



Homeless Action Scotland

Evidence
Homelessness in Scotland
What next?

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Evidence - Homelessness

Executive summary

Scotland should be working to maintain and develop the culture which seeks long lasting solutions for everyone affected by homelessness and to avoid any return to ‘rationing’ services. We know how to eradicate and prevent homelessness; we have the legislation and guidance in place, but we need to utilise all the tools at our disposal to ensure consistency in good practice across the country.

The points below highlight our main recommendations:

- The Scottish Government should implement a plan to end both the use of nightshelters and B&Bs in the lifetime of this parliament.
- A 10-year plan was launched in May 2016 to end preventable youth homelessness. We seek an all-party commitment to prioritise this aim.
- ‘The Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2014’ should be extended to include young people.
- The Government should require all Local Authorities to have both a homelessness strategy, and a separate youth homelessness strategy; tying into other strategies across the LA.
- The Housing Options guidance should be reviewed, then made statutory and to include a section stating that Local Authorities should work across a broader range of departments both within and out with the Authority, in particular Eviction Teams; considering the full service roll out of Universal Credit.
- A stable and predictable funding regime should be in place to allow for preventative support to be provided across the country.
- Better linkage between violence against women services and the homelessness sector, and the funding to create and retain this.

Housing Options and Homelessness Prevention

How do you feel housing options and homelessness prevention is working in practice? Are there examples of good practice?

Providing a range of housing options with a more holistic approach can be beneficial to people accessing services, and Homeless Action supports much of the work that has taken place to date.

However, there are definite areas for improvement, and some Local Authorities have embedded the approach better than others.

How effective is the relationship between all the relevant agencies, including the health sector, and charities working on homelessness prevention?

Most Local Authorities are working to a Housing Options model, some with extremely good relationships with a varied range of external organisations. However, to date it has been almost exclusively retained within Local Authorities. The model is currently known and used primarily by Local Authorities. It is now time to shift this way of working to actively include Housing Associations and the third sector, improving communications and practice across the sectors and allowing different sectors to learn from one another.

Homeless Action Scotland welcomes the explicit recognition of the links between domestic abuse and homelessness in the ongoing Equally Safe delivery plan consultation. We are supportive of the commitments to ensure that LA have corresponding commissioned training resources. However, we would encourage a broader gender based violence approach to ensure consistency of knowledge and support for a diverse range of issues including childhood sexual abuse, human trafficking, homophobia, transphobia, commercial sexual exploitation and sexual violence, amongst many other factors, which are overrepresented in the homeless population.

This approach requires better linkage between violence against women services, the homelessness sector and LGBT organisations. To create this there must be well coordinated funding streams from the Scottish Government and support for linked up working which does not rely on third parties such as the lottery to fill the gaps.

What needs to happen to improve the delivery of housing options and homelessness prevention services and the outcomes achieved for service users?

Working within a rights-based system it is easy to see how attention can become focused only on the point of crisis. However, to improve outcomes for service users and prevent homelessness, Homeless Action Scotland believes that there is also a need to re-focus and fund long term prevention and sustainable solutions. The following points outline some of the more specific areas of opportunity for improvement:

- Homeless Action has shadowed homelessness assessments and Housing Options Interviews in a number of Local Authorities, gaining an insight into the different ways the model is approached.

Generally, there is a more holistic, person centred focus and the options provided reflect this. However, the options offered are not as tailored as they could be; too frequently the same options provided to different cases. This is partly due to a lack of affordable options within housing, but for support services and broader solutions, there is further training and coordination with local services required.

Homeless Action Scotland supports a programme of training and looks forward to the Housing Options Training toolkit becoming available. However, we would ask for an explicit

recognition that additional training also needs to be funded to expand knowledge relating to each locality, considering a wide range of support needs including local debt advice, mediation, mental health and employability.

- As well as reaching external sectors, Housing Options must become a cross department model within local authorities. The model should involve all relevant departments including social care, employability and education and in particular Eviction Teams. This suggestion is particularly timely given the likelihood of 6 week arrears where a tenant moves into Universal Credit.
- Homeless Action was pleased to be a part of the development of the Housing options guidance, and welcomed the guidance for Housing Options being implemented. However, we are aware that it was due to be reviewed April 2017 which we would welcome. After which we would recommend the document becomes statutory guidance.
- Updated guidance should also include specific guidance for housing options for youth homelessness, considering that both the reasons behind youth homelessness as well as the solutions can be different.

Temporary Accommodation

What evidence is there of pressure on temporary accommodation in your area? Has this increased?

Homeless Action believes that temporary accommodation is often not the most suitable option for people in crisis. While temporary accommodation can remain a useful resource to help people in certain circumstances, it does not provide an offer that is always fit for purpose. The following points give an overview of improvements that should be made:

- Bed and breakfasts are still widely in use across the country and for some Local Authorities there is very little evidence of attempts to decrease this. There needs to be a focussed plan to move funds from these establishments to suitable alternative accommodation types.

All temporary accommodation should provide the minimum of a clean, furnished, safe secure place where someone is able to sleep in comfort, sit in calm, make a hot drink, cook a hot meal, wash themselves and launder clothes. This should be available to them for 24 hours of every day they are there. These basic needs are not met by B&Bs on several counts.

- Some LA's automatically place people in temporary accommodation while they are assessed, and in many cases, they end up staying there much longer term. This practice is not acceptable or financially sound, yet it is an unwritten pathway provided to so many.
- We would request that 'The Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2014' is extended to include young people, and in general for young people not be placed in accommodation where there are people with medium to high support needs. We would look for this change to eradicate the use of B&Bs for young people and improve temporary accommodation options, avoiding unsuitable allocations.

- There are currently a range of temporary furnished flats in each Local Authority; these are most often allocated to households with children. This is understandable given the number available, but does not make it the suitable balance of accommodation provision:

Homeless Action would like to see an end to winter nightshelters and the use of B&Bs; both are unfit for purpose and prolong homelessness. However, to do so, we realise that for some Local Authorities these provisions will need to be replaced with something more suitable.

Homeless Action would recommend that the solution is a larger number of temporary furnished flats with the possibility of support. We also know of some Local Authorities where nightshelters have been used, despite there being alternatives with hostel style accommodation and therefore the answer for these areas may not be additional accommodation provisions, but to look at provisions overall. For all of this to take place we need a strategy to make it happen.

- In addition to the above, we recommend that if the ‘temporary period of stay’ becomes longer than a year, that the person residing there is given the opportunity for it to become their permanent tenancy. The Local Authority should then make an alternative property available as temporary to replace that provision. This is unlikely to be any more costly than the current arrangements, but instead may result in less upheaval for the resident.
- There should be agreed minimum standards of accommodation across all forms of temporary accommodation, including B&Bs (whilst being used) and women’s refuges. The need for privacy, safety and stability is key to recovery from trauma and poor accommodation can affect wellbeing.

How can homeless people’s experiences of temporary accommodation be improved?

- There are also still people who are turned away, for all accommodation, despite their legal entitlement. We recommend that the Scottish Housing Regulator acts to ensure that these basic legal rights are met consistently across Scotland.
- Homeless Action Scotland has welcomed the work taking place between housing and prisons, but there are still cases where people are leaving prisons without accommodation in place. If there was more support and planning between prisons and housing, we could have someone moving directly into permanent accommodation. We recommend an independent housing adviser in all short stay prisons This is especially key with Young Offender Institutions.

Do you have concerns about the funding of temporary accommodation?

Though Temporary and Supported accommodation are funded differently, they are often provided by the same providers. Temporary accommodation has different functions: emergency accommodation whilst a household is assessed and ‘warehousing’ whilst a household awaits permanent accommodation. Homeless Action would suggest there is a greater emphasis on crisis temporary accommodation. It is important that funding takes account of the type of housing

stock used in Scotland; that it takes account of the fact that sharing with another household may be unwise and that with a high turnover, housing management costs are likely to be high. Homeless Action commends work undertaken by ALACHO to produce a typology and costing of the different types of temporary accommodation required and recommends that a means be found to address the funding gap identified in that work.

Permanent Accommodation

How do social landlord's allocation policies prioritise applications from homeless households and how does choice based lettings work in practice?

The situation varies across Scotland. Homeless Action is concerned that 'Section 5 referrals' which ensure RSLs assist in housing homeless households are not being used as effectively as they should be in all areas. We recommend that the Scottish housing Regulator undertake a Thematic Inquiry into Section 5 referrals to ensure consistency across Scotland.

Choice based lettings do not work effectively for those who do not have time to wait (i.e. homeless people). While they are relatively simple to understand, ultimately, for any popular properties they rely on waiting time rather than need. All allocation policies are rationing systems which result from the lack of adequate affordable housing supply and all systems will have winners and losers. CBL is not an effective means of allocating social housing to homeless households.

Multiple and Complex Needs

What more could be done to ensure that the needs of homeless people with multiple and complex needs are adequately supported? Are there examples of good practice?

Health and Social Care Integration offers an opportunity to make a real difference to this client group. Too frequently we hear of situations where people who have mental health, addiction and housing issues have only one of their needs addressed rather than managing them holistically. Initiatives, such as Housing First for those with the most complex needs show very encouraging results. It is important that Integrated Joint Boards, Alcohol and Drugs Partnerships and housing (and support) providers pool resources to address the whole needs of individuals.

This client group, though relatively small, consumes significant resources with largely poor outcomes at present. It can change with co-ordinated funding and action.

There needs to be a better understanding of trauma, an end to the 'treatment first' approach, an end to services requiring sobriety before they will accommodate or treat households and significant progress to ensuring that services are available when they are needed.

- To be effective services cannot be one size fits all. Therefore, to improve delivery of homelessness prevention services and service user outcomes it is vital that we work towards holistic, person centred care. At a minimum, this means future guidance should consider promoting psychologically informed environments with an understanding of trauma, gender sensitive services which recognise the different needs and experiences of all genders, best

practice domestic abuse training including a gendered analysis and ensuring that responsive and robust referral mechanisms are in place to link people into the support that works for them.

What scope is there for improved joint working with all agencies and groups supporting those with multiple and complex needs, which would also include the health sector?

- Homeless Action Scotland welcomes the increasing involvement of health in the partnership approach to tackling homelessness, but there is a danger of a 'medicalised' approach which looks on homelessness as a series of personal failings rather than also at the structural issues (supply of and access to housing and other services).

Homeless Action believes that through IJBs significant progress could be made in addressing the needs of this group.

- Dundee City Council has recently implemented a Lead Professional model, currently in its early stages. The approach is a person-centred case management model. The current aim is to reduce repeat homelessness. This is done by improving communication across services working with a service user, with one person taking the reins for managing the case and keeping momentum. The services should have a TAY (Team Around You) meeting every 28 days, which the service user can also attend (if they wish to, or in part if they prefer). Each meeting should provide an update and actions for the next 28 days. This approach should enhance the service provided, avoid duplication of work and place the service user at the centre of the support. The commissioning team have been the drivers for this, which has been a key part of it being implemented.

Homeless Action would like to see the scheme evaluated and rolled out across Scotland, if proven to be effective for this client group.

- A lack of focus on gendered experiences of multiple and complex needs was highlighted by the 2007 Scottish Executive Literature Review on Multiple and Complex Needs. Homeless Action Scotland believes that this gap still exists and has a disproportionate impact on those experiencing homelessness. We strongly recommend a focus on gendered responses both within homelessness and in other services supporting those with multiple and complex needs.

How can access to general health services, including preventative health services, be improved for homeless people?

- Homeless Action Scotland recognises the important contribution made by homeless specific health services but would recommend further to work to ensure mainstream services are designed to be accessible and suitable for this group. This includes more work around psychologically informed environments and trauma informed care.
- Homeless Action would recommend that the findings from the upcoming report on Health Data linkage with HL1 statistics are used to determine the direction of future services.

What role could the “housing first” model play in improving outcomes for homeless people with multiple and complex needs?

Homeless Action Scotland has evaluated 2 Local Authorities who have rolled out Housing First. The outcomes from the evaluations demonstrate very positive findings. However, Housing First is not suitable for everyone. There is a need for a range of accommodation types with appropriate support. Very often the savings to the public purse from Housing First benefit budgets which do not directly fund it (community justice, health etc.). Housing First relies to a large extent on third party funding to meet the higher housing support costs involved which ultimately benefit areas such as health and community justice as well as housing. A sustainable funding stream needs to be found to enable this approach to be mainstreamed.

Rough Sleeping

How has the pattern of rough sleeping changed in your area? For example, is the number of rough sleepers increasing or have the characteristics of rough sleepers changed? What are the reasons?

Homeless Action Scotland is currently conducting a second survey of rough sleeping. We are aware that HL1 statistics underestimate the prevalence of rough sleeping since the data only records those who approach local authorities. The statistics are welcome but do not give the whole picture. Homeless Action recognises that there are different cohorts within the rough sleeping population (regular rough sleepers, sporadic, ‘one off’, people without recourse to public funds, people who ‘sofa surf’ etc.). It is our view that to tackle rough sleeping effectively, different groups will require specific targeted action.

Here are some points we can share from the report findings so far:

- There is an obvious rise in visible rough sleeping
- There are several groups of people sleeping rough creating "communities" of rough sleepers
- In Edinburgh, there is an increase in groups of EU nationals (particularly Eastern Europeans)
- In Glasgow people don't want to approach the council as they don't think there's any point
- Cases coming through appear to be more complex (poly drug use, mental health etc.)
- Due to commissioning of services, some organisations running multiple services, there is a knock-on effect if a person is excluded from one service -making it harder to access help
- There is a need for more outreach support
- Women are being exploited for sex in return for "protection"
- Mental health and Health services need to play a larger part in the solutions

Other

Are there any problems with people accessing their housing and homelessness rights? If yes, how can access be improved?

Information around homelessness provided by Local Authorities can be varied, and some wording available through websites can be misinterpreted. Homeless Action Scotland would suggest that there is standardised wording that is used across all Local Authorities highlighting people's rights and providing clear routes how to access help and services.



Submission by Homeless Action Scotland

Homeless Action Scotland is the membership body for organisations and individuals in Scotland working to prevent and tackle homelessness. Our members include local authorities, housing associations, voluntary organisations and individuals.

Homeless Action Scotland is happy for this evidence to be published.

For any further information or to answer any queries regarding the content of this document please contact:

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