

Homelessness in Scotland September 2016

Homelessness in Scotland

- **34,662 households made homelessness applications across Scotland in 2015/16**, a 4% fall on the previous year.
- The majority of homeless households are single people. Applications from this group fell at a slightly slower rate of 3%, suggesting that the largest reduction is among households with children.

Support needs

- **The proportion of applicants with support need is increasing**, from 35% in 2012/13 to 42% in 2015/16.
- The proportion of households who are homeless more than once in 12 months remains at around 7%. Together with the increasing proportion of people who have support needs, this may indicate that the people needing homeless assistance have more complex needs than in the past.

Temporary accommodation

- Around **10-11,000 households live in temporary accommodation placements** at any one time. This number has remained steady for the last few years.
- Local authorities across the country report households spending **substantially lengthening periods of time in temporary accommodation**, sometimes a year or more. This is attributed to the increased demand from the change to legal duties, pressure on the supply of permanent social tenancies and the challenges presented by welfare reforms.
- Most placements are in ordinary social housing stock, but single people are far more likely than families to be in accommodation such as hostels and B&Bs.

Rough sleeping

- Rough sleeping is the most visible form of homelessness. Across Scotland, 1352 people slept rough the night before applying to the council for assistance. This is a 6% (84) drop on the previous year.
- However, data from the Scottish Household Survey suggests that **just under 5000 people sleep rough in Scotland each year**, or 660 people a night.
- During winter 2015/16 the winter shelters in both Edinburgh and Glasgow reported a major increase in use. This suggests that **rough sleeping could be on the rise**, and that **some rough sleepers are not going to their council for help**.

Preventative approaches to homelessness

- The 'Housing Options' approach to preventing homelessness is believed to be the main driver of the reduction in homelessness applications. **Around 54,000 people come to local authority homelessness prevention services each year**.
- The practical implementation of this approach has caused some controversy in relation to how it interacts with the legal framework for homelessness support. Concerns have been raised about potential 'gatekeeping' of statutory support.
- Initial indications suggest that the **Housing Options interventions used so far are relatively 'light touch', limited to active information and signposting**. The most common outcome is for people to go on to make a statutory homeless application.

Housing

- At least **12,000 new affordable homes need to be built each year** to address the housing shortage.
- We are beginning to see a marked upturn in evictions by social landlords as a result of a rise in rent arrears, due in part to changes to the benefits system.
- Private tenants are expected to benefit from a substantial improvement in their security of tenure under new Scottish legislation abolishing the 'no fault' ground for eviction.

Social security

- The ongoing impact of UK welfare reform threatens to overwhelm efforts to prevent and address homelessness in Scotland. Housing benefit is no longer linked to local rents, and restrictions and caps on support have been introduced which particularly affect young people and larger families. More generally, low income households renting in the private sector are also affected.
- There is substantial anxiety in the homelessness sector in Scotland about the implications of welfare reforms for meeting the costs of temporary accommodation.
- The impact of benefit sanctions have dominated the experiences of many homelessness service users and providers. The benefit cap will have a much wider impact in Scotland in future.

Recommendations

Crisis believes that the following steps are needed to address homelessness in Scotland:

- A national **strategy for tackling homelessness** bringing together all relevant areas of government to co-operate in addressing the causes and consequences of homelessness, building on the good progress that has already been made
- **Stronger prevention and early intervention.** Integrated Health and Social Care Boards should include responses to homelessness prevention in their planning
- Increase **support for homeless people with complex needs** through Integrated Strategic Commissioning Plans, and through rapid rehousing models such as Housing First
- **Time limit the use of temporary accommodation**, particularly emergency temporary accommodation such as B&Bs for single people to bring it in line with the standard for families
- **Use the devolved powers on social security and employment support** to prevent homelessness and support people at risk of homelessness. This should include:
 - Abolishing the bedroom tax
 - Extending exemptions for vulnerable people under 35 currently only eligible for the Shared Accommodation Rate of Housing Benefit
 - Developing a national framework for administering Discretionary Housing Payments
 - Allowing Universal Credit housing payments to be made direct to social and private landlords
 - Ensuring employment support staff consider individuals' housing needs and apply discretion when applying conditionality requirements

About Crisis

Crisis is the national charity for single homeless people. Our goal is to end homelessness. We campaign for change at Holyrood and Westminster and carry out research to understand the causes of homelessness and the issues homeless people face.

We work directly with people who are homeless and at risk of homelessness, and with local authorities across Scotland to improve access to the private rented sector for people who are at risk of homelessness.

Homelessness ends here