 2019. While we welcome this long-awaited and improved guidance, we emphasise that more structural actions must be taken alongside it. We have found that Housing Options is also sometimes misused as a method of gatekeeping, but hope that the Housing Options Training Toolkit can go some way to addressing this.

Aside from Housing Options, as part of the Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan, the Scottish Government intends to investigate and develop a new duty on local authorities, wider public bodies and delivery partners for the prevention of homelessness. The timetable for this is to be set in 2019. We welcome the consideration of a prevention duty as for many people, homelessness is avoidable and unnecessary and a duty would force local authorities to take more proactive steps to avoid homelessness. We strongly believe that homelessness services alone cannot effectively prevent

<sup>13</sup> Shelter Scotland (2016); [Homelessness far from fixed - Why Scotland needs a National Homelessness Strategy](#)

<sup>14</sup> Scottish Housing Regulator; [Housing Options in Scotland – a thematic inquiry](#)

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homelessness and we welcome the inclusion of other public bodies in helping to identify where homelessness is a possibility and preventing this happening through partnership work. We advise that the experiences of Wales and its own Prevention Duty must be looked to in the course of this work: evaluation of the approach in 2017<sup>15</sup> concluded that while positive steps have been achieved, such as the improvement in the services offered to previously excluded groups, issues such as geographical variations in availability of prevention services and ensuring rights to access services remain.

**Recommendations:**

- 1) The Housing Options Training Toolkit should be rolled out to all local authorities as a priority.
- 2) The Scottish Government should carefully consider the learnings from the introduction of a prevention duty in Wales, and assess whether this approach could work in Scotland and what changes or improvements could be made in the Scottish context.
- 3) A multi-agency and cross-sector approach is crucial to preventing homelessness before it happens; detailed plans and agreements as to how this will happen in practice should be set out.

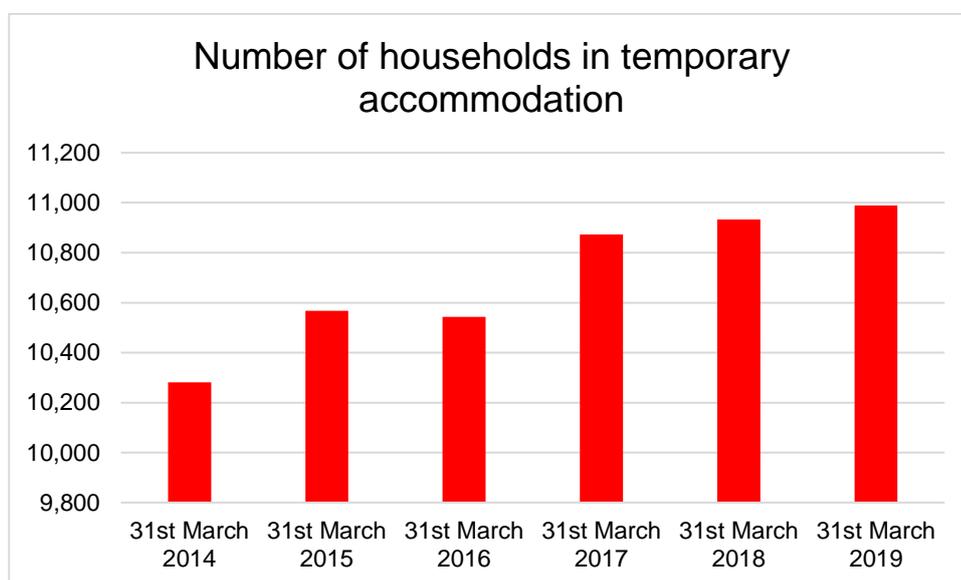
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<sup>15</sup> Mackie, P., Thomas, I. and Bibbings, J. (2017); [Homelessness Prevention: Reflecting on a Year of Pioneering Welsh Legislation in Practice](#)

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## TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

Every day Shelter Scotland supports people who are in poor quality temporary accommodation, often for weeks and months on end, while they wait for permanent accommodation. The demand for temporary accommodation is rising and people are spending longer in temporary accommodation; the average time that a household now spends in temporary accommodation has risen to 180 days, while families are staying for an average of 219 days.<sup>16</sup> This can have an immensely negative impact on people's physical and mental wellbeing, and particularly on children's education and life chances.<sup>17</sup> <sup>18</sup> People should be supported into permanent accommodation much more quickly than is currently done, and all temporary accommodation should be good quality.



**Source:** Scottish Government (2019); [Homelessness in Scotland 2018-19](#)

We continue to campaign to improve standards in temporary accommodation and in 2011 we developed joint guidance with the Chartered Institute of Housing.<sup>19</sup> We therefore support the Scottish Government's aspiration to transform temporary accommodation in Scotland and move towards a model of "Rapid Re-housing". This means that the Government want to see fewer people using temporary accommodation for shorter periods of time and moving to settled housing more quickly. Specifically, the Scottish Government has stated that they will enforce and monitor standards for temporary accommodation by 2023, and

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<sup>16</sup> Scottish Government (2019); [Homelessness in Scotland 2018-19](#)

<sup>17</sup> Digby, A., Fu, E. (2017); [Impacts of homelessness on children – research with teachers](#)

<sup>18</sup> Shelter (2006) [Chance of a lifetime: The impact of bad housing on children's lives](#)

<sup>19</sup> Shelter Scotland and CIH (2011); [Temporary Accommodation Guidance](#)

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extend the Unsuitable Accommodation Order restriction of a maximum of seven days to all groups, however a timeline for this has not yet been set.

While we welcome the Scottish Government's intention to introduce and enforce minimum standards in temporary accommodation, this should be implemented much sooner than 2023. Last year, there were 620 breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order,<sup>20</sup> which is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of demonstrating the poor conditions that many people have to endure in their temporary accommodation. This statistic only relates to families, and we know that single people in particular are routinely offered accommodation which is inappropriate, unsuitable and sometimes even damaging, and this data is not sufficiently recorded or published. We therefore support the extension of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order as we believe that all people should have the right to good quality temporary accommodation when they need it. However, we emphasise that there must be effective support and enforcement to ensure that local authorities comply sustainably with this policy.

In order to achieve all of these aims around temporary accommodation, in many areas the available supply of temporary accommodation must increase sharply at least in the short to medium term, with a simultaneous move away from using B&Bs and hostels. This is a significant ask of many local authorities, and we know that many struggle to provide this even now. This has resulted in B&Bs and other unsuitable accommodation often being used as standard, which is entirely unacceptable. We have produced more in-depth topic briefings on the use of temporary accommodation, and the experience of children in temporary accommodation, both of which are available on our policy library.<sup>21 22</sup>

### **Recommendations:**

- 4) Minimum standards of temporary accommodation should be implemented as soon as possible, and cover not only physical standards, but management and location standards.
- 5) The use of Bed and Breakfast should be ended entirely.
- 6) The Unsuitable Accommodation Order should be extended to all groups, and the Scottish Government should work closely with local authorities to ensure this is achieved effectively and sustainably.
- 7) These changes should be supported by strong statutory guidance for local authorities.

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<sup>20</sup> Scottish Government (2019); [Homelessness in Scotland 2018-19](#)

<sup>21</sup> Shelter Scotland (2018); [Time in temporary accommodation 2018](#)

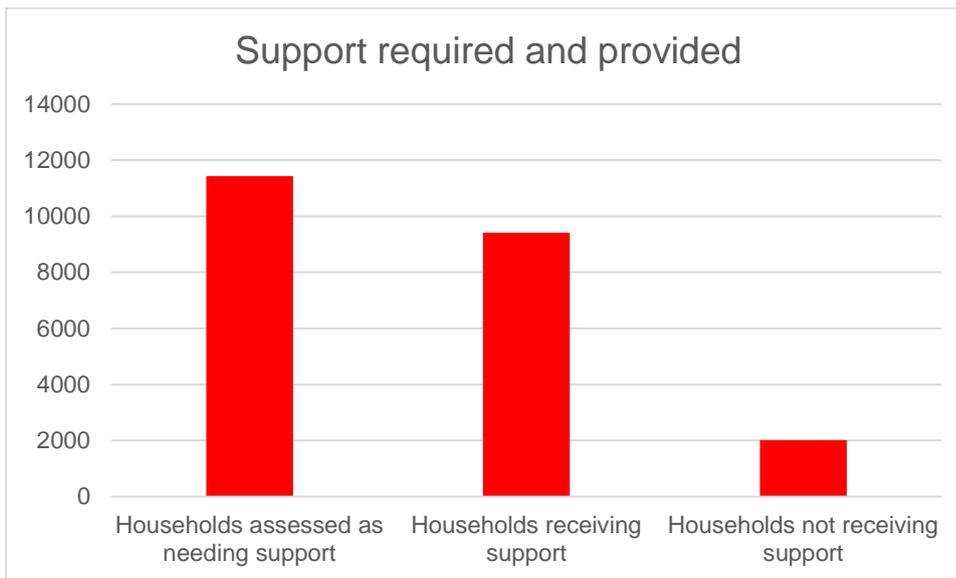
<sup>22</sup> Shelter Scotland (2018); [Children who are homeless 2018](#)

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# SUPPORT

Shelter Scotland has long emphasised the importance of tailored support to prevent people from becoming homeless, and where this is not possible, to help people quickly out of homelessness. In most cases, people simply require decent, affordable homes, but the number of households with support needs is increasing<sup>23 24</sup> and service and funding provision must reflect this.

Concerningly, statistics on housing support (which local authorities have a duty to provide to unintentionally homeless households who require it) show a gap between those who are assessed as requiring support, and those who actually receive the support. Of the 11,435 households identified as having a support need under housing support regulations, 9,420 (82%) received support either during their application or when they were accommodated while 2,015 (18%) did not.<sup>25</sup> This suggests that local authorities are struggling to fulfil their obligations under the Housing Support Duty. Bearing in mind the gap between need and provision, we caution that future support must be properly resourced to meet the needs of people who require it.



**Source:** Ad hoc request to the Scottish Government

As above, the Scottish Government introduced a five-year £50 million fund to support its ambitions in the Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan. A significant portion of this money will be spent on support provision, including for Housing First which is aimed at people with high support needs.<sup>26</sup> We are concerned that local authorities will struggle to continue to provide the same high-

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<sup>23</sup> Scottish Government (2019); [Homelessness in Scotland 2018-19](#)

<sup>24</sup> Shelter Scotland (2018); [Getting behind the homeless statistics: update for 2017-18](#)

<sup>25</sup> Ad hoc statistics request to the Scottish Government

<sup>26</sup> The Big Issue (2018); [A further £21m will go towards ending homelessness in Scotland](#)

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quality, high-cost support when this funding runs out and so the Scottish Government must commit to sustainably funding support services, because they are crucial to preventing and alleviating homelessness. As part of the Government's work on both support and prevention of homelessness, the Government intends to increase tenancy sustainment support. We have produced a briefing on Housing First which discusses our position in more detail.<sup>27</sup>

The key areas of the Scottish Government's approach to homelessness include adopting a person-centred approach to solving homelessness, which will give people greater choice and control; ensuring children in homeless households have a wellbeing assessment carried out to put in place any additional support that may be required; and increased support to people to access housing.

**Recommendations:**

- 8) The Scottish Government must provide reassurance to local authorities that they will be supported and funded to continue to provide high quality support into the future. Support is crucial to people accessing and sustaining a tenancy.
- 9) The Scottish Government and local authorities must ensure that those who have support needs but do not qualify for Housing First do not slip through the cracks and are not disadvantaged by new support programmes.

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<sup>27</sup> Shelter Scotland (2019); [Housing First in Scotland: Topic Briefing](#)

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## SUPPLY

Supply is absolutely key to addressing homelessness in Scotland and continuing the current momentum in affordable housebuilding is extremely important. Following decades of underinvestment and undersupply, Scotland has a huge deficit in affordable and social housing to overcome to meet current and future needs of its population. To illustrate the extent of demand, there are currently around 131,900 households on the waiting list for a council home in Scotland,<sup>28</sup> and this figure does not include people on the waiting list for housing associations in many areas.<sup>29</sup> In addition, there is a bottleneck in temporary accommodation: the average time that a household now spends in temporary accommodation has risen to 180 days, while families are staying for an average of 219 days,<sup>30 31</sup> illustrating the difficulty that many local authorities have in finding suitable homes to move households on from temporary accommodation. That the number of people making a homeless application has increased for the first time in nine years further exacerbates the pressure on housing stock.<sup>32</sup>

Following research jointly commissioned with the Chartered Institute of Housing and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations to examine affordable housing need in Scotland,<sup>33</sup> the Scottish Government committed in 2016 to build 50,000 affordable homes (of which 35,000 were to be social rent) over the five-year term of the parliament. Through research carried out with the Equality and Human Rights Commission and SFHA,<sup>34</sup> we have found that, encouragingly, the Government is on target to achieving its affordable homes target in the timescale. However, we must not be short-sighted and must continue to plan and resource affordable housebuilding into the future. We must also ensure that homes meet people's needs and are built in the right areas, close to support and education networks.

The Scottish Government has recently started considering the picture of affordable housebuilding beyond the current Parliament, and it has stated that it “remains committed to continue to promote increased supply across all tenures but doing this through a broader range of government-led interventions in the housing market”.<sup>35</sup> However, it is unclear if the momentum in affordable housebuilding will continue. It is imperative that we ensure that momentum in housebuilding is not lost after this parliamentary term.

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<sup>28</sup> Scottish Government (2018); [Housing Statistics for Scotland - Housing lists](#)

<sup>29</sup> NB Local Authority and Common Housing Registers do not include the 6 local authorities (including Glasgow) which have transferred all of their housing stock to Registered Social Landlords. (Scottish Government 2018; [Housing Statistics for Scotland 2017: Key Trends Summary](#))

<sup>30</sup> Scottish Government (2019); [Homelessness in Scotland 2018-19](#)

<sup>31</sup> Shelter Scotland (2018); [Time in temporary accommodation 2018](#)

<sup>32</sup> Scottish Government (2019); [Homelessness in Scotland 2018-19](#)

<sup>33</sup> Shelter Scotland (2015); [Affordable Housing Need in Scotland - Summary Report September 2015](#)

<sup>34</sup> Young, G. & Donohoe, T. (2018); [Review of Strategic Investment Plans for Affordable Housing](#)

<sup>35</sup> Scottish Government (2018); [Housing Beyond 2021: Discussion Paper](#)

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In line with this, we have commissioned further research to examine affordable housing need in Scotland,<sup>36</sup> following on from our 2015 research. This work will produce definitive figures for the number of homes that are needed in the future, in order to ensure that everyone in Scotland can access a safe, secure and affordable home.

**Recommendations:**

- 10) The Scottish Government must keep pace with demand and continue to invest in and build high levels of safe, decent and affordable homes in places and communities where people want to live.

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<sup>36</sup> Scottish Housing News (2018); [Joint research project to build case for social housing investment post-2021](#)

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# CONCLUSION

Shelter Scotland welcomes the energy, commitment and sense of purpose that has developed across the sector over recent years to sustainably address homelessness. Every day, we support people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless and the Scottish Government has a core role to play in transforming how local authorities and partners are able to respond when people approach them for assistance.

Last year, homelessness applications rose for the first time in nine years. This represents a challenge to local authorities in how they understand and respond to needs in their area, and also signals a change in that people's homelessness is becoming harder to resolve through existing methods, such as Housing Options.

The actions outlined in the Scottish Government's Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan are ambitious and can go some way to alleviating the problems faced by local authorities and the people they serve. However, we emphasise that any positive progress made will be undone if there is no long-term plan beyond 2023 to continue supporting local authorities and most importantly, people facing or experiencing homelessness, and the ten recommendations made throughout this paper will help to achieve this.

## Contact:

Aoife Deery, Campaigns and Policy Officer

[aoife\\_deery@shelter.org.uk](mailto:aoife_deery@shelter.org.uk)

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Shelter Scotland  
Scotiabank House

6 South Charlotte Street  
Edinburgh EH2 4AW

[shelterscotland.org](https://shelterscotland.org)