

Scottish Government submission of 29 July 2022

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

Sean Anthony Clerkin has submitted a petition to the Scottish Parliament which asks the Scottish Government to use general taxation to pay for all charges for temporary accommodation, including writing off the £33.3 million debt owed for temporary accommodation to local authorities.

In the Scottish Government's most recent responses to Mr Clerkin on this matter, issued on 31 January and 8 March 2022, we highlighted that the Scottish Government encourages all local authorities to take a person-centred approach and to take individual circumstances into account when deciding how much to charge for temporary accommodation.

The Scottish Government is working with COSLA to review the way in which funding provided to local authorities is used to prevent homelessness and reduce reliance on temporary accommodation – an action in our Ending Homelessness Together action plan. COSLA has stated that temporary accommodation charges are a matter for individual councils and are based on local need. These charges by councils for homelessness services have to cover the funding for providing the temporary accommodation, as well as staffing costs for providing these services.

The Scottish Government agrees that the cost of temporary accommodation – both to the household and local authorities – can be expensive, which is why we are firmly committed to reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation. We are committed to introducing new legal duties on the prevention of homelessness in a forthcoming Housing Bill. This will include new duties on public bodies to prevent homelessness alongside changes to homelessness legislation to ensure action can be taken at an earlier stage to prevent homelessness. Our approach is guided by the principles of shared public

responsibility to prevent homelessness, earlier intervention and increasing choice and control over their housing options for people at risk of homelessness. These changes are aimed at preventing the disruption and trauma of homelessness for individuals and families and reducing the need for temporary accommodation in Scotland.

In 2022-23, in addition to funding provided through the local government settlement, we are providing local authorities an annual share of £23.5 million for homelessness prevention and response measures and an annual share of £8 million to support the implementation of rapid rehousing transition plans, which aim to reduce the use of temporary accommodation by moving people into settled accommodation as quickly as possible.

We have also recently established a temporary accommodation task and finish group, chaired by Shelter Scotland and the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers, to consider how Scotland can reduce the number of people living temporary accommodation and the length of time they stay there. The group has been asked to review other factors that impact on the use of temporary accommodation, including charging practices and affordability concerns. A representative from Legal Services Agency (LSA), who published the recent report on temporary accommodation charges, is on the group.

The Scottish Government is acutely aware of the impact the rising cost of living is having on people and the hardship this can bring, which is why we have committed to a £290 million package of support to help people affected by the cost of living crisis. This will allow us to provide £150 to every household in receipt of council tax reduction in all council tax bands and £150 to all other households in a band A to D property. The £290 million package includes an extra £10 million for the Fuel Insecurity Fund to help households at risk of self-disconnection or who are self-rationing their energy use due to unaffordable fuel costs.

These measures will help households impacted by the cost of living crisis who are not in receipt of benefits and who are not claiming a council tax reduction. However, the Scottish Government will continue to urge the UK Government to use all the powers at their disposal to address the cost of living crisis.

The Scottish Government is committed to working with local authorities and third sector providers to deliver vital homelessness services in their areas. I hope the Committee finds this information helpful.