

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 28 January 2026
3rd Meeting, 2026 (Session 6)

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

Introduction

Petitioner Sean Anthony Clerkin

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to use general taxation to pay for all charges for homeless temporary accommodation, including writing off the £33.3 million debt owed by homeless people for temporary accommodation to local authorities.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1946>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 4 June 2025](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Housing.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received a new written submission from the Cabinet Secretary for Housing which is set out in **Annexe C**.
4. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage](#).
5. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. [The Scottish Government gave its initial response to the petition on 29 July 2022](#).
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 11 signatures have been received on this petition.

Action

8. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee
January 2026

Annexe A: Summary of petition

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

Petitioner

Sean Anthony Clerkin

Date Lodged

11 July 2022

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to use general taxation to pay for all charges for homeless temporary accommodation, including writing off the £33.3 million debt owed by homeless people for temporary accommodation to local authorities.

Previous action

Written to Shona Robison on the homeless issue and I have highlighted this issue in various newspapers. Jackie Baillie MSP has been involved in homeless issue as well.

Background information

The issue of the plight of homeless vulnerable people paying large charges for temporary accommodation from local authorities was first highlighted by a recent report from the Legal Services Agency in Glasgow which concluded that the Scottish Government should use general taxation to pay for all charges for temporary accommodation for homeless people.

More recently Homeless Action Scotland have highlighted in a report that working people who are homeless are being forced into serious debt. As they are above the threshold for housing benefits, the report suggests that local authorities are chasing after them using debt collection agencies.

The cost of living crisis will further impoverish many people in Scotland and it is highly likely there will be an increase in homeless applications and homeless assessments therefore the state has to protect our most vulnerable.

It is in this context of terrible financial hardship being experienced by many people in Scotland that I present this petition calling on the State to protect very vulnerable homeless people from this financial burden that will drive many of them into physical and mental ill health.

Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE1946 on 4 June 2025

The Convener: PE1946, which was lodged by Sean Clerkin, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to use general taxation to pay for all charges for homeless temporary accommodation, including writing off the £33.3 million debt owed by homeless people for temporary accommodation to local authorities.

We last considered the petition on 13 November 2024, when we agreed to write to the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers and to the Scottish Government. We asked the Scottish Government for an update on the work undertaken by the housing affordability working group, and its submission states:

“the group has explored the underlying meaning of affordability and its different uses within housing debates, policy and practice. The group has not been asked to find solutions to housing affordability problems, nor has it been asked to focus specifically on homeless households. Rather, members have worked together to agree a shared understanding of what housing affordability is and how it should be measured, in order to support a range of policy and sector requirements across relevant areas.”

That might not have been everybody’s expectation, but there we are.

That report’s recommendations were expected before the summer recess in 2024. However, the Scottish Government’s submission states that reaching consensus between stakeholders has—and I quote—“taken time”.

In response, the petitioner states that

“The ... exercise is yet another working group going nowhere”, and, in his submission, he reiterates the increasing numbers of people in temporary accommodation and states:

“General Taxation should be used to pay for the costs of temporary accommodation”.

In its response to the committee, the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers shares its view that it does

“not think that there is any case for the Scottish Government to take on the cost of funding temporary accommodation or to write off existing arrears.”

However, the submission highlights a number of areas where there is a lack of clear data to inform any work that could be undertaken in that area, and it explains that

“Most of those in temporary accommodation are eligible for housing benefit”, which “In most cases ... will cover the full cost to the resident with a deduction for heating or ‘board’ where this is included in the rent charge.”

Finally, the submission notes that

“Councils … take a proportionate approach to collecting any arrears that do arise”, including debt write-off, when that is the most appropriate approach. The association also suggests

“targeted funding to support the acquisition of additional … temporary accommodation to support councils to meet their statutory obligations and provide the quality of temporary accommodation that homeless applicants are entitled to expect”, and calls for “a more consistent approach to accounting for the cost of temporary accommodation to improve transparency around charges and value for money.”

Do we have any suggestions as to how we might proceed? Mr Torrance, do you want to comment? There is a case for writing to the Minister for Housing, I think.

David Torrance: Yes, there is. I would ask the committee to write to the Minister for Housing to ask why the publication of the report on the definition of housing affordability has been subject to such significant delay and when it will be published; to highlight the written submission from the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers; to ask why there continues to be significant uncertainty on the issue, particularly in relation to data gathering; to ask whether it will work with local authorities and stakeholders to create a consistent approach to monitoring the cost of temporary accommodation to improve transparency on charges and value for money; and to ask whether it has considered targeted funding to support the acquisition of temporary accommodation.

The Convener: Are members content? For the Scottish Government to have said that it expected to produce a report before the summer recess last year but to then say that it has taken a bit of time to drive some consensus as we head into the summer recess of 2025 does not inspire one to the view that there is any pressing urgency being given to producing the required information to help the issue to progress.

Fergus Ewing: I agree with Mr Torrance and you, convener, that this has taken far too long. I am reminded that the petition was lodged in 2022 and that it has been considered several times since. The delay in itself is not acceptable, so Mr Torrance is quite right to say that we should not close it but should press the minister further. I also want to remark on the submission that the committee has just received from a body whose existence I must admit that I was hitherto unaware of—every day is a school day. The organisation is called the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers, or ALACHO. Its submission, from April this year, points out quite extraordinary things. For example, its most recent survey showed that charges vary from £69 to £358 a week. How on earth is that the case?

ALACHO also points out that, as you have said, convener, in many cases, housing benefit is applicable. However, in some cases, it is not applicable, where claims are late or where somebody’s circumstances change. Hidden behind these statements are probably lots of human tragedies—for example, someone might not submit a document because they did not know that they had to or there was some bureaucratic foul-up. As MSPs, we deal with that kind of thing day and daily. I would

be grateful if the Minister for Housing could specifically address each of the points that were raised by ALACHO in its submission of April this year, because it raises an alarming complexity and illogicality, under which I suspect lie a lot of human tragedies.

The Convener: Can we incorporate the suggestions made in the ALACHO dispatch in our submission to the minister? Are we agreed?

David Torrance: Indeed.

Foysol Choudhury: May I—

The Convener: Oh, I am sorry, Mr Choudhury—I do apologise.

Foysol Choudhury: It is no problem. Several of my constituents have written to me about the length of time that they have been staying in temporary accommodation. I am sure that they have been writing to all of us. Can we also invite the minister to the committee, because it is an on-going and big issue.

The Convener: That is an option that we could perhaps explore but, as you know, Mr Choudhury, there are fewer weeks left in the parliamentary session than there are items of business to deal with. Therefore, maybe we could write in the first instance and see what the quality of the response is, before we commit to further action.

Fergus Ewing: We could come back to that suggestion, though, if we do not get a satisfactory answer—

The Convener: Yes, we can, absolutely. That would be a perfectly reasonable response.

Fergus Ewing: —because we have not had a satisfactory response over three years now.

Foysol Choudhury: Yes, and there is a housing emergency.

The Convener: Not that that is unique.

Foysol Choudhury: No, but it is something that should be prioritised.

The Convener: Can we reserve that option and seek an expedited response?

Fergus Ewing: I entirely agree. You are absolutely right but, at the same time, and as must be said openly, we cannot let ministers off the hook simply because they can run the clock down. If that were the case, they could get away with doing nothing for every petition in every parliamentary session.

Foysol Choudhury: I was just trying to save the time.

The Convener: It is a badge of honour of this committee that we do not let ministers off the hook.

Fergus Ewing: Indeed.

The Convener: If we can proceed on that basis, I would be grateful.

Annexe C: Written submission

Cabinet Secretary for Housing written submission, 9 July 2025

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

Thank you for your letter of 5 June to the Minister for Housing following the committee's consideration of the petition PE1946. I am pleased to respond in my new role as Cabinet Secretary for Housing and look forward to keeping you updated on the work I will be undertaking in this vital portfolio.

The committee requested a response to each point raised by the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers (ALACHO), which I have set out below.

The housing emergency has placed significant pressure on some local authorities. I know that the cost of temporary accommodation – both to the household and local authorities – can be expensive, which is why the government is firmly committed to reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation, and the use of unsuitable accommodation.

The Scottish Government established a Housing Affordability Working Group with the aim of reaching a consensus on a shared understanding of affordability. This short-life group made up of stakeholders and experts is currently finalising its report and I look forward to its recommendations.

I also appreciate the exercise ALACHO, COSLA and the local government directors of finance group are undertaking in partnership with the Scottish Government to better understand the costs, quality and value for money challenges around increasing the use of suitable temporary accommodation and I look forward to seeing the outputs of this work.

I understand that COSLA's housing special interest group has included assessing the shared understanding of affordability as part of its medium/long term actions, which could then inform whether local authorities will apply this to the costs of temporary accommodation.

Charges for temporary accommodation are a matter for individual councils, but councils must take into account what a person can afford to pay. The Scottish Government is willing to work in partnership - as suggested by ALACHO - to increase consistency in monitoring to improve transparency on charges and value for money.

On the Committee's ask on targeted funding, the Scottish Government aims to reduce the demands on temporary accommodation by (i) preventing homelessness in the first place; (ii) moving those in temporary accommodation into settled housing as quickly as possible; and (iii) increasing the supply of affordable homes overall. We have:

- Increased the Affordable Housing Supply Programme budget for 25-26 to £768m, including £40m targeted towards acquisitions to support the local authorities with the most sustained temporary accommodation pressures.
- In 2024-25, brought almost 1,000 homes back into use, through £40m targeted investment in acquisitions and reducing the number of empty social homes; helping reduce the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation.
- Helped an estimated 2,457 households with children into affordable housing in the year to end March 2025.
- Invested £46m in Charitable Bonds, supporting the delivery of around 325 homes.
- Made £1m available in 2024-25 to registered social landlords and third sector partners to help sustain tenancies and prevent homelessness.
- Included an additional £4m in the Ending Homelessness Together budget for 2025-26 to help local authorities, frontline services and relevant partners prepare for the new prevention measures and to help them to respond to the housing emergency by preventing homelessness before it occurs.
- Announced a long-term commitment of £100m for Mid-Market Rent – and with institutional investment we will grow that fund to at least £500m to support the construction of around 2,800 mid-market rent homes.
- As part of our City Deal approach, announced almost £16m of grant funding to City of Edinburgh Council to support the delivery of 847 homes in total, with 387 much-needed affordable homes.
- Through the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership and network of empty homes officers we delivered real results, with 1,875 homes returned to active use in 2023-24.

You may also have noted that last week I announced a £2 million investment in the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership. This will support local authorities to employ Empty Homes Officers who can focus on returning private, long term empty homes into liveable accommodation.

I also note the Committee's highlighting of data gaps on the costs of temporary accommodation. I would like to reassure the committee that to support our active and interventionist approach, the Scottish Government continues to work closely with local authorities and partners to facilitate greater understanding of the costs, impacts and value for money of temporary accommodation provision. We are also exploring the necessary data collection requirements to support the successful implementation of rent controls, using the powers in the Housing Bill.

The Scottish Government has shown its support for local authorities in the challenges they face through targeted support and engagement with the local authorities facing the greatest pressures. I have already seen early indications of the success of this approach and expect that this continues to have a positive impact in addressing the strategic housing system challenges facing local authorities.

It is a priority for me to enhance and expedite actions which can deliver more homes and reduce the number of people facing homelessness. I have already started meeting with the local authorities facing the most sustained homelessness pressures to discuss the actions we need to take, and intend to complete this round of meeting this week. I will also be meeting with stakeholders and MSPs ahead of Stage 3 of the Housing (Scotland) Bill to ensure it responds to the challenges and opportunities we face.

I hope this response is helpful to the committee.

Màiri McAllan MSP