

Scottish Parliament: Social Justice and Social Security Committee

Homelessness and temporary accommodation

Submission from the Scottish Housing Regulator

Update to our February 2023 thematic review of homelessness services in Scotland

In February of this year we published [Homelessness services in Scotland: A thematic review](#). In that report we set out the findings of our thematic review of our work on the services provided by local authorities to help people experiencing homelessness.

This statement presents an update to that review, reflecting our ongoing engagement with councils about their delivery of services for people who are homeless, the Scottish Government's release of annual homelessness statistics in August 2023, and a review of the Annual Assurance Statements submitted to us by all councils by the end of October 2023.

In our thematic review we highlighted that some councils were finding it increasingly difficult to fully meet their statutory duties, and that there were increasing and more widespread breaches of statutory duties around the provision of temporary accommodation. At that time we said that for some councils there was an emerging risk of systemic failure.

Since the publication of the thematic review, the Scottish Government released [statistics](#) in August that showed that in the year to the end of March 2023 the number of homeless applications rose, there were more people and children than ever before in temporary accommodation, and that they are spending longer in such accommodation.

Through our ongoing engagement with councils about their delivery of services for people who are homeless we have found that breaches of statutory duties are now a regular occurrence in some councils. In their recently submitted Annual Assurance Statements 14 councils stated that they do not always fully comply with their duties to people who are homeless; indeed, some councils now regularly acknowledge that they are not able to fully meet all of their statutory duties to people who are homeless and are planning service delivery with the assumption that they will not be able to fully meet all of these duties all of the time.

In our [National Report on the Scottish Social Housing Charter](#), published in August 2023, we reported that social landlords are seeing a lower turnover of homes than they did before the pandemic hit in 2020: around 1,700 fewer homes became empty during 2022/23 than in the previous year and nearly 5,000 fewer than in 2019/20. We also reported that homes were, on average, empty for 56 days, significantly up on 32 days in 2019/20. This means that social landlords have fewer homes available to let to people in need, including those who are experiencing homelessness.

Looking further ahead, early findings from our analysis of the five year financial projections (FYFPs) submitted to us by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) in May show significant reductions in the number of RSLs that will be building new homes and in the number of new homes that will be built. We know that some RSLs have announced reductions in the size, or suspension of their new build programmes, since they submitted their FYFPs in May, so it is likely that these numbers will have reduced further.

We are also aware of potential significant additional demand for homelessness services resulting from the Home Office's initiative on streamlining asylum processing; one council has estimated that this is likely to result in more than 1,000 additional applications to the council for homeless assistance from people granted leave to remain by the end of this financial year.

Taking all of this together, it is clear that the demands on some councils now exceed their capacity to respond and in others it soon will; given this, we are of the view that there is systemic failure in the services provided to people who are homeless by some councils and that there is a heightened risk in other councils.

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Taking all of this together, it is clear that the demands on some councils now exceed their capacity to respond and in others it soon will; given this, we are of the view that there is systemic failure in the services provided to people who are homeless by some councils and that there is a heightened risk in other councils.

Next Steps

We will now engage with the councils which we believe are experiencing systemic failure, and we will update the engagement plans for those councils to reflect our assessment.

In our February thematic review, we emphasised that there are actions councils can take to respond to the current challenges in homelessness, and all councils should continue best efforts to meet their statutory obligations. We will continue to monitor, assess and report on councils' performance in discharging their duties to people who are homeless, and we will engage with councils to promote improvement where this is possible. However, systemic failure requires a systemic intervention that is beyond our regulatory powers.

We are aware that the Scottish Government has initiated work to bring forward measures to respond to the challenges councils are now experiencing. We believe that added urgency is now needed in this work. We are ready to work with the Scottish Government and other stakeholders to identify and implement actions that will address the acute issues in temporary and permanent accommodation for people who are homeless.