

# Lived experience engagement – facilitated by Crisis

Monday 10 June 2024

## Key points from group discussion

This engagement event was facilitated by Crisis and made up of four individuals from the Edinburgh area with lived experience of homelessness, in addition to the Convener of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee, Collette Stevenson MSP, and Jeremy Balfour MSP.

*The points below reflect comments made by one or several participants who took part in the session.*

## Circumstances leading to homelessness

- Insufficient support to deal with adverse mental health.
- Serving of notices to quit accommodation.
- Inability to afford tenancy deposits.
- Discrimination against tenants on benefits.
- Combination of poor mental health and an inaccessible housing market too much to overcome.
- Increased isolation from support networks.
- Relationship breakdowns and threat of domestic abuse.
- Impact of COVID-19 on availability of work.
- Feeling that all 'social capital' had been used up, and that friends and family could no longer be called upon to help.
- One participant said if you don't accept the first housing offer then you are removed from the priority lists and you have to start all over again.
- Individuals are sometimes in a situation where they need a higher salary to get the housing they need, but they need to find somewhere to live in order to access that work.
- Breakdown of "social contract".
- A number of participants referred to a lack of affordable housing options, particularly in the City of Edinburgh Council area. For example, increasingly high private rents have led to people having to leave their home or restrict their housing options in trying to find a new home.

### Contact with organisations before becoming homeless

- Contact with GP to address difficulties with mental health. GP contacted link worker, who signposted to Crisis within two weeks of eviction date. Very rushed fortnight.
- A general feeling that people approaching homelessness have increased contact with police and emergency services due to inability to cope.

### Processes after becoming homeless

- Extended periods in temporary accommodation.
- A lot of self-advocacy needed to move things along.
- Properties 'ring-fenced' for temporary accommodation, even though people may say they want to stay in these on a longer term basis, or permanently.
- Some temporary accommodation is difficult to live in, had to deal with curfews and poor standard of accommodation.
- Its possible to spend years in temporary accommodation without being allocated something permanent.
- Access to social housing only becoming available when given extra priority for a medical condition.
- Changes made during the pandemic were helpful.

### Support

- Participants described the importance of support from voluntary organisations in helping them navigate the system and obtain support. For example, one participant stated that "Crisis saved my life".
- A participant commented that, some organisations might be more engaged in particular types of work, such as working with individuals with other social or substance related issues, whereas Crisis can help you navigate the system to find housing if you are able to work with them.
- Help from organisations such as Crisis helps free up mental 'bandwidth' to deal with other issues an individual may be facing.
- One participant described only receiving support through 'pure luck' when a voluntary organisation provided a talk at their school. The support of third sector organisations was important, but only when they were actually homeless.
- Face to face meetings with The City of Edinburgh Council.
- Individuals need to be able to advocate for themselves and enforce their rights. This can be very difficult for people, especially those who are dealing with other issues. It should not be up to an individual or charity to move things forward.

### Difficulties in accessing support

- Councils were unable to provide support until evidence of homelessness was received, for example, actually being evicted or evidence from family members where a family breakdown was involved (which could exacerbate the problem).
- Failures to share information between agencies eg DWP health and housing services.
- Attitude of schools to the problem, they would rather not deal with pupils who were homeless.
- Might be a fear of making the situation worse, particularly amongst young people with a family breakdown situation.
- Issues around perceived stigma in asking for help.
- People who present well may not be taken seriously when they say they are at risk of homelessness. There is an assumption they will be able to solve the situation themselves.
- A letting agency didn't know about Crisis, and therefore did not signpost to it.
- Individuals may blame themselves for the situation they are in.
- Support can be 'piecemeal'.
- Whenever an individual is turned away from a service or organisation, they have to gather themselves and start again. Better communication between organisations, as well as a No Wrong Door type of approach (whereby people only have to enter services once, and are supported within a coordinated system of support) could help with this.

### How to prevent homelessness

- Things start going wrong long before a person presents as homeless. Some of those in temporary accommodation could have avoided being there had intervention happened earlier.
- Health and social care services are key to preventing homelessness.
- People's needs are interconnected. Good housing leads to better mental health, which in turns helps people to be able to function well and prevent homelessness to some extent.
- Need a person-centered approach.
- Better wraparound support in temporary accommodation.

### How organisations work together

- One participant commented that Shelter had worked with Crisis to highlight how long a participant had been in temporary accommodation for.
- Organisations do not always work well together.

- Organisations and services may say they do not have a ‘mandate’ to help someone.
- If people working within organisations have the confidence to ask about a person’s situation, this may help prevent homelessness. The Bill could help with this.
- “Housing like the fourth emergency service now”.

## General comments on the Bill

- Concern about the lack of provisions in the Bill specifically for young people.
- Concern around the availability of resources to implement the ‘Ask and Act’ duty properly.
- There will be a need for increased training across organisations on dealing with people who have experienced trauma, otherwise people will not engage with services.
- Uncertainty about how the provisions in the Bill all fit together, and potential contradictions between, for example, the aims of the domestic abuse provisions compared with the homelessness prevention provisions.
- Support for the No Wrong Door approach.
- ‘Ask and Act’, when done properly, is essentially No Wrong Door. If it is clear ‘Ask and Act’ is in place, organisations and services would be forced to engage and try to help. This could prevent homelessness.
- The change from two months to six months for an assessment to be made regarding whether a household is threatened with homelessness is welcome, although a participant spoke about current difficulties of accessing support when they were threatened with homelessness under the current legal definition.
- However, another participant mentioned that it was unclear whether young people in particular would be able to identify whether they were at risk of homeless six months in advance.
- Rent controls would take the pressure off people financially.