

Homelessness evidence session: Social Justice and Social Security Committee

Submission by Homeless Network Scotland

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Homeless Network Scotland

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The committee has asked for:

- a) Priorities for homelessness policy.
- b) Progress towards delivery of the Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan and recommendations from the Prevention Review Group's report.
- c) Impact of Covid-19 on policy approaches and individual's experiences of homelessness.
- d) How effectively you think people with lived experience have been involved in policy development.

Homeless Network Scotland is a knowledge-based membership organisation. As a network, we create opportunities to connect, learn and act on homelessness to end it for good. Our latest [Impact Report](#) sets out that work in the first half of 2021.

We are pleased to provide the following evidence on the four questions being explored by the committee.

1. Priorities for Homelessness Policy

Scotland is rightly considered to have among the strongest housing and homelessness legislation in the world. But ensuring this policy framework prevents or alleviates homelessness every time remains the key challenge.

While statutory homelessness data points to a reduction in the number of households becoming homeless in 2020-21, the latest [Homeless Monitor for Scotland](#) shows that 'core homelessness' - a concept which captures the most severe and immediate forms of homelessness - has been relatively steady over the past 7 years.

The urgent imperative now is to convert this steady starting point into year-on-year reductions over the next 5-10 years, underpinned by the Rapid Rehousing policy objective. This can be helped by the eight following policy priorities:

a) **Duties to Prevent Homelessness**

Prevention Review Group [Report](#) published March 2021. Chaired by Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick, convened by Crisis with lived experience insight from the Prevention Commission.

There is widespread acknowledgement that stronger policies are needed to prevent homelessness happening in the first place; a policy gap and where Scotland currently lags behind other parts of the UK.

People often reach crisis point before they get help, and it was this drive, widely supported, to act earlier that guided the work of the Prevention Review Group. The Group's work drew from best policy and practice across the UK and internationally, resulting in a proposed policy framework that would be setting the standard to be compared against.

The Prevention Review Group Report is in two parts. Part 1 addresses the role of public bodies and landlords outwith the homelessness framework to ensure that opportunities are taken to prevent homelessness before this gets to crisis point and makes proposals for legal requirements to act.. The second part focuses on reforming the current statutory framework on homelessness to give greater priority to preventing homelessness.

As part of the Prevention Review Group, Homeless Network Scotland facilitated the Prevention Commission, people with lived and frontline experience of homelessness who played a critical role in shaping the report and recommendations.

b) Place-based approach to preventing homelessness

All homelessness starts in a community. The [Everyone Home](#) Collective (of 35 third and academic sector organisations) designed a route-map to help inspire and guide a place-based approach to preventing homelessness. The purpose is to connect what we know about the causes of homelessness with the local knowledge and services that can reach people earlier — and closer to home. Related policy recommendations to enable this are:

- Community Planning Partnerships to include 'preventing homelessness' as a priority outcome in Local Outcomes Improvement Plans and Locality Plans. LOIPs are the mechanism by which Community Planning Partnerships deliver improved outcomes for their communities, based on local needs that reflect agreed local priorities.
- A Community Planning statement in Local Housing Strategies on the role of communities to protect homes and prevent homelessness. This would give

the best lever to connect community aspirations with the local authority's housing and investment strategies.

- Scottish Government to include 'preventing homelessness' in the Communities Outcome of the National Performance Framework. Scotland's National Performance Framework tracks performance towards 11 agreed outcomes and indicators of national importance.

c) **Housing First**

Homeless Network Scotland host Housing First Scotland, a strategic partnership with Scottish Government to support the pathfinder, and provide a monitoring, evaluation and learning infrastructure to help all partners start up or scale up Housing First scale across Scotland.

- Housing First provides ordinary, settled housing as a first response for people whose homelessness is made harder by experiences such as trauma, addiction and mental ill health. It is internationally regarded as the most effective intervention for this group – and has now been independently evaluated as highly effective in Scotland.

Pathfinder:

- Scotland's Housing First Pathfinder has successfully scaled up Housing First provision and more than 550 people had been allocated a permanent tenancy by the end of September 2021 across Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Dundee, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Stirling. The Pathfinder has elevated Scotland to one of the success stories internationally, being mentioned alongside exemplars such as Finland.
- But we are just at the start. A priority for homelessness policy is to establish a joint planning and commissioning framework with health and social care partnerships; enabling the collaborations and resources needed to significantly scale up Housing First until it becomes the default offer for the estimated 3000-plus people who could benefit annually. This will include working toward setting a specific HEAT target (Health Improvement, Efficiency, Access and Treatment).

National Framework:

- [‘Branching Out’](#) is the National Framework For Housing First in Scotland. It provides a ‘how to and why’ guide for all sectors planning, commissioning and delivering Housing First. The Framework draws on the experience and expertise of partners across Scotland acting as a toolkit and reference point for all those scaling up or starting up Housing First as part of Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans. Updated twice a year, the Framework is a ‘living’ document, tracking innovation and best practice from those operating Housing First.
- The new ‘Housing First Check Up’ is an approved process that will facilitate a 360-degree reflection with local authorities and partners and provide an assurance that Housing First is being scaled up in accordance with the principles that make it effective. This rolling process will support the quality of support services, fidelity to the principles underpinning the model, improvement methodology around local systems and clarity on when to step-down and stand-down support.

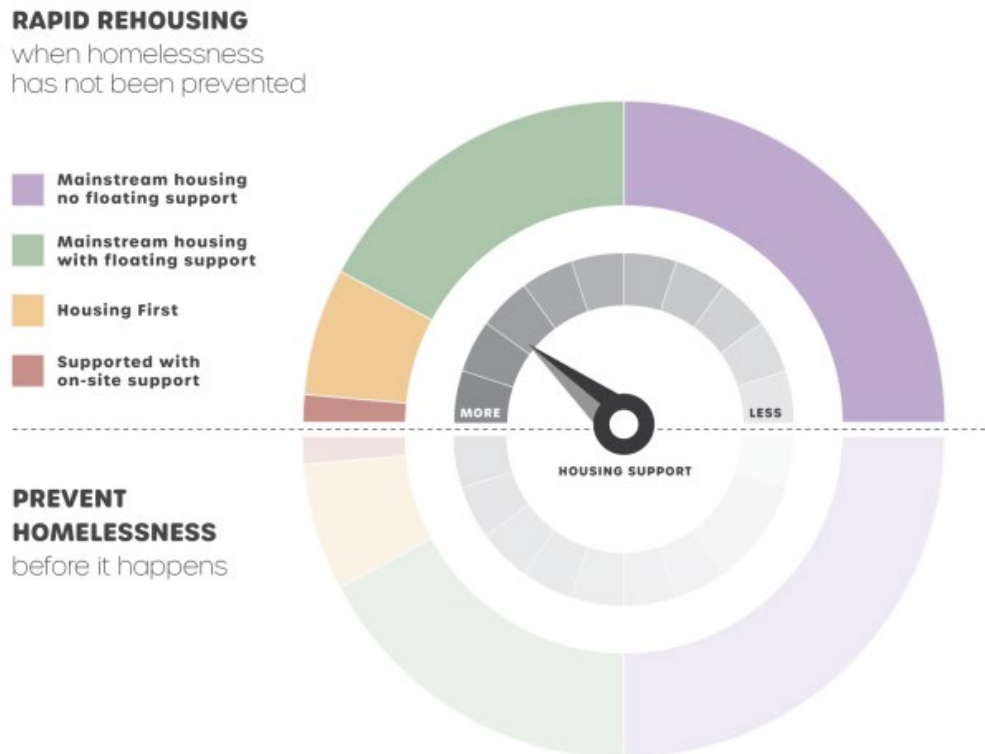
d) **Shared Spaces: The future of shared and supported housing**

[Research and policy position](#) commissioned by Homeless Network Scotland published Oct 2021.

Described as the ‘missing piece of the jigsaw’ in the transition to rapid rehousing, a policy direction for the role of shared, supported housing to prevent and respond to homelessness has been defined. A qualitative research project was commissioned by Homeless Network Scotland to better understand the circumstances when it should be used, the key features of a contemporary model – and what likely scale of demand is. The direction is toward:

- Supported housing as a *settled* housing option for a *small* number of people who want support *on-site*.
- A ‘core and ‘cluster’ of self-contained housing, combining rights, independence and peace of mind.
- Led by HSCPs and integrated to avoid stigmatization; there should no silos or concentrations of ‘homeless people’ living in ‘homeless accommodation’.

The forecast scale is around **2-5%** of homeless households each year, and can be illustrated as:



e) **Rapid Rehousing Policy**

This key policy objective is to reduce the time that people spend in temporary accommodation – because it is costly, ineffective, and damaging for people’s lives. Scotland’s Rapid Rehousing framework, just one-year into operation fully at the start of the pandemic, remains the right direction forward. However:

- The very high numbers of households in temporary accommodation needs locally sensitive approaches to increase **proportion of social housing allocations** to homeless households; this is urgent, many people have now spent considerable periods of time in limbo during the pandemic. Local support for increasing the range of housing options in the **private rented sector** is also needed.
- Scottish Government needs to provide extra support to the minority of local authorities who will have the steepest challenge to meet the terms of

the **Unsuitable Accommodation Order**, especially given the measurable increase in the use of temporary accommodation, and the associated cost and challenges for local authorities, as a consequence of the pandemic.

- Evictions must be an absolute last resort and there should be **no evictions into homelessness**, from any sector or organisation. This includes ensuring that lawful evictions do not leave any individual or family without a place to stay.

f) **Rough Sleeping**

Rough sleeping is the most extreme form of homelessness – and at all times, not just during a pandemic. We ask the committee to help us in ensuring rough sleeping remains a **public health priority** with resources leveraged alongside cross-sector partners targeted to the areas most affected. No return to emergency night shelters with dormitory style accommodation needs a strong commitment to ensure emergency night shelters are not needed in the future.

g) **Poverty and Homelessness**

We know that 8% of the Scottish population will experience homelessness and we can predict those at greatest risk. Poverty is the most powerful driver, with child poverty a key predictor of homelessness later. We are over eight times more likely to become homeless if our household income is under £10k than if over £20k.

National and local policy to reduce poverty and inequality will reduce homelessness. This can be consolidated with a stronger focus on the **housing component** in all relevant strategies.

h) **No Recourse to Public Funds**

When the Scottish Government and local councils in Scotland had the opportunity to provide services and accommodation for everyone during the pandemic using public health legislation, they all took it. We applaud that life-saving intervention and now we must find a fair way forward to prevent destitution in Scotland for good.

Fair Way Scotland is a national approach to design out destitution and protect the human rights of people affected by NRPF in Scotland. It is an integrated service delivery model provided by experts in the field: Scottish Refugee Council, Safe in Scotland, Refugee Survival Trust, Simon Community Scotland and Turning Point Scotland.

And importantly, it is an action learning approach, within a human rights framework, to understand better the level of hidden need, destitution, homelessness and exploitation so that we can respond to and prevent it. This strong infrastructure is provided by Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Heriot-Watt University and Homeless Network Scotland.

Fair Way Scotland, in partnership with Scottish Government and COSLA, has published a 5-year [delivery plan](#) and is getting ready to mobilise.

Our ask of the Scottish Parliament's Social Justice and Social Security Committee is to help us deliver it and to end this severest form of destitution in Scotland.

2. Progress Towards Delivery of Ending Homelessness Together

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group recommended Rapid Rehousing as the mechanism to chart a 5-year route away from reliance on temporary accommodation and towards improved prevention and settled accommodation by default response to homelessness. It took 10 years to give everyone the right to housing in Scotland. **And we believe we now need an ambitious 10-year policy and funding commitment to deliver the infrastructure and resources needed to end homelessness.**

The recently published [Homelessness Monitor](#) (Heriot Watt University/Crisis) provides an independent analysis of the homelessness impacts of recent economic and policy developments in Scotland and provides an important marker on progress toward delivery of the ending homelessness together plan.

Key take-aways include that:

- Rapid Rehousing policy is gaining momentum and achieving 'spin-off' successes, especially in terms of collaborations and partnerships. Three quarters of Scottish councils have seen changes to social housing allocation policies linked to Rapid Rehousing.

- Rapid Rehousing is contribution to holding a ‘stable’ homelessness position and scale; but is not yet returning the decline in homelessness figures that is needed. The prevalence of rough sleeping is *more* sensitive to the range of policy interventions.
- Rapid Rehousing is rooted in the promise of more cost-effective local systems in the longer term, as well as better outcomes for people. However, the transition period itself needs properly resourced and supported.
- The monitor notes that many, though not all, of the changes identified as impactful in reducing core homelessness are within the power of the Scottish Government.

3. Impact of Covid 19

In the early months of the pandemic, many aspects of Scotland’s response to homelessness increased in pace, scope and parity in response to the pressure of a public health emergency bearing down on the system. **Local authorities** especially acted quickly and decisively to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on homelessness, rough sleeping and destitution - and should be acknowledged for that.

Across the third and academic sectors, we pooled expertise and diverse skills in response to a crisis presenting as ‘too big’ for any single organisation to respond alone. The Everyone Home Collective emerged, facilitated by Homeless Network Scotland, with ambition encouraged by the ‘overnight’ suppression of rough sleeping enabled by national and local government and the third sector. That showed what can be achieved when the will and the means converged to solve an urgent problem.

Everyone Home created a platform to connect, assemble the right people, gather evidence and set priorities. The collective today numbers 35 organisations from the third sector and academia, publishing so far five influential pieces of work. A preliminary framework described a ‘triple-lock’ of measures needed – more homes, no return to rough sleeping and no evictions into homelessness. Four subsequent Route Maps followed to cut through the range of evidence, information and opinion on some of the ‘big questions’ in the homelessness sector and, importantly, to offer a way forward:

- [Ending the need for night shelters and hotel provision in Scotland](#)
- [Scotland's Ambition to End Destitution and Protect Human Rights](#)
- [Can the Scottish Parliament come two terms with homelessness?](#)

- [A route-map to protect homes in communities across Scotland](#)

The additional impact of the Coronavirus outbreak on homelessness and the protected characteristics of people who experience it in Scotland was considered by Homeless Network Scotland and a specialist group of Expert Reviewers leading to publication of an [overview of equality considerations arising from Coronavirus \(Covid-19\)](#) and its impact on homelessness in Scotland.

4. More lived experience in policy making

Homeless Network Scotland provides several platforms for people with lived experience of homelessness to be involved as strategic partners, reality-checkers and change-makers. We have been impressed by the commitment of Scottish Government's homelessness unit to fully support this, including seconding a full-time policy officer with lived experience of homelessness to their team.

With all our partners, we are committed to constantly learning, improving and increasing the impact of lived experience in policy making. An outline of current platforms include:

- [All in for Change](#) is a team of around 30 people from across Scotland committed to ending homelessness and each with personal experience of homelessness or with frontline responsibilities. The team has a seat at the Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group and are experts in what homelessness looks like within their networks for the people who are most affected. This helps to bridge the gap between policy, planning and action on the ground.

This summer a national conversation hosted by All In For Change through an online survey and a series of workshops revealed progress on the team's Four New Directions for how Scotland responds to homelessness - People First, No Wrong Door, At Home and Good Vibes. Progress was identified along with some discrepancy between what we say in Scotland (our policy) and what we do (our practice). For example, more organisations are becoming more trauma informed, offering more training to staff, and building the approach into their daily work to improve the offer of support. However, limitations on available housing mean too many people in recovery are still being offered tenancies in blocks/closes where there is identified drug dealing/use, in some cases forcing people to choose between a home and their recovery.

- **Prevention Commission.** The work of the commission strongly influenced the Prevention Review Group recommendations. The Commission comprised people with lived and frontline experience of homelessness who met regularly during the lifetime of the Prevention Review Group to discuss and shape the proposals. Starting with an exploration of what makes a good law – and do we need one? The group emphasised the importance of keeping it simple (duty to ask and act), choice and control for people facing homelessness and of services working in alongside people to find out what assistance they need to address their situation.
- **Glasgow Homeless Involvement and Feedback Team.** GHIFT were a full and equal partner in the commissioning process for the 10-year, £187m Glasgow Alliance to End Homelessness and now members of the Alliance Leadership Team jointly responsibly for all commissioning and decision-making processes over the next 10 years. Recently, GHIFT hosted focus groups in Glasgow hotels with residents accommodated during the pandemic, providing detailed reports to the Alliance with the findings, driving immediate improvements and helping shape future support models.