

# Scottish Parliament: Social Justice and Social Security Committee

## Homelessness and temporary accommodation

### Submission from Shelter Scotland

Shelter Scotland exists to defend the right to a safe home and fight the devastating impact the housing emergency has on people and society. We work in communities to understand the problem and change the system. We run national campaigns to fight for home.

The choices made on housing today have implications for decades to come. Just as we continue to live with the impact of policy decisions made since the 1980s, the decades of underinvestment and ongoing austerity policies, policy and spending decisions made now will impact our communities far into the future.

### Key messages

- **We are in a housing emergency, and that requires an emergency response from government.**
- There is consensus across the housing and homelessness sector and beyond **that business as usual will not address the exceptional levels of homelessness** and housing unaffordability people in Scotland are currently experiencing.
- Recent interventions from the Scottish Housing Regulator, ALACHO, SOLACE and others have made clear the scale of the challenge our local authorities face, with **homelessness systems across the country now experiencing systemic failure.**
- The **130% increase in the number of children stuck in temporary accommodation** since 2014 is a national scandal and reversing this trend should be the government's priority.
- The Scottish Government's decision to make **massive cuts to the housing budget** suggests they have made the choice to allow homelessness and number of families in temporary accommodation to increase.
- **Local authorities must be given the support and resources they need** to uphold housing rights and prevent homelessness services from failing.

It is now nearly a year since the Scottish Government's own expert Task and Finish group on temporary accommodation made its recommendations to HPSG, and nearly a year since the Scottish Housing Regulator made warnings of impending systemic failure. The situation has only got worse since then – and will continue to do so with huge budget cuts coming down the line.

### Scotland's Housing Emergency

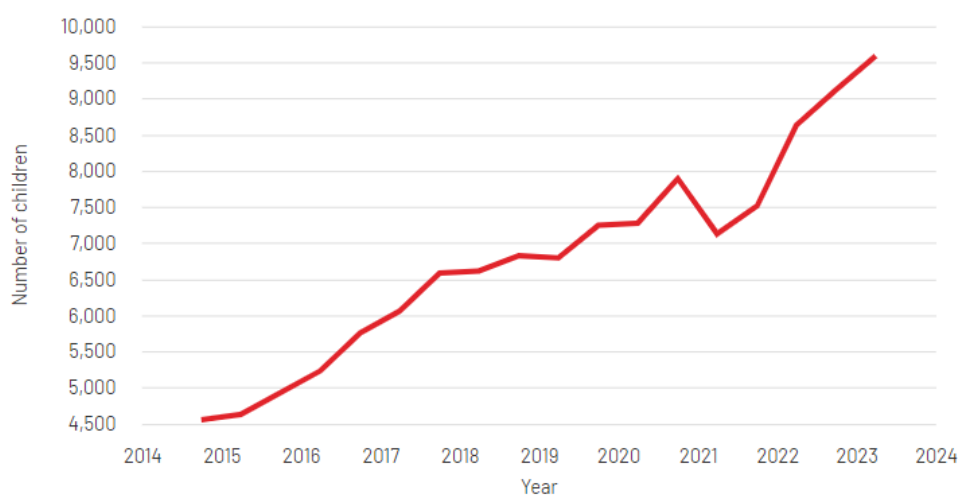
Scotland is in the grip of a devastating housing emergency which damages lives every single day.

- A record **9,595 children trapped in temporary accommodation** – up 130% since 2014.
- **1,910 households with children** that have been in trapped in temporary accommodation for over a year.
- **45 children become homeless every day.**
- **A household becomes homeless every 16 minutes.**

- A **10% increase** in households becoming homeless compared to last year.
- Local Authority homelessness services are busier than ever, with record numbers of open homelessness applications.
- Couples with children spend just under **a year trapped in temporary accommodation**, on average<sup>1</sup>
- Routine **failure by local authorities** to uphold housing rights.
- A **failure to deliver the social homes** we urgently need and a significant slowdown in new social housing developments in the last year.
- Private **rents continuing to rise** despite emergency legislation, and household incomes and the UK Government's **Local Housing Allowance rates are failing to keep pace**.
- Warnings of a **broken and failing housing system** from the Scottish Housing Regulator<sup>2</sup>, the Accounts Commission<sup>3</sup>, and the Scottish Government's own expert Task and Finish Group on Temporary Accommodation<sup>4</sup>
- **Local Authority Chief Executives have stated<sup>5</sup> Scotland is experiencing a housing emergency** and emergency action must be forthcoming.
- A government willing to prioritise other areas of public spending over providing safe, secure homes for children.

This is an emergency that damages health, wellbeing, education and the economy, and leaves tens of thousands of people without anywhere to call home. It is a national scandal.

Number of children in temporary accommodation in Scotland 2014 – 2023



Key

— Children in temporary accommodation

<sup>1</sup> Scottish Government (2023), [Homelessness in Scotland 2022/23](#).

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Housing Regulator (2023), [Homelessness Services in Scotland: A Thematic Review](#)

<sup>3</sup> Accounts Commission (2023), [Local Government in Scotland](#)

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Government (2023), [Temporary Accommodation Task and Finish Group: final report and recommendations](#)

<sup>5</sup> SOLACE (2023), [Housing in Scotland: Current Context and Preparing for the Future](#)

## Over a year of warnings being ignored

### **Summer 2022:**

- Shelter Scotland published our Scottish Housing Emergency Action Plan in response to then-record homelessness statistics.

### **Winter 2022/2023:**

- The Scottish Government announced cuts to the budget to deliver social homes for 2023/24.
- Record levels of homelessness were hit again.
- The Scottish Housing Regulator warned of a risk of systemic failure in homelessness services.

### **Spring 2023:**

- The Temporary Accommodation Task and Finish group presented its findings and recommendations, but waited months for the government to respond.
- The Accounts Commission warned of local authority housing and homelessness services being at risk.

### **Summer 2023:**

- Argyll and Bute Council declared a housing emergency.
- Local authority chief executives warned of a failing housing system and a housing emergency in Scotland.
- The Scottish Government finally responded to the TA Task and Finish Group recommendations, but the response offered no new targets, piecemeal funding and a limited leadership role for Scottish Ministers.
- Yet more record levels of homelessness were reported as the number of children trapped in temporary accommodation rapidly approached 10,000.

### **Autumn 2023:**

- The City of Edinburgh Council and Glasgow City Council declared housing emergencies in Scotland's two largest cities.
- The Scottish Government refused to back calls to declare a national housing emergency.
- Statistics outlined devastating numbers of deaths of homeless people in Scotland, and continued growth in private sector rents despite emergency legislation.

### **Winter 2023/2024:**

- The Scottish Housing Regulator said some local authorities were experiencing systemic failure in their homelessness services, and were beyond the point of regulation.
- A further significant slowdown in the delivery of social homes was announced in quarterly statistics – with new social starts falling by a staggering 29% on last year.
- Scottish Government announce further swingeing cuts to the Affordable Housing Supply Programme budget, ripping £196m out of the budget in order to fund other policy areas and reducing the budget by 26% in the face of steeply rising child homelessness.

## Responding to the emergency

### Deliver the social homes we need

Without sufficient good quality social homes across Scotland, we will not meet anti-poverty targets, tackle health inequalities, close the attainment gap, reduce homelessness, or alleviate the significant strain on local services.

The government is failing to deliver new social homes at the rate required to reduce housing need. **Year-on-year budget cuts have resulted in a steep fall in both starts and approvals of new social homes (down 29% and 18% respectively** in the most recent statistics<sup>6</sup>) – and without those homes the housing emergency is only going to get worse with more people trapped in temporary accommodation for longer, and more people unable to have their housing rights upheld.

We raised our concerns with the Finance Secretary<sup>7</sup> ahead of the budget and called on her to ensure that the Affordable Housing Supply Programme was at a minimum protected. **The Scottish Government has no hope of meeting its statutory child poverty targets if it continues to look to the social housing supply budget for savings** at every opportunity.

We are devastated that these calls, from ourselves and partners from across the housing, homelessness and anti-poverty sectors, have fallen on deaf ears, with housing pretty much singled-out for cuts in the 2024/25 draft budget. To cut the housing supply budget by 26% in cash terms is a staggering decision by the Scottish **Government, particularly when the overall capital budget is only falling by 4% in real terms.**<sup>8</sup>

We were already concerned that the Scottish Government's response to the Task and Finish Group on Temporary Accommodation would not drive the structural changes needed. There were no new targets, piecemeal funding was offered, and we were concerned about the limited leadership role the Scottish Government would play in the proposed National Acquisition Programme. **The 2024/25 budget cuts suggest the government has abandoned even this most timid of responses altogether.**

### Fully Fund Homelessness Services

Significant investment in frontline services is required if we are to tackle the backlog in temporary accommodation and ensure people's housing rights are upheld and enforced. **Local authorities cannot continue to be asked to do more with less**, and the warnings from the Scottish Housing Regulator, Accounts Commission, ALACHO and SOLACE should awaken the government to the reality of the crisis being faced in housing and homelessness services.

Late last year, **the Scottish Housing Regulator said that we were now at the point of systemic failure in local homelessness services**, following previous warnings in February. This is an emergency. A failing homelessness system means more people will be driven into the severe deprivation and hardship. People will have their housing rights

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<sup>6</sup> Scottish Government (2023), [Housing Statistics for Scotland Quarterly Update to end September 2023](#).

<sup>7</sup> Shelter Scotland (2023), [Letter to Cabinet Secretary for Finance, 12 September 2023](#)

<sup>8</sup> Scottish Fiscal Commission (2023), [Scotland's Economic and Fiscal Forecasts](#), p.6.

breached on a mass scale. It is remarkable that the government has not listened to this analysis.

Over a decade of austerity and real terms budget cuts have left local authority services stripped to the bone while they try to deliver the rightful extension of housing rights from national government. This has resulted in a situation where **legal duties are routinely breached** – and it is people in need of support who are left to suffer the consequences of that.

The Scottish Government should be ensuring that **local authorities have the resources they need to deliver on existing housing rights**, as well as ensuring the funding is in place and staff are prepared to deliver the suite of new housing rights, such as the UN right to adequate housing. Failure to do so will only trap even more people in the temporary accommodation system.

There are nearly 10,000 children stuck in temporary accommodation in Scotland. It is quite staggering that the government is not doing everything in its power to respond to that situation – and are instead pursuing cuts which will only make things worse.

### **The impact of temporary accommodation on children and families**

Shelter Scotland has commissioned research from De Montfort University and University College London into children's experiences of Temporary Accommodation. We will hear from children in their own words the impact that growing up in temporary accommodation has on them in terms of their mental and physical health, ability to thrive and achieve their full potential.

We are happy to keep the committee updated as this research progresses in the coming months and years.