

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

2nd Meeting, 2024 (Session 6), Wednesday 7
February 2024

PE1946: To call on the Scottish Government to pay all charges for homeless temporary accommodation

Petitioner Sean Anthony Clerkin

**Petition
summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to use general taxation to pay for all charges for homeless temporary accommodation, including writing off the £33.3 million debt owed by homeless people for temporary accommodation to local authorities.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1946>

Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [3 May 2023](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new responses from the Scottish Government and the petitioner which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).
5. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. The Scottish Government's initial position on this petition can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).

7. The Scottish Government's Temporary Accommodation Task and Finish Group published its [final report](#) on 30 March 2023. The group made two recommendations about charges for temporary accommodation:
 - **Recommendation 14:** COSLA should undertake a benchmarking process on TA and there should be greater transparency on charges of TA by individual local authorities. (page 21)
 - **Recommendation 15:** The Scottish Government should review the guidance to local authorities on setting charges for TA by clearly defining the terms "reasonable charge" and "affordable". (page 21)
8. To take forward this work, the group recommended that the Scottish Government should set up a working group to examine financing and the cost of temporary accommodation.
9. Longer-term solutions identified in the report included phasing funding towards making temporary accommodation free at the point of use by restructuring the funding model (Appendix 5).
10. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 4 signatures have been received on this petition.

Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE1946: To call on the Scottish Government to pay all charges for homeless temporary accommodation.

Petitioner

Sean Anthony Clerkin

Date lodged

11 July 2022

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to use general taxation to pay for all charges for homeless temporary accommodation, including writing off the £33.3 million debt owed by homeless people for temporary accommodation to local authorities.

Previous action

Written to Shona Robison on the homeless issue and I have highlighted this issue in various newspapers. Jackie Baillie MSP has been involved in homeless issue as well.

Background information

The issue of the plight of homeless vulnerable people paying large charges for temporary accommodation from local authorities was first highlighted by a recent report from the Legal Services Agency in Glasgow which concluded that the Scottish Government should use general taxation to pay for all charges for temporary accommodation for homeless people.

More recently Homeless Action Scotland have highlighted in a report that working people who are homeless are being forced into serious debt. As they are above the threshold for housing benefits, the report suggests that local authorities are chasing after them using debt collection agencies.

The cost of living crisis will further impoverish many people in Scotland and it is highly likely there will be an increase in homeless applications

and homeless assessments therefore the state has to protect our most vulnerable.

It is in this context of terrible financial hardship being experienced by many people in Scotland that I present this petition calling on the State to protect very vulnerable homeless people from this financial burden that will drive many of them into physical and mental ill health.

Annexe B

Extract from the Official Report of last consideration of PE1946 on 3 May 2023

The Convener: PE1946, which was lodged by Sean Clerkin, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to use general taxation to pay for all charges for homeless temporary accommodation, including writing off the £33.3 million debt that is owed by homeless people for temporary accommodation to local authorities.

Since our previous consideration of the petition, the Scottish Government's temporary accommodation task and finish group published its report on 30 March this year. The group made two recommendations about charges for temporary accommodation, and those are available in the clerk's note. In response to our recent correspondence, the Scottish Government stated that "provisions to prohibit local authorities from charging individuals for the provision of temporary accommodation have not been considered for inclusion" in the housing bill, and that it has "no plans to pay for homeless temporary accommodation nor waive the outstanding debt owed".

Shelter Scotland's written submission outlines a number of issues, including its view that a change in the financing of temporary accommodation is overdue. The petitioner's recent submissions highlight concerns about the repossession of family homes resulting in record amounts of homelessness in Scotland, and his submission outlines information that has been received through a freedom of information request to Glasgow City Council. He states that the system is "unworkable and broken now" and that means that thousands of people need help immediately.

I invite colleagues to suggest any way in which we might proceed.

David Torrance: Should the committee write to the Scottish Government to seek confirmation of its planned work in response to the report of the temporary accommodation task and finish group? In particular, the committee should ask about recommendations 14 and 15, as they relate to temporary accommodation charges.

The Convener: As members have no more suggestions, are we content to proceed with writing to the Scottish Government as Mr Torrance has suggested?

Members indicated agreement.

Annexe C

Scottish Government submission of 19 September 2023

PE1946/G: To call on the Scottish Government to pay all charges for homeless temporary accommodation

Thank you for your letter of 4 May following the Committee's consideration of the petition PE1946 at its meeting on 3 May 2023, which requests the Scottish Government's planned work in response to the Temporary Accommodation Task and Finish Group's report, in particular, recommendations 14 and 15.

The Scottish Government published its [response](#) to the Temporary Accommodation Task and Finish Group's report on 19 July 2023. It committed the Scottish Government to prioritising action in response to the recommendations that will have the greatest impact in reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation by 2026. The key actions for immediate progression are:

- invest at least £60 million through the Affordable Housing Supply Programme in 2023-24 to support a national acquisition plan
- maintain momentum in delivering our Affordable Housing Supply Programme
- work with social landlords to deliver a new programme of stock management
- implement targeted partnership plans with the local authorities facing greatest pressure

Although our immediate focus will be on working with partners to deliver on the actions above, our response did address all 15 recommendations made by the Temporary Accommodation Task and Finish Group. As some of the recommendations were not considered to have an immediate impact on reducing the numbers in temporary accommodation, our response set out how we will address these over the longer-term. These include recommendations 14 and 15 on temporary accommodation financing.

Recommendation 14: COSLA should undertake a benchmarking process on TA and there should be greater transparency on charges of TA by individual local authorities.

As this recommendation was directed at COSLA, the Scottish Government's response did not directly address this. However, as per the Verity House Agreement, Scottish Government officials will engage with COSLA as necessary in relation to progressing this recommendation.

Recommendation 15: The Scottish Government should review the guidance to local authorities on setting charges for TA by clearly defining the terms "reasonable charge" and "affordable".

Established in May 2022, the Housing Affordability Working Group, made up of stakeholders and experts from across the housing sector, has been tasked with developing a shared understanding of housing affordability for Scotland. The group will critically review the main working definitions and the different uses of affordability in policy and practice, which will inform recommendations to Scottish Ministers. This could potentially help to clarify guidance on 'reasonable charges' and 'affordable'. Please note that the group's work will not result in a legal definition of housing affordability but rather a working definition that has attracted consensus support.

I hope this response is helpful to the Committee.

Homelessness Unit

Petitioner submission of 14 January 2023

PE1946/H: To call on the Scottish Government to pay all charges for homeless temporary accommodation

The Scottish Government has abandoned its homeless people by failing to declare a housing and homeless emergency and is also planning to cut its affordable housing budget by 25%. When I wrote Petition 1946 in 2022, I predicted that homelessness would worsen due to the cost of

living crisis and that is what has happened with a 9% increase in homeless applications to 39,006, and there was a 10% increase in homeless assessments to 32,242 households representing 53,111 people with 16,263 being children to the year ending 31st March 2023.

Given these record numbers of homeless, there has been a major increase of homeless households found in often squalid and substandard temporary accommodation increasing to 15,039 households with there being 9,595 homeless children languishing in such Dickensian temporary accommodation. That is an increase of 27% in households and a 30% increase in children between March 2020 and March 2023.

Increasingly there are homeless households in temporary accommodation who are working and do not qualify for full housing benefit and find themselves deep in debt due to these high costs for temporary accommodation.

In such circumstances, the Scottish Government has rejected the call of this petition for the state to pay the high costs of temporary accommodation set by local authorities and refused to write off the historic debt of £33.3 million owed by the homeless to local authorities.

I would urge the MSPs on this committee to be courageous and keep this petition alive to pressurise the Scottish Government into a change of mind as we are now in a housing and homeless emergency with Edinburgh, Glasgow, Argyle and Bute declaring emergencies and a fourth local authority Fife Council has stated in recent days its intention to declare a housing emergency very soon.

Please stand up for homeless men, women and children in Scotland by sending a clear signal by keeping this petition alive and sending it to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee.