

Shelter Scotland submission of 28 November 2022

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

We are responding to the Committee's request for information as part of their consideration of PE1946.

- Temporary accommodation is a crucial part of Scotland's rights-based homelessness system and the fulfilment of the UN right to adequate housing.
- The current system can lead to inflated temporary accommodation charges which can act as a barrier to working households and those not eligible for housing benefit.
- A change in the financing of temporary accommodation is overdue.
- A sub group of the Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group is set to consider financing of temporary accommodation in early 2023.
- An audit of existing homelessness funding should be undertaken to identify potential funding gaps and ensure money is targeted in the right places.
- Prioritising delivery of the social homes required to reduce housing need will reduce both the backlog and time households are stuck in expensive temporary accommodation.

All households experiencing homelessness should be able to access affordable temporary accommodation which meets their needs.

However, the current financial arrangements for temporary accommodation mean that charges are often significantly higher than social rents. This creates a barrier for working households and those not eligible for housing benefit/universal credit. It can lead to a poverty trap whereby households are disincentivised from taking up employment or further education opportunities if it means their housing benefit entitlement will change, and their temporary accommodation becomes unaffordable to them as a result. It can also act as a barrier to households experiencing homelessness whereby they do not seek or

take up support and the rights to which they're entitled when they cannot afford the accommodation charges.¹

A recent report from Legal Services Agency² found that all Scottish local authorities issue some charges for the provision of temporary accommodation and use varied methods to calculate charges, resulting in a postcode lottery for homeless people. Whilst the law requires that charges for temporary accommodation must be reasonable, the report found that whilst local authorities consider affordability when setting their charges, they do not currently take individual circumstances into account.

Action is needed to ensure people aren't locked into a temporary accommodation system that makes them poorer or leaves people's lives on hold by preventing them from finding work. The cost of temporary accommodation to individuals must be addressed to ensure that people's housing and homelessness rights can be realised.

A subgroup of the Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group (HPSG), the Task and Finish group on Temporary Accommodation, is due to conclude its work in 2023. The report and recommendations from the group may be useful for the Committee as part of their deliberations.

Scottish Housing Emergency Action Plan

Our Scottish Housing Emergency Action Plan³, launched in response to the growing national housing emergency, calls on the First Minister to spearhead a plan to protect households from homelessness and to reduce affordable housing need by 2026.

As part of this Emergency Action Plan, we have called for homelessness services to be fully funded, and for the Scottish Government to conduct an audit of existing homelessness funding at both local and national levels so that potential funding gaps can be identified and money targeted in the right places, including on temporary accommodation.

And prioritising the delivery of social homes needed to reduce housing need will reduce the backlog in temporary accommodation. This will ensure people are not trapped in expensive temporary accommodation

¹ For example, Crisis (2021) [The experiences and impact of in-work homelessness across Britain](#) and HAS (2022) [Exclusion of working homeless](#)

² LSA (2021) [Charges for temporary homeless accommodation in Scotland: law and reality](#)

³ Shelter Scotland (2022) [Scottish Housing Emergency Action Plan](#)

for lengthy periods of time, and instead are able to move on and build their lives in a settled home which meets their needs.