

# Ending Homelessness Together

**Updated action plan, October 2020**



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The Scottish Government  
St Andrew's House  
Edinburgh  
EH1 3DG

ISBN: 978-1-80004-102-8

Published by The Scottish Government, October 2020

Produced for The Scottish Government by APS Group Scotland, 21 Tennant Street, Edinburgh EH6 5NA  
PPDAS750906 (10/20)

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# Guest foreword

David Duke MBE, founder and CEO of Street Soccer Scotland and member of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group

## **They say that in every crisis, there**

**is opportunity.** Admittedly, while the coronavirus pandemic has gripped the world, from my own perspective, it has been difficult to see past the week ahead, let alone to a world when things resume to some sort of normal and start to feel better.

Imagine then how difficult it is to hold on to hope and the promise of ‘better’ if you are homeless, perhaps sleeping rough night after night. ‘Better’ cannot come soon enough for some.

Over the last few months individuals, organisations and institutions have come together to help some of the most marginalised people in our society. We have set the scene for the change we want to achieve, and we have shown that with will things can change. We MUST now ensure this continues as the risks of the COVID-19 crisis are managed.

Because, as we emerge from one crisis, unfortunately another crisis awaits.

Homelessness is an everyday crisis for thousands of adults and children living in Scotland. As the work of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group has shown, there is a desire to drive change, to think differently and, importantly, to take action.

Over the last few months we have set a good pace for addressing homelessness in Scotland. The key will be to maintain this level of action over the months and years to come until we end homelessness for good.



The way to achieve that has been the subject of much discussion in the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group. We are all in agreement that we need to create a homelessness plan that works for everyone. We need a plan that is flexible enough to suit individual needs and circumstances. We need a plan that offers choice and empowers individuals and families at a time when all else is lost.

A commitment to flexible support and choice must also be applied to people moving into permanent accommodation. People are much more likely to avoid repeat homelessness if they settle into their new home with a level of support they choose and can integrate into their community. We must ensure people feel safe, that they have relationships and support and a purpose. This is the model we have applied at Street Soccer Scotland for over a decade. I’ve seen others do it successfully too. It works. So, let us take stock at this

pivotal moment, assess what is known to alleviate the distress and trauma caused by homelessness and poverty in general, and apply it.

And let's ask people facing homelessness day in and day out about what they want and need. Many of us think we know what homelessness looks like and some of its impacts on the individual. But what does it feel like? I, unfortunately, know what it feels like, but it's time to engage everyone else in that conversation, from school children to politicians.

No two people are the same, and that applies to people experiencing homelessness. Behind every statistic is a person with a life story and with hope that things will get better. Let's capture that hope, and give due consideration to what they need and want to overcome their personal circumstances, using lived experience to design and deliver services that work.

We must also apply the learning of the coronavirus pandemic to prevent destitution and exclusion, ensuring that we do all we can to protect people with no recourse to public funds. If we don't, who will?

I am proud of the work of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group and of the recommendations the group has produced. Each recommendation has the potential to change the lives and experiences of people facing homelessness. But together the recommendations have the potential to transform systems, the way we address homelessness and our success in preventing it from occurring in the first place.

If the crisis has shown us anything, it is that urgency and pace of change matter. If we apply the lessons from the health crisis to homelessness, we have an opportunity to radically reshape the homelessness system, and better yet will be one step closer to ending it once and for all in Scotland.



# Introduction

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**Kevin Stewart MSP,**  
Minister for Local Government, Housing and  
Planning



**Councillor Elena Whitham,**  
COSLA Spokesperson for Community  
Wellbeing

## Everyone should have a home that meets their needs.

The shared ambition of national and local government to end homelessness has not changed during the COVID-19 pandemic but our determination has increased.

We want to see an equitable recovery, where people affected by homelessness have access to the housing and support they need and are treated with dignity and respect.

The pandemic has changed our way of life. The public health emergency has rapidly turned into an global economic crisis and those with the fewest social and financial resources have often been the hardest hit.

At the same time, we have seen what is possible when we respond collectively and urgently with an inclusive and human rights-based approach to tackling homelessness. The willingness of all parties to come together quickly to move hundreds of people from the streets, night shelters, bed and breakfasts and hostels into a place of safety

has strengthened our partnerships and our resolve. It has shown us new paths to end homelessness in Scotland.

This year, we have all seen just how important it is to have a home that is warm, safe and affordable. We have seen the value of family, friends and community. Our aim now is to draw on what we have learned, retain our collective strength and secure our goal of eradicating rough sleeping and ending homelessness in Scotland.

The emergency accommodation arrangements were always a temporary measure, not a sustainable solution. The next stage of this work is to ensure everyone is supported out of these arrangements and into settled homes. We know this will take sustained effort from all partners and that people need to be at the heart of that process. Both the Scottish Government and local government are committed to driving this forward.

We believe that no-one should return to unsuitable temporary accommodation, night shelters or rough sleeping, or see the medical or social care they have accessed during this period withdrawn once the crisis ends. Our vision is for a future where there is no need for night shelters; where people are not left destitute by design; where people can move into their own home as soon as possible; and where all parts of the system respond to someone's experience or risk of homelessness in a way that advances equality.

Preventing homelessness is about more than finding somewhere else to live. National and local government will continue to work in partnership with the third sector and other public bodies in their approach to homelessness prevention. This means targeting support to people at risk of homelessness much sooner. It means considering people's circumstances in the widest sense, including their wellbeing, health and social care, employment and welfare needs. It means having local approaches to suit local circumstances.

We sought guidance on how to deliver lasting change from the expert members of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group. The group was asked to undertake a rapid review of our existing plans and provide recommendations on post-pandemic recovery. It delivered a set of thoughtful proposals in July 2020. This updated action plan takes full account of the group's new recommendations while continuing to build on the recommendations the group set out in 2018.

In line with the Ending Homelessness Together principles and the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group's original work, our updated action plan is informed by people who have experience of homelessness and rough sleeping and by the insights of those who work in homelessness services. We are pleased that the report includes the voices of people who have been homeless. They are most directly impacted by the proposals in this document and they will continue to guide us on what works. The input from people with lived experience also helps to counter myths and misunderstandings about homelessness. To end homelessness, it is important that we remove stigma and build understanding.

Homelessness has a devastating impact on individuals and it is bad for society, but it is not inevitable. We know that the best solution to homelessness is to stop it happening in the first place. The pandemic has shown us that by pulling together we can bring about remarkable change. We are on the right path with our plan to tackle homelessness but we must keep going to achieve our shared ambition.

Together we can end homelessness in Scotland.



# Homelessness vision:

## Everyone has a home that meets their needs

### Homelessness is ended



National Performance Framework: Our Values

'We are a society which treats all our people with kindness, dignity and compassion...'

To end homelessness we will:

Embed a person-centred approach



I AM LISTENED TO, VALUED AND TREATED WITH DIGNITY AND RESPECT



Prevent homelessness from happening in the first place



I AM HELPED TO KEEP MY HOME, WHICH HELPS ME FOCUS ON OTHER GOALS

MY HOUSING OPTIONS ARE CONSIDERED WHEN MY OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES CHANGE



Join up planning and resources to tackle homelessness



I EXPECT SERVICES TO WORK TOGETHER, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ME

I TRUST THAT THE RIGHT PEOPLE ARE INFORMED ABOUT MY NEEDS AND EXPERIENCES

Respond quickly and effectively whenever homelessness happens



THE HELP I GET IS RIGHT FOR ME, AND REDUCES THE RISK OF HOMELESSNESS HAPPENING AGAIN



Prioritise settled homes for all

I CAN EXERCISE MY RIGHT TO ACCESS AND MAINTAIN A SAFE AND SECURE HOME



I BUILD AND MAINTAIN POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS AND AM PART OF THE COMMUNITY



# Outcomes and equality

We are putting equality and human rights at the heart of our response to COVID-19. Promoting equality is one of the three central themes of our [programme for government 2020/21](#). The Scottish Government is also committed to building a [wellbeing economy](#). Wellbeing economy governments recognise that development in the 21st century entails delivering human and ecological wellbeing.

Equality and human rights underpin this updated action plan. The plan is guided by the vision and values of [Scotland's National Performance Framework](#).



# What is new in our updated action plan?

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Scotland already has some of the strongest rights in the world for people who are homeless. National and local government partners have a shared vision and an ambitious plan to end homelessness.

## **Scotland's plan is the right one - we need to stick to it and maintain momentum.**

This update to [Ending Homelessness Together](#) renews our commitment to ending homelessness, raises our ambition in light of the public health crisis and sets out the next steps on Scotland's journey to end homelessness and rough sleeping.

We are already delivering on many of the more urgent recommendations from the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group. The rapidity and effectiveness of our collective response to COVID-19 has resulted in a **dramatic reduction in the numbers of people sleeping rough**, taking us closer to our goal of eradicating rough sleeping.

We are placing even greater emphasis on the prevention of homelessness. We have put in place a raft of measures to support people to remain in their homes and prevent rent arrears. We have **legislated to minimise the risk of evictions into homelessness**. We have introduced **new pre-action protocols for private rented sector landlords**. We have significantly increased the money available to local authorities for **crisis grants** and **discretionary housing payments**. We have **invested more in money advice services**. We are introducing a **hardship loan fund for tenants**.

We have learned a lot during the pandemic and that has prompted us to think about the practices and programmes we want to build on, such as Housing First, and those we want to leave in the past, such as night shelters.

In this updated plan, we set out proposals to **modify night shelter provision this winter and end the use of night shelter and dormitory style provision in future**. To support this transition, we are establishing rapid rehousing welcome centres to provide an under-one-roof triage service to people experiencing the most acute forms of homelessness.

We will build on the success of the [Housing First pathfinder](#) and **scale up Housing First more rapidly**. Over 300 tenancies have now started and no-one has been evicted from their home. Alongside this, we have a **shared ambition to see a significant increase in the proportion of social homes allocated to people who are homeless** for a limited period.

Equality is the thread running through our updated action plan. To that end, we will **strengthen the voice of lived experience** in the policy-making process; we will **advance legislative protections for people experiencing domestic abuse**; and we will **explore alternative routes to reduce migrant homelessness**.

We continue to learn about what works and that is why this is a living action plan. Our next formal report to parliament on progress will be in October 2021.

## Summary of new and existing actions

The following table provides at-a-glance information on the status of all the actions – existing and new – in our [Ending Homelessness Together](#) action plan, grouped by the five approaches.

### Key

<b>NEW</b>	Added since last publication
✓	Completed
●	Well underway
○	Started
●	Planned in 2021/22

Approach	Action	Status
<b>Embed a person-centred approach</b>	1 Build on evidence base to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the risk of homelessness for particular groups	<b>NEW</b>
	2 Strengthen the role and influence of the Change Team	<b>NEW</b>
	3 Support people to access digital equipment, data and training	<b>NEW</b>
	4 Develop a lived experience programme	✓
	5 Apply a gendered analysis to our actions, ensuring the homelessness system meets the needs of diverse groups of women	○
	6 Explore options for taking forward personal housing plans	●
	7 Ensure a child wellbeing assessment is undertaken where children are homeless	○
	8 Organise an event for local authorities and housing providers to share best practice	✓
	9 Support frontline staff in their work with people experiencing homelessness	○
	10 Publish first modules of housing options training toolkit	○
	11 Raise public awareness of homelessness and challenge stigma	●

<b>Approach</b>		<b>Action</b>	<b>Status</b>
<b>Prevent homelessness from happening in the first place</b>	12	Introduce the transfer of tenancy provisions for social housing tenancies as part of the domestic abuse bill	<b>NEW</b>
	13	Publish an implementation plan to respond to the recommendations of the domestic abuse pathway group	<b>NEW</b>
	14	Develop and implement human rights-based accommodation pathways for women and children with no recourse to public funds who are experiencing domestic abuse	<b>NEW</b>
	15	Share innovative and successful examples of early prevention and effective tenancy sustainment work	<b>NEW</b>
	16	Work with COSLA and local authorities to introduce shared and more streamlined application processes for discretionary housing payments	<b>NEW</b>
	17	Use information sharing powers to help local authorities target people who are most need of discretionary housing payments	<b>NEW</b>
	18	Support the social housing sector to identify and support households at risk of homelessness before they reach crisis point	<b>NEW</b>
	19	Develop cross-sector project to establish mechanisms for avoiding evictions into homelessness	<b>NEW</b>
	20	Take forward further awareness raising activity on financial support and tenancy rights	<b>NEW</b>
	21	Look further at affordability in the private rented sector, building on the work to set up and review rent pressure zones	<b>NEW</b>
	22	Assess the impact of temporary pre-action protocols in the private rented sector to inform the development of permanent pre-action protocols	<b>NEW</b>
	23	Support the First-tier Tribunal to improve transparency around outcomes for tenants through better use of data	<b>NEW</b>
	24	Develop rapid protocols with public institutions as part of prevention pathway work	<b>NEW</b>
	25	Test, learn from and improve the homelessness prevention approaches recommended in the pathways	<b>NEW</b>
	26	Respond to the recommendations from the prevention duty review group, setting out our next steps in 2021	<b>NEW</b>
	27	Develop prevention pathways for groups at particular risk	●
	28	Prevent and respond effectively to youth homelessness	○
	29	Increase focus on tenancy sustainment	●
	30	Make homelessness assessments more flexible	●
	31	Embed a 'no wrong door' approach	○
	32	Embed homelessness prevention in Housing Beyond 2021 (due to be replaced by Housing to 2040)	✓
	33	Understand the impact of UK welfare reforms	●
	34	Set out plans for a new public sector homelessness prevention duty	●
	35	Improve outcomes for women experiencing domestic abuse	○
	36	Review implementation of the SHORE standards	●
	37	Create a homelessness prevention fund for social landlords	●

<b>Approach</b>		<b>Action</b>	<b>Status</b>
<b>Prioritise settled homes for all</b>	38	Take forward work on the right to adequate housing (through work on First Minister's national taskforce for human rights leadership)	<b>NEW</b>
	39	Build on early results from pathfinder programme and work with local authorities to scale up Housing First more rapidly	<b>NEW</b>
	40	Significant increase to the proportion of social homes allocated to people who are homeless while we are still in phase 3 of Scotland's route map	<b>NEW</b>
	41	Complete the delivery of 50,000 affordable homes as soon as it is safe to do so	<b>NEW</b>
	42	Encourage the housing sector to prioritise the process of bringing empty homes back into use	<b>NEW</b>
	43	Support local authorities to build stronger relationships with the private rented sector and to develop their empty homes services and private rented sector access schemes	<b>NEW</b>
	44	Support local authorities to submit rapid rehousing transition plans	✓
	45	Support local authorities with plans to deliver Housing First in their areas	✓
	46	Evaluate and provide feedback on all rapid rehousing transition plans	✓
	47	Support the Housing First Scotland pathfinder programme in five cities	●
	48	Forge partnerships with health and justice systems to embed Housing First	🟡
	49	Develop best practice examples of choice in settled housing	●
	50	Assess impacts of providing wide range of housing options in local areas	🟡
	51	Set up a temporary accommodation funding framework	🟡
	52	Establish a third sector homelessness fund to support transformational change	●

<b>Approach</b>		<b>Action</b>	<b>Status</b>
<b>Respond quickly and effectively whenever homelessness happens</b>	53	Share summaries of audits of the numbers and needs of people in emergency accommodation with the Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group	<b>NEW</b>
	54	Support local authorities and health and social care partners with their efforts to provide appropriate move on support and stable accommodation for all those currently in emergency accommodation	<b>NEW</b>
	55	Learn from recent initiatives and consider what further support is needed to help people with the transition out of the crisis	<b>NEW</b>
	56	Work with local authorities and other partners to provide access to safe and self-contained accommodation during the pandemic	<b>NEW</b>
	57	Support our partners to modify existing night shelter provision in Edinburgh and Glasgow in winter 2020/21 and actively end the use of night shelter and dormitory-style provision in future	<b>NEW</b>
	58	Form alliances with like-minded partners (on support for people with no recourse to public funds), including other devolved nations and cities	<b>NEW</b>
	59	Work with the Everyone Home Collective so that the route map to end destitution informs our forthcoming anti-destitution strategy	<b>NEW</b>
	60	Explore alternative routes through which to provide accommodation to people with no recourse to public funds	<b>NEW</b>
	61	Extend funding for projects that provide advocacy and legal advice to destitute asylum seekers and people with no recourse to public funds	<b>NEW</b>
	62	Publish guidance later in 2020 on the Unsuitable Accommodation Order and bring forward a further Scottish statutory instrument that will provide clarity on the changes to the Order	<b>NEW</b>
	63	Develop a model of frontline outreach	●
	64	Put in place training and support for frontline staff (through the development of the housing options training toolkit)	●
	65	Support local winter planning	●
	66	Support people engaged in street begging	●
	67	Press UK Government on migrant homelessness	●
	68	Prevent homelessness for those with no recourse to public funds	●
	69	Clarify protection afforded to those with no recourse to public funds	✓
	70	Set out broader range of accommodation options in crisis situations	●
	71	Share information about short-term community hosting as a crisis response	●
	72	Publish options appraisal for new rough sleeping data collection	✓
	73	Revise legislative arrangements for intentionality and local connection	●
	74	Amend intentionality definition to focus more closely on 'deliberate manipulation'	●
	75	Consult on extending Unsuitable Accommodation Order to all	✓
	76	Introduce temporary accommodation standards	●
	77	Complete voluntary review of homelessness provision at Glasgow City Council	●

<b>Approach</b>		<b>Action</b>	<b>Status</b>
<b>Join up planning and resources to tackle homelessness</b>	78	Work with Public Health Scotland to ensure that guidance on infection prevention and control remains fit for purpose and develop separate guidance for homelessness services in Scotland	<b>NEW</b>
	79	Improve how we use Public Health Scotland data and intelligence capabilities to ensure improved outcomes	<b>NEW</b>
	80	Learn from the crisis period to further improve drug and alcohol treatment and harm reduction services	<b>NEW</b>
	81	Ensure next National Performance Framework review includes explicit consideration of homelessness	<b>NEW</b>
	82	Ensure local authorities, housing providers and public bodies join up to prevent homelessness	●
	83	Update code of guidance on homelessness	●
	84	Review need for code of practice in code of guidance on homelessness	●
	85	Embed homelessness as a public health priority	●
	86	Improve join up between health, social care, housing and homelessness planning	●
	87	Join up housing, employment and employability support	●
	88	Produce cross-government response to the Hard Edges report	●
	89	Work with local authorities and delivery partners on effective implementation	●
	90	Support the homelessness system to respond more appropriately to the shared needs of mothers and children	●
<b>Other actions</b>	91	Relaunch the third sector homelessness fund by the end of 2020	<b>NEW</b>
	92	Review the homelessness data collection (HL1) to improve our understanding of the causes of homelessness and the outcomes	<b>NEW</b>
	93	Publish equality breakdowns of existing homelessness data	✓
	94	Conduct equality impact assessments	●
	95	Improve homelessness data on protected characteristics	●
	96	Develop the evidence base on homelessness	●
	97	Undertake analysis of the economic impacts of homelessness	●
	98	Ensure Scottish Government data collections reflect the increased priority of tackling homelessness	●

# **Actions we will take 1: we will embed a person-centred approach**

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## **Setting the scene**

The Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) published [Ending Homelessness Together](#), our national plan for ending homelessness, in November 2018. We formally reported on the positive progress made against the actions in that plan in our [annual report](#) of January 2020. This updated plan builds on the original action plan in light of the pandemic; it does not replace it. Scotland's [Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group](#) will be responsible for overseeing the delivery of our plans and driving joined up action across the public and third sectors.

When the coronavirus outbreak was declared a pandemic in March 2020, partners in Scotland's housing and third sector pivoted to meet urgent needs for safe accommodation. We had to temporarily pause some longer term and strategic activity; however, the learning about what works in preventing and responding to homelessness has continued. Our work to transform the homelessness system in Scotland is now resuming in a phased and prioritised way. This updated action plan sets out our plans for tackling homelessness with renewed impetus and strengthened cooperation.

A home is much more than bricks and mortar and homelessness is not just a housing problem. A home provides security, a sense of wellbeing and is somewhere to put down roots. It is a place to make connections with friends, family and the wider community

and to access services. For some people, homelessness is linked to more complex needs and difficult life and institutional experiences; for others, there may only be a requirement for light-touch services or practical support. Whatever wider needs people have, we are clear that everyone needs a safe, warm, secure home and no-one should be denied this.

## **Person-centred and trauma-informed approaches**

We know that to be most effective, services should be trauma-informed, person-centred and tailored to reflect individual needs and circumstances. This means understanding the ways in which adverse and traumatic experiences in childhood and later life contribute to homelessness.

The Scottish Government is committed to developing a trauma-informed workforce across Scotland, supported by over £1.5 million investment in a [national trauma training programme](#), led by NHS Education for Scotland. The national trauma training programme is overseen by a steering group, chaired by the Deputy First Minister, with representation from senior leaders across all sectors of the workforce including housing and adult protection, as well as experts by experience. The programme will continue to support local authorities and community planning partners across Scotland to drive forward progress in embedding trauma-informed practice across the workforce and services.

This programme has now delivered face-to-face training to over 7,000 people across our public services, including social workers, police officers and housing officers. Many thousands more have used online digital training resources, which are accessible across all sectors. Delivery trials are currently underway in Glasgow, Argyll and Bute and Midlothian. Through the trials, we are looking at different approaches to delivery, including partnerships with third sector providers. Our ambition is to ensure we have trauma-informed workforces and services to help minimise distress, overcome barriers and build trust. Whatever the level of need, people must have the right support to prevent homelessness happening in the first place and to stop it recurring in future.

Scotland's modernised (post-2012) legislative framework delivers strong housing rights and puts the individual at the centre of homelessness policy. Indeed, a person's rights, needs and aspirations are the starting point for the current delivery of housing options services in Scotland ('housing options' is the advice process that councils use when someone approaches them with a housing problem). Further improvements could, however, be achieved by continuing to develop person-centred approaches, such as those taken in Housing First, and this will be underpinned by the personal housing plan approach we are now developing.

**"Housing First has helped me a lot, my support worker has been great. Anytime I have a problem, my support worker helps me to solve it."<sup>1</sup>**

We and our partners are committed to working together to design housing and homelessness services around the needs of individuals, and not around how the public sector is organised, as described in the [Scottish approach to service design](#). Organisations that work together in a responsive and person-centred way can help people out of a difficult situation more efficiently and effectively. Ending homelessness depends on all public services working together and playing their part in ensuring people have stable homes. This is the thinking that informed the creation of the Prevention Review Group, which will make recommendations to the Scottish Government for new legal duties on all relevant public bodies to prevent homelessness<sup>2</sup>.

## Promoting equality

Health and socioeconomic inequalities have been brought into sharp focus by the pandemic. Now is the time to examine more closely the range of inequalities faced by people experiencing homelessness, recognise the differential impact of gender, and build a fairer society.

The [Social Renewal Advisory Board](#) is supporting our thinking in this area. This board is advising the Scottish Government on how to build a stronger, fairer and more equal Scotland for the postpandemic period. Proposals are being developed by a series of expert discussion groups known as 'policy circles'. One of these circles is focusing on the housing system. Others are considering age and disability; addressing low income; community-led place based renewal; cross

<sup>1</sup> Unless noted otherwise, the quotes in this document about homelessness are from people with lived experience. The quotes were contributed to Homeless Network Scotland and its members. Names and places have been removed to protect individuals' confidentiality.

<sup>2</sup> Detail about the Prevention Review Group can be found in [Actions we will take 2: we will prevent homelessness from happening in the first place](#).

cutting delivery; financial security; access to food; the third sector; and communities and volunteering. Initial recommendations from the board are included in our [programme for government 2020/21](#). The board is now developing further proposals on social renewal and will set these out in a report later in the year.

As part of our commitment to embed a person-centred approach, we set out actions in our [annual report](#) to develop a better understanding of women's experiences of homelessness. We know that the risks, causes and paths into homelessness are different for men and women. We need to understand these differences to respond to homelessness effectively. We will continue to work with partners to ensure that policies and practice development are informed by a gendered analysis of homelessness.

**Having safe accommodation is fundamental for women's – and their children's – safety and wellbeing. At the start of the outbreak,**

**Fife Council saw a spike in domestic abuse enquiries. Working closely with Fife Women's Aid, the council provided an additional six properties for refuge. Housing support was made available through the Fife Public Social Partnership to support the women and children. The council is now focused on sourcing permanent housing for the families.**

We are also committed to understanding the experiences of groups with other protected characteristics so that we can better meet people's needs and help everyone find routes out of homelessness.

The homelessness prevention pathways, the work of the Prevention Review Group, personal housing plans, rapid rehousing transition plans and our work on improving housing outcomes for women and children experiencing domestic abuse will all benefit from embedding a richer understanding of the varied experiences of women and men.

In developing this updated action plan, we considered relevant evidence for each protected characteristic. This evidence will inform the equality impact assessments we conduct as we transform the new actions into policy and practice. We will strive to ensure our actions and commitments reflect the needs and experiences of different individuals and households experiencing homelessness.

To improve our understanding of the age, gender and ethnicity of homeless applicants, the Scottish Government will continue to publish equality breakdowns of the homelessness statistics. The Scottish Government will review homelessness data collections and ensure we are capturing appropriate data to understand the experiences of people with other equality characteristics in the future.

Recognising that people's outcomes are simultaneously affected by multiple factors and disadvantages, an intersectional approach is required if we are to fully understand individual needs and risks in the post COVID-19 period, as well as any gaps in our plans for recovery and renewal.

The Scottish Government has published [evidence](#) on how COVID-19 has different impacts on different groups of the population. The evidence highlights that women are more likely to be unpaid carers and are overrepresented in health and social care jobs. This is likely to put them at higher risk of contracting COVID-19. Women are the vast majority of lone parents. Their disproportionate share of caring responsibilities may also make it harder to maintain or take on employment. Women account for the majority of employment in many of the shutdown sectors, such as retail, accommodation and food and beverage services. Women earn less than men on average, are less likely to be eligible for sick pay, and are overrepresented in many of the sectors where median hourly pay will fall below the current rate of the real living wage if employers do not bridge the 20% shortfall for furloughed staff.

**We will build on this evidence to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the risk of homelessness for particular groups and reflect this in our policies.**

## Policies that reflect the real world

The policy process must be informed by up-to-date evidence and should take account of ideas and experience from the frontline. We have heard from people with lived experience of homelessness how important it is to have access to clear information, support and advocacy during a public health crisis.

We will continue to ensure that the voices of people with lived experience and those working on the frontline are at the heart of what we are doing to end homelessness. We remain committed to working closely with and listening to the [Change Team](#)<sup>3</sup> and to engaging with the [Prevention Commission](#)<sup>4</sup>. This will ensure the recommendations are grounded in real life experience of what works to prevent homelessness.

We will continue to support the Change Team to work with and advise the [Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group](#), ensuring people with lived experience help shape policy and practice.

**We will strengthen the role and influence of the Change Team and ensure they draw on a diverse range of lived experience as they do so.** This means that those affected by housing and homelessness policies are engaged in the policy-making process and have the opportunity to feed in their views and offer constructive challenge to policy makers.

<sup>3</sup> The Change Team is a group of people with frontline and personal experience of homelessness who act as a bridge between decision makers and the people affected by change.

<sup>4</sup> The Prevention Commission was set up to work with the Prevention Review Group as it reviews the gaps in prevention legislation and develops recommendations to Scottish Government on next steps.

## Personal housing plans

Personal housing plans are an important way to ensure people receive the support, information and advice they need as they access emergency accommodation during the pandemic.

Shelter Scotland and the Improvement Hub ([ihub](#)) - part of Healthcare Improvement Scotland - are working together to develop a personal housing plan model in two phases. Based on its extensive experience in this area, Shelter Scotland is drawing together an analysis of models used elsewhere, identifying features that embed choice and control for people. The design phase is underway and a report is due in early 2021.

Once this work is complete, we will incorporate a personal housing plan model in the updated [code of guidance on homelessness](#), including practical advice and expectations around timescales for delivery.

## Child wellbeing assessments

We want to support the homelessness system to respond more appropriately to the shared requirements of parents and children. Recognising that the majority of single parent households making a homelessness application are mothers and children, a gendered understanding of their needs is particularly important.

We will draw on examples of models used elsewhere as we take forward development work around child wellbeing assessments, with the aim of ensuring that children in households experiencing homelessness have any additional learning or support needs met as the household is supported to access settled accommodation.

We will work with children's services and children's organisations, local authorities and partners, as well as people with lived experience, to establish how to best deliver child rights and wellbeing assessments. We will also consider how best to link this with the personal housing plan model.

## Digital access

The digital world is not a substitution for human contact but having digital expertise is a great enabler. The pandemic has highlighted that internet access is a basic necessity and not a luxury. People must have the ability and the equipment to access the information, support and advice they need. Recognising that not everyone has the same digital access and skills, **we will support those who need it to access equipment, data and training.**

The importance of digital access will be reflected in planning at an individual level in the personal housing plans, and at a local authority level through rapid rehousing transition planning.

[Connecting Scotland](#) is a Scottish Government programme set up in response to COVID-19. It provides iPads, Chromebooks and support to develop digital skills for people who are digitally excluded and on low incomes. Phase two of the programme launched in August 2020. It is targeted at households with children (including pregnant women with no child in the household) and care leavers up to the age of 26.

## Public awareness of homelessness and challenging stigma

We regularly hear from those with experience of homelessness about the stigma they face when going through housing and other crises. We are determined to change the narrative on homelessness.

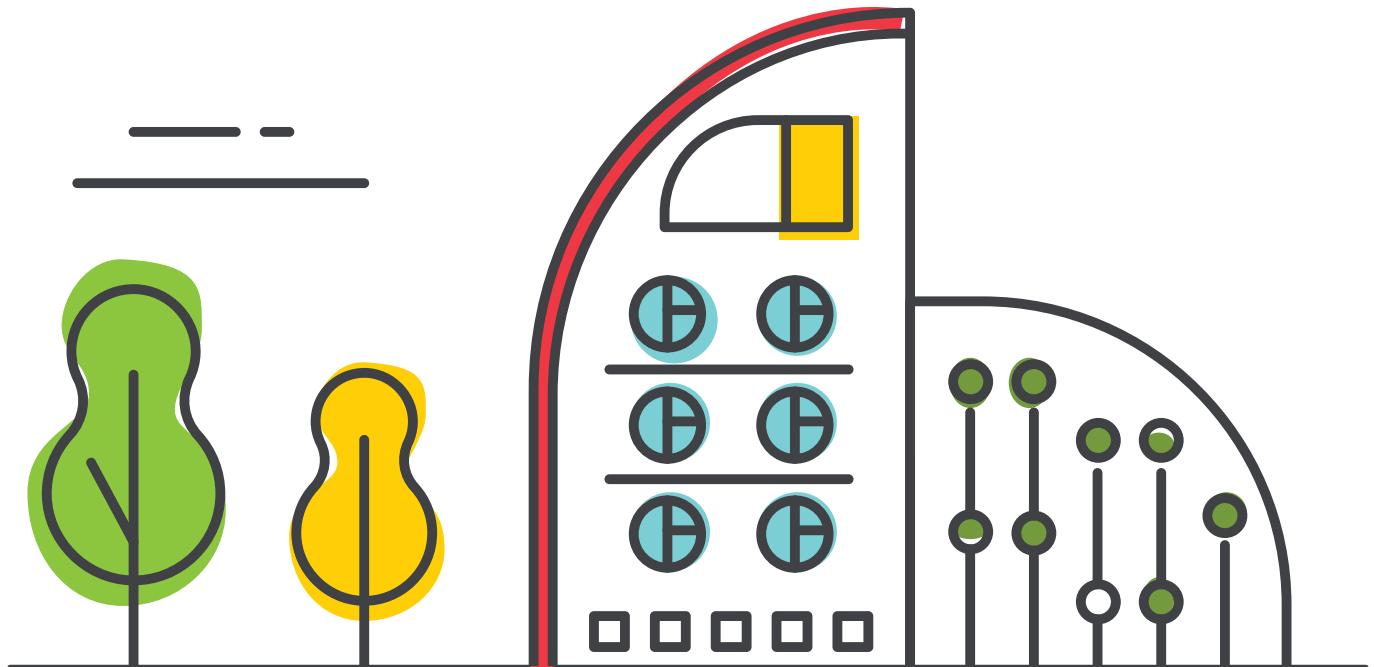
We have a rich bank of positive stories from frontline homelessness services on how our collective response to the virus has already improved outcomes for individuals.

**"Housing First is the best thing ever. To have the opportunity to start a new life. Through lockdown, staff have been fantastic. I get along with all the staff, they are all amazing."**

We must get better at sharing stories about successes. We need to inspire and motivate the public and the media, and raise the aspirations of people experiencing homelessness to show that ending homelessness is possible.

We will continue to work with our partners in the housing sector to challenge stigma and improve public perceptions of homelessness. We have joined forces to develop a set of style guidelines. These are designed to support the media to understand its role in challenging stigma and to raise awareness of the underlying structural causes of homelessness.

We will organise a virtual event for Scotland's media industry later in 2020 to promote and share the style guidelines. We will also ensure that all Scottish Government communication on housing and homelessness is designed to reduce stigma and encourage discussion about homelessness.



# **Actions we will take 2: we will prevent homelessness from happening in the first place**

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## **The importance of prevention in the current climate**

Prevention of homelessness remains at the heart of our updated action plan. Shifting the balance of services and response towards prevention is more important than ever given the current public health crisis and the rapidly developing economic crisis.

Social restrictions are necessary to reduce rates of new infections; however, social connections are important for our wellbeing. Losing these connections can have serious mental and physical impacts, which may increase the risk of homelessness. The impact of the social restrictions on those experiencing domestic abuse – known to be a driver of homelessness, particularly for women and children – has been shown to be severe, with abuse increasing in frequency and intensity.

Individuals and families across Scotland are facing financial insecurity and this may affect their ability to sustain their tenancies and remain in their homes. In June 2020, the Scottish Government published analysis of the [economic impact](#) of the labour market effects of COVID-19, highlighting that low earners, women, younger people, minority ethnic people, disabled people, those living in deprived areas and lone parents are at higher risk of being affected financially. As well as the coronavirus outbreak, the continuing impacts of UK Government welfare cuts combined with the UK's decision to leave the European Union will increase pressures on many households.

We have taken action with partners to support people facing difficulty through a range of measures introduced since the start of the outbreak. These are covered in more detail later in this chapter, but include financial support and advice; access to food and fuel; and support for community anchor organisations through the [£350 million communities funding package](#). As we plan for the next phase of the pandemic and the economic impacts, it is vital that partners across the housing sector take steps to prevent any increases in homelessness both among those already facing challenges and those who may be newly affected.

## **Causes of homelessness**

Homelessness is caused by a range of challenges in people's lives – which can be complex and interrelated – such as poverty, inequality, relationship breakdown, job loss, bereavement or as a result of domestic abuse. Other factors – the UK Government's welfare cuts; rising housing costs; access to mental health services, physical health treatment and social care – play a role in whether or not a household reaches crisis point.

Homelessness has a financial cost but it also has a considerable human cost in the shape of increased isolation, barriers to employment and education, and risks to mental and physical health. When homelessness does happen, it is vital to act quickly to prevent the situation worsening and leading to a cycle of repeat homelessness.

## Homelessness prevention in Scotland

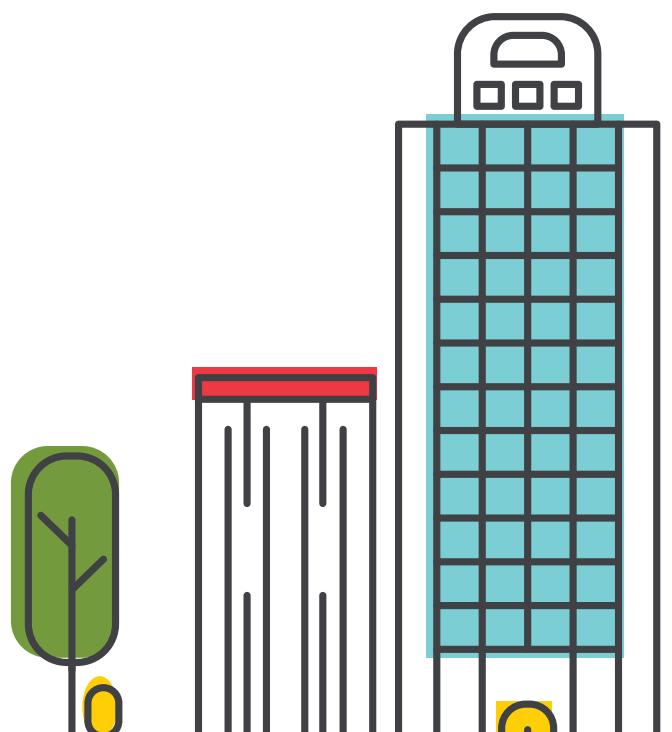
We are building from a strong base. The Scottish Government published [statutory guidance](#) on the prevention of homelessness in 2009 and an updated [code of guidance](#) in 2019 to guide local authorities in their duties to assist people threatened with or experiencing homelessness. We know that good quality housing management services can have a positive impact on tenancy sustainment, particularly where policies and procedures reference homelessness prevention as an objective.

Local authorities continue to place great emphasis on prevention services. Over the last 10 years, far greater resources have been invested in prevention activity and the recently introduced rapid rehousing transition plans have prevention at their heart. Local authorities have been focusing on homelessness prevention through their work on housing options and intelligence is shared through the housing options hubs. This will have contributed to the decrease in the number of homeless households from a peak in 2009-10 (43,564 households) to 2015-16 (28,609). More recently, we have seen slight increases in the numbers of homeless households (see [annex 1](#) for more information). This is a sharp reminder to all partners why prevention work must remain a priority.

We will continue to assess the economic and social impacts of COVID-19 and the economic recession on people's housing stability and risks of becoming homeless, and develop appropriate measures, including legislation where appropriate, to prevent homelessness.

## Gender and homelessness prevention

The biggest difference between men's and women's homelessness is the impact of domestic abuse, which is the most common reason for women making a homelessness application. Scottish Women's Aid has reported an increase in enquiries to its domestic abuse helpline during the pandemic, and women's aid members have heard from callers that restrictions on movement have created opportunities for abusers to exert greater control. We will continue to implement our [Equally Safe](#) strategy, to prevent and eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls. In April 2020, we launched a [stakeholder toolkit](#) to raise awareness of the support and assistance available to victims of domestic abuse, so that people know they do not need to wait to seek help during the current coronavirus situation.



We are taking action to prevent homelessness as a result of domestic abuse. The Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Bill is intended to improve the protections available for people who are at risk of domestic abuse, particularly where they are living with the perpetrator. The bill intends to provide the courts with a new power to make a Domestic Abuse Protection Order. This can remove a suspected perpetrator of domestic abuse from the home of a person at risk and prohibit them from contacting or otherwise abusing the person at risk, providing those at risk of domestic abuse with some certainty about their protection. In addition, **the bill introduces the transfer of tenancy provisions for social housing tenancies**, creating a new ground on which a social landlord can apply to the court to end a perpetrator's interest in a tenancy or joint tenancy, thereby enabling the victim to remain in the family home where they wish to do so.

In February 2020, we held the first meeting of a group chaired by Scottish Women's Aid and the Chartered Institute of Housing to prevent women and children experiencing domestic abuse from becoming homeless. The group agreed to develop recommendations on how we can work together across the public and housing sectors to improve the housing outcomes of women and children experiencing domestic abuse. The group is considering how to support women to stay in their home as the default approach and how to put [Domestic abuse: a good practice guide for social landlords](#) on a statutory footing. The work of this group was put on hold in the early stages of the crisis, but resumed with urgency in June 2020 due to concerns about increased levels of domestic abuse. **The group's recommendations in relation to social housing are expected later this year and will be followed by the publication of an implementation plan.** The group will then

develop recommendations for the private rented sector.

Scotland's housing minister wrote to all local authorities in May 2020 to encourage them to develop local plans to ensure people experiencing or at risk of domestic abuse can immediately access housing advice, support and emergency accommodation if needed.

We know that housing support is important for women involved in prostitution. The Scottish Government is currently [consulting](#) on challenging men's demand for prostitution, working to reduce the harms associated with prostitution and helping women to exit prostitution. As a result of COVID-19, women involved in prostitution have had greater concerns about paying rent and bills, in addition to the stigma they may experience. Housing and other partners across the Scottish Government will work together on the actions in this plan to ensure that our work is closely aligned.

In addition, there is joint work being undertaken by the Scottish Government and COSLA to **develop and implement human rights-based accommodation pathways for women and children with no recourse to public funds who are experiencing domestic abuse.**

## Tenancy sustainment, money advice and income maximisation

Preventing people from losing their home remains a priority in our efforts to end homelessness and rough sleeping. An important way of doing this is ensuring the right tenancy sustainment support is available at the right time.

We know that it often makes more sense to redirect the money that landlords spend on

pursuing rent arrears through the courts, tackling difficult behaviour and reallocating properties to activities that help people sustain tenancies. Measures to support tenancy sustainment include signposting tenants to income maximisation and debt management services. Housing officers in the social rented sector have an established track record of helping people to sustain tenancies with early action. To encourage adoption of effective early prevention approaches, **we will share innovative and successful examples of early prevention and effective tenancy sustainment work**, such as cross-sector ‘early warning systems’ for people in arrears to ensure they receive the support they need to sustain their accommodation. There are opportunities for partners, including Jobcentre Plus, health and housing providers and food bank providers, to work together to share information. This quickly alerts them to households at risk of homelessness, allowing effective prevention activity to be put in place.

Housing options guidance is clear about housing officers’ roles to consider affordability for each household’s housing options assessment, whether social or private rented accommodation is sought.

We have already made an extra £22 million available to enable local authorities to increase the financial support available through the Scottish Welfare Fund. People in Scotland who require help in a crisis or to establish or maintain their home can receive a community care grant through the Scottish Welfare Fund. These grants can help people set up or keep a settled home by covering the cost of floor coverings, beds and bedding and white goods.

In 2020/21, the Scottish Government is investing over £10 million in welfare and debt advice services. This funding covers projects such as the Money Talk Team, delivered by Citizens Advice Scotland, which offers advice on benefits and entitlements, dealing with debt and ways to reduce household bills. The £10 million investment also includes an extra £2.4 million for money advice services – announced in August 2020 – to enable more people to benefit from free debt advice. We and our partners will continue to ensure people have access to money advice to help them avoid arrears.

UK Government welfare reforms continue to frustrate our efforts to prevent and deal with homelessness. The five week wait for universal credit leaves people in low income households without enough money to cover the basics. This makes it harder for them to pay their rent. The local housing allowance rate cap limits accessibility to private rented accommodation in many areas of Scotland. The shared accommodation rate rules mean that younger claimants who want to live alone face difficult choices. The benefit cap sets a limit on the total amount of benefits that an individual can receive. The bedroom tax means housing benefit and the housing element of universal credit are limited for certain tenants.

While we have fully mitigated the bedroom tax in Scotland through discretionary housing payments, we continue to push the UK Government to abolish the bedroom tax at source. This year we have made almost £19 million<sup>5</sup> available through discretionary housing payments to enable local authorities to support tenants affected by the local housing allowance rates that apply in the private sector (including the shared accommodation rate rules) and tenants whose award is reduced by the benefit cap.

<sup>5</sup> An initial £10.9 million was allocated, with a further £5 million on 20 May 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 emergency to help tenants sustain their tenancies. An additional £3 million was allocated following the programme for government announcement on 1 September 2020, taking the total spend for “other DHPs” to £18.9 million.

Despite these mitigation measures, there are still areas of concern that only the UK Government can fix, including the initial five week wait for universal credit payments, which can put new claimants immediately in debt.

The Scottish Government has given people the option to participate in *Universal Credit (Scottish Choices)*. This means people can choose to have their universal credit paid twice monthly instead of monthly and to have their universal credit housing element paid directly to their landlords. This can reduce the potential for rent arrears.

The Scottish Government is currently considering how best to deliver split payments of universal credit in Scotland. This will offer couples the choice to split their household's payment of universal credit into individual payments to reflect the needs and responsibilities of each person. These measures can reduce the potential for rent arrears, but cannot fix all the problems with universal credit. We followed this with a new £10 million [tenant hardship loan fund](#) to support people struggling to pay their rent as a result of the pandemic. The fund will offer interest-free loans to those unable to access other forms of support for their housing costs.

Discretionary housing payments, the Scottish Welfare Fund and the tenant hardship loan fund will remain available for tenants who need help to pay their rent and living expenses, including where they have accrued arrears for reasons related to the pandemic. We know that compared to the legacy housing benefit system, the universal credit system makes it harder for local authorities to target households who could benefit from discretionary housing payments. The Scottish Government and local government will work together to improve access to, and awareness of, financial assistance for tenants.

**To encourage greater uptake of discretionary housing payments, the Scottish Government will work with COSLA and local authorities to introduce shared and more streamlined application processes.**

**The Scottish Government will also use information sharing powers to help local authorities target people who are most in need of support, and encourage them to apply for discretionary housing payments.**

## **The homelessness prevention fund**

The Scottish Government's [homelessness prevention fund](#), administered by the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, was launched in August 2020. It will provide up to £1.5 million over three years to Scottish housing associations, social landlords and cooperatives to support development of programmes to prevent homelessness. Proposals are expected to target households most at risk of poverty and support delivery of the recommendations from the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group. We will make the first awards from this fund later in 2020.

**We will support the social housing sector to identify and support households at risk of homelessness before they reach crisis point, including through the homelessness prevention fund.**

## **Protection for tenants in the social and private rented sectors**

Tenants across the social and private rented sectors need time to find solutions to pressures they may be facing as a result of COVID-19. We have therefore introduced a range of protections specifically for tenants. These include temporary measures around protections from eviction; new pre-action protocols for private rented sector landlords;

protections against evictions for tenants with agreed arrears repayment plans; and discretionary powers over eviction for the First-tier Tribunal.

Through the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020, the Scottish Government increased the notice period across all eviction grounds in the private and social rented sector for up to six months. By extending the notice periods landlords must give, the Scottish Government has ensured that tenants have time to access available support and can plan for the longer term. The legislation was initially in place until 30 September and the extended notice periods and discretion for the First-Tier Tribunal in repossession cases will now be extended for six months, expiring on 31 March 2021. The extension of the eviction notice period underlines our commitment to do all we can to support people at risk of becoming homeless.

We recognise that serious antisocial behaviour has a severe impact on neighbours and communities and affects the everyday lives of those who are subject to it. We want to ensure that where landlords have clear evidence of antisocial or criminal behaviour that cannot be resolved by other means, they are able to take action to end a tenancy. To enable landlords to do this, the notice periods for initiating eviction action for antisocial or criminal behaviour are being reduced from three months to the pre-coronavirus period of 28 days.

**We will set up a cross-sector project to establish mechanisms for avoiding evictions into homelessness from the private and social rented sectors and take forward the necessary actions.**

The Scottish Government has created two dedicated web pages with information on tenants' rights:

- [\*Renting and your rights during coronavirus if you have a social landlord\*](#)
- [\*Renting and your rights during coronavirus if you have a private landlord\*](#)

The Scottish Government recently launched a [social media campaign](#) on financial support and tenancy rights. The campaign was organised jointly with Citizens Advice Scotland and signposts people to a range of advice and support. This followed a [tenancy rights awareness raising campaign](#) that took place when the emergency legislation protecting renters first came into force in April 2020. **We are currently planning further awareness raising activity in this area.**

Section 11 of the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003 requires social and private sector landlords to give notice to the local authority of their intention to seek repossession of a home, in order to give the authority warning of the need to provide information and support to the tenant at risk of homelessness. In 2019, a project was conducted to explore whether enhanced practices relating to section 11 could help prevent evictions and homelessness. The project, funded by the North and Islands homelessness and housing options hub, resulted in the publication of [process guidance](#) to support improvements to the section 11 process in the social rented sector. The learning from this is also relevant across the private rented sector.

## Specific support for tenants in the private rented sector

The private rented sector plays an important role in Scotland's housing market, offering choice and flexibility. However, affordability remains a concern for some tenants, especially those on lower incomes. We know that people from non-white backgrounds are more likely than people from white backgrounds to live in the private rented sector. There is evidence too from the Office for National Statistics that renting households are less likely than homeowners to have enough savings to cope with a fall in employment income. A [survey](#) commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in June 2020 showed that in the private rented sector in Scotland, almost half of tenants (45%) had seen a drop in their incomes since March 2020.

The Scottish Government introduced a range of significant reforms through the Private Housing (Tenancies) (Scotland) Act 2016 to improve the private rented sector. The act introduced the most significant change in private renting in 30 years, giving tenants a range of new rights and greater security, stability and predictability in their rents as well as introducing measures to tackle increasing rents. This included the new private residential tenancy from 1 December 2017, which limits rent increases to once in 12 months, with three months' notice required; enables tenants to challenge unfair rent increases for adjudication by a rent officer; and provides local authorities with discretionary powers to designate an area as a rent pressure zone.

The Scottish Government is conducting a review of rent pressure zone legislation to examine how it can be made more workable. To support this work, we are considering how to improve data collection in the private rented sector. We also expect the [Social Renewal Advisory Board](#) to provide a view on the role of rent control or rent capping in its recommendations.

### **We will look further at affordability in the private rented sector, building on the work to set up and review rent pressure zones.**

More recently, we have introduced private landlord pre-action protocols – similar to those already in place in the social housing sector. Private landlords who wish to end a tenancy due to rent arrears that have occurred as result of the pandemic will be required to comply with these protocols. This will ensure that, before seeking repossession of a property on the grounds of rent arrears, landlords make reasonable efforts to work with tenants to manage arrears.

### **We will assess the impact of temporary pre-action protocols in the private rented sector, including exploration of any unintended consequences, to inform the development of permanent pre-action protocols.** This will require primary legislation.

The provisions to ensure that all cases going before the First-tier Tribunal are discretionary have now been extended to March 2021 and can be extended again, should the Scottish Parliament agree, to September 2021.

### **We will support the First Tier Tribunal to improve transparency around outcomes for tenants through better use of data.**

A range of support and advice is available for people living in the private rented sector during the pandemic:

- In August 2020, the Scottish Government published a resource for private rented sector tenants which provides information about support and advice for those living in the private rented sector during the COVID-19 pandemic: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): advice for private tenants](#), hard copies of which were sent by post to private rented properties across Scotland. The toolkit is a collaboration between Public Health Scotland, Citizens Advice Scotland, Shelter Scotland and Scottish Government.
- To help facilitate dialogue between tenants and landlords around rent difficulties, SafeDeposits Scotland has launched a free [resolution service](#).

We will also work with the Everyone Home Collective and partners to support development of the third Everyone Home Collective route map, which will be focused on creating more housing capacity, better conditions and improved security within the private rented sector. We expect this route map to be published by the end of 2020.

## Social housing sector rent setting

Individual social landlords determine their own rent setting policies and rent levels and have a legal requirement to consult with their tenants and tenant organisations on rent levels. The [Scottish Social Housing Charter](#) sets out the standards and outcomes that all social landlords should achieve and requires them to consider rent affordability. Social landlords are expected to strike a balance between the level of services provided, the cost of the services, and how far current and prospective tenants and service users can afford them. The Scottish Housing Regulator monitors performance against the charter and ensures social landlords consider affordability in their business planning. We will review the Scottish Social Housing Charter during 2021.

The [monthly reports](#) from the Scottish Housing Regulator on the impact of the virus on social landlords suggest that rent arrears are beginning to increase. This trend is likely to continue as the full economic impact of the pandemic is felt. The data collected by the social housing sector is building our understanding of the difficult situations households are facing and continues to inform development of solutions. We will continue to work with the regulator to monitor and respond to any increases.



## Prevention pathways

We have heard from those with experience of homelessness that, to be effective, prevention must take account of life transitions (e.g. leaving care, hospital, prison or the military). We need to support people to maintain a tenancy when they face particular risks (e.g. women and children experiencing domestic abuse) or when challenges arise (e.g. rent arrears or antisocial behaviour). We need to improve housing outcomes for those in the most difficult circumstances, and help sustain these positive outcomes, preventing homelessness and repeat homelessness.

We will continue to work with partners and appropriate public institutions to develop and implement gender-sensitive and targeted preventative pathways for the groups at particular risk of homelessness and rough sleeping.

These include:

- Women and children experiencing domestic abuse
- People leaving prison
- People leaving care (published in 2019)
- Young people
- Veterans
- People leaving hospital
- People leaving asylum support

The prevention pathway work for veterans will start later in 2020 and the pathway work for people leaving hospitals and asylum support will start in 2021.

As part of this work, **we will also develop rapid protocols with public institutions** (including prisons and healthcare settings) **so that people are not discharged without a managed housing pathway in place.** In

addition, we will explore how Housing First can help support smooth transitions from institutions when people have more complex needs.

**We will test, learn from and improve the homelessness prevention approaches recommended in the pathways, as we provide this targeted support to the groups at particular risk of experiencing homelessness.** To increase impact, we will create partnerships across the public sector to put in place the joint actions needed.

### People leaving prison

We will continue to work with people with lived experience and with the Scottish Prison Service to support the delivery of the [Sustainable Housing on Release for Everyone](#) (SHORE) standards. We initiated a review of the implementation of the SHORE standards early in 2020. This was paused due to COVID-19, but we now intend to pick up this work and learn from the experiences of early prisoner release over recent months, through local authorities, Scottish prisons, criminal justice and the third sector.

### Domestic abuse

The work on improving housing outcomes for women and children experiencing domestic abuse began in February 2020 and we expect to receive recommendations relating to social housing by the end of this year (see [gender and homelessness prevention section](#) above).

### Improving housing pathways for young people

The 'A Way Home Scotland' coalition published the completed [Youth Homelessness Prevention Pathway: Improving Care Leavers' Housing Pathways](#) in November 2019, setting out a number of recommendations for actions

to help prevent homelessness among care leavers and improve their housing outcomes. The Scottish Government is now working with partners to take forward the recommendations in the pathway, to align with plans for implementation of The Promise.

The coalition is currently developing a housing pathway for young people. This includes consideration of a range of affordable housing options and housing pathways for young people, such as flat sharing, community hosting and other non-institutional accommodation. We know that a number of local authorities already have young person pathways included in their rapid rehousing transition plans. The coalition will build on existing good work and consider the development of youth housing protocols and access to mediation. Recommendations will be submitted later in 2020.

## Prevention Review Group

We want the prevention of homelessness to become the business of all relevant public bodies.

We have already committed to developing a new duty on local authorities, public bodies and delivery partners for the prevention of homelessness. In October 2019, a [review group](#) was established to make recommendations for the development and implementation of a new prevention duty on local authorities and wider public bodies.

The group, convened by Crisis and chaired by Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick of Heriot-Watt University, has been engaging extensively with stakeholders, and the views of the Prevention Commission<sup>6</sup> (providing lived and frontline experience) have been essential in shaping the proposals. Areas the group has looked at include health and social care, community justice, children's services and multiple and complex needs. The group is exploring changes to legislation that allow for more flexible and wide-ranging support and assistance being provided to people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. This includes a greater emphasis on choice for individuals and families.

As part of its work the group is considering strategic planning within local authorities and across relevant public bodies to ensure that duties to prevent homelessness are supported by other public services. In addition, the group will explore ways to ensure households are no longer evicted from social or private rented accommodation into homelessness – including through regulation. We will share best practice among landlords on the most effective ways to achieve this.

**We expect to receive the recommendations from the review group in November 2020 and we will respond and set out our next steps in 2021.** This will include evidence of likely impact and an assessment of the regulatory framework that a prevention duty would sit within.

<sup>6</sup> The commission was set up to work with the Prevention Review Group as it reviews the gaps in prevention legislation and develops recommendations to Scottish Government on next steps.

## Action for the UK Government

A properly functioning welfare safety net is crucial in preventing homelessness. The Scottish Government will continue to challenge the UK Government to reform its fragmented welfare system.

We have urged the UK Government to strengthen the social security system in light of the COVID-19 emergency. In particular, we have asked the UK Government to increase local housing allowance rates; suspend the benefit cap; end the five week wait for benefits to start; scrap the bedroom tax; suspend the shared accommodation rate; enable the three-month rule when claiming universal credit; and extend the current suspension of direct deductions from benefit to repay third party debts. We are also asking the UK Government to maintain the temporary £20 a week increase in universal credit and extend it to legacy benefits.

We have repeatedly called on the UK Government to extend the furlough scheme to prevent thousands of people in Scotland from losing their jobs. We have also asked the UK Government to implement an extension to provide help for the sectors that have been most heavily affected. Unlike the Scottish Government, the UK Government has the borrowing powers necessary to fund the extension of the job retention scheme – vital to protect jobs and livelihoods. Scottish Government analysis shows that extending the scheme by eight months could save 61,000 jobs in Scotland.

# Actions we will take 3: we will prioritise settled homes for all

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## The right to housing

Our aim is that everyone should have a home that meets their needs. Having a settled home is the best way to ensure people can live their lives with good health, wellbeing and a sense of community and belonging. It is vital that we embed a housing-led response to homelessness supported by strong partnerships with other public services. A settled home acts as the foundation for a person to tackle an array of challenges including poverty, addictions, mental and health problems and avoiding offending and reoffending.

Having a settled home also allows us to focus on other goals such as community, connection, education, employment and wellbeing. In this way, a settled home is crucial to promoting inclusion and equality and to our vision for a fairer Scotland. We are already committed to supporting the development of a wider range of options for a settled home so that people are helped to find a housing solution that works for them. We will continue to develop and build on best practice examples of alternative housing options, including shared living and other models as an active choice where appropriate.

The right to housing is a human right enshrined in international law. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognise the right to housing as part of the right to an adequate standard of living. The UK and Scottish governments and local authorities therefore have an obligation to protect and promote people's right to adequate housing. The First Minister of Scotland's [advisory group on human rights leadership](#) published a report in December 2018 with recommendations aimed at ensuring Scotland is an international leader in building a rights-based society. This included a section on economic, social and cultural rights and the right to adequate housing.

As set out in our [programme for government 2020/21](#), **the Scottish Government will continue work on the First Minister's national taskforce for human rights leadership**, to deliver a radical blueprint for human rights legislation covering all areas of devolved responsibility, including the right to adequate housing. To take this forward we will build our understanding of the impact of incorporation of these rights on current housing and homelessness policy and we will review existing legislation to ensure that housing rights are strengthened as intended.

## Rapid rehousing

We know that a housing-led approach reduces the need for many forms of temporary accommodation. Rapid rehousing means making sure that everyone that has experienced homelessness is helped into permanent accommodation as quickly as possible rather than staying in temporary accommodation for too long.

**“Moving from one temporary furnished flat to another caused me to relapse. It was an unfamiliar area, I had no support network. Moving impacted my children, they had to move schools and are isolated.”**

Rapid rehousing was one of the main recommendations in the [Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group](#)’s first suite of reports, and was central to our 2018 [action plan](#). Two years on and Scotland’s transition to a rapid rehousing approach is well underway, representing significant culture and systems change in how we respond to homelessness. All 32 councils have rapid rehousing transition plans (RRTPs) and have been implementing them for over a year. This means they are well-placed to respond quickly with appropriate housing solutions as we transition out of the crisis and continue this transformation.

Housing First is an important component of our rapid rehousing approach, offering settled accommodation and wraparound support to people with multiple and complex needs. It is a well-evidenced and effective model. The principle of Housing First is that a safe, secure home is the best base for addressing any support needs. Most councils included Housing First in their rapid rehousing transition plans as a means of addressing unmet support needs.

The Scottish Government has allocated £32.5 million from the Ending Homelessness Together fund and from the health budget for rapid rehousing and Housing First so that local authorities and partners can support people into settled accommodation first and then help them with their longer term support needs.

We know that in order to provide effective person-centred support, we have to understand people’s individual needs and experiences. Equality impact assessments in RRTPs – along with personal housing plans and trauma-informed assessments – provide a mechanism for generating this comprehensive understanding and ensuring that local authorities tackle any barriers that exist for specific groups. In February 2020, local authorities were asked to submit an updated RTP along with an activities and spend monitoring template. These plans have been reviewed by Scottish Government and feedback has been provided.

The Scottish Government held a national event in February 2020 with national RTP coordinators to share ideas, experiences and learning. We continue to support local authorities and partners to share good practice through the [housing options hubs](#) meetings (now engaging fortnightly), national meetings and events. In June 2020, we introduced in an electronic platform to connect RTP coordinators and encourage collaboration. We have established a running list of ideas – known as a “basket of ideas” – where examples of different practices and projects are shared for other local authorities to consider and adapt to their local circumstances as we learn collectively about the shift to rapid rehousing.

Homeless Network Scotland and Crisis are developing a guide to help local authorities review their RRTPs in light of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group's recent recommendations. The guide has been tested with a focus group of local authorities and will be further developed in the light of feedback.

Local authorities have already been considering what changes need to be made to their RRTPs as a result of COVID-19, including on rapid housing access and plans for stepping back from use of hotels and night shelters. The intention is to ensure these types of accommodation are not inadvertently designed back into the homelessness system. Other RRTP changes being developed include:

- changes to temporary accommodation legislation and standards;
- strengthened prevention activity, including earlier housing-led intervention work to prevent homelessness;
- learning about the impact of wider housing choice, such as shared living, and continued development of alternative settled housing options; and
- a national Housing First development framework (for pathfinder and non-pathfinder areas).

## Housing First

The Scottish Government will continue to support and fund Housing First in the pathfinder areas (Aberdeen/shire, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Stirling) until the end of March 2022. Progress has slowed down because of the pandemic; nonetheless, by the end of August 2020, 306 tenancies had been set up with a tenancy sustainment rate of 87%. To date, nobody has been evicted from their home.

**"A few months after arriving [in shared hostel], I was offered a home of my own through the Housing First programme. I refused it but when a house came up in an area I was familiar with, I decided to take the chance. At first, I hated it. I could feel the walls closing in like before. But the Housing First support staff were incredible. They stood by me every step of the way and did everything they could to help me adjust to living in my own home. I've now been in my wee house for almost a year and I love it. I'm always thinking about different things to do to improve it. I can see me living here for the rest of my life, hopefully."**

The focus will now shift to secure mainstreaming of Housing First funding from local authority budgets and contributions from other local partners so there is no cliff edge when the support from the Scottish Government and its current funding partners ends. We will support the Housing First Training Academy, which is supporting the [Housing First pathfinder](#), to include training on gender inequality.

**“That is the best sleep I have had in 14 years.”**

Male, after spending the first night in his new home. He had lived on the street for 12 years and then spent two years in emergency accommodation.

We continue to support a national roll out of Housing First, building on the learning from the pathfinder programme and its evaluation being conducted by Heriot-Watt University, including understanding any differences in relation to the experience and impact of Housing First for women and men. By the end of March 2021, 27 local authorities in Scotland will have adopted Housing First. The Housing First national development framework is being finalised to support the rapid scaling up of Housing First and is due to be published in October 2020. It will include a focus on gender.

**We will build on these early results and work with local authorities to scale up Housing First more rapidly.**

Local authorities and their partners plan to increase the number of lets to people who will benefit from Housing First. There will be more advanced matching of people to tenancies to reduce refusals and ensure people are more involved in the selection of their tenancy. Some local authorities and their partners have already begun to include the private rented sector as a source of settled homes. This can offer additional choice to Housing First tenants and is something we are keen to explore further.

**“Housing First has helped me to recover from my drug addiction by finding me a new home.”**

We will work towards Housing First being a realistic option for those at risk of repeat homelessness or currently in public institutions such as prisons. We saw examples of this happening during the early release scheme. Local authorities will make sure that the learning from this experience is captured.

**“The [Housing First] support has been amazing and coming out of prison into my own tenancy has made a difference as I have been away from negative influences and [it] feels that with Housing First support I will be able to remain in my home and not return to prison.”**

## Social housing allocations

It is important for every social landlord to have a social housing allocation policy that complies with all relevant legislation and statutory guidance. The allocation policy should also reflect housing needs in the area in which the landlord has homes for rent. What works well in one area will not necessarily work in another and allocation policies should reflect the circumstances and housing needs of the communities covered by the policy.

The Scottish Government and COSLA issued non-statutory [guidance](#) for local authorities, social landlords and private rented sector landlords in April 2020 to help them meet their duties during the coronavirus pandemic. We know there is existing good practice with some councils making 100% of their social housing allocations available to homeless households, but we want to see a greatly increased proportion of social housing allocations going to those experiencing or at risk of homelessness. This may mean rebalancing needs across housing lists to give greater priority to households who are more at risk in this period. This will support those on the long waiting lists that have developed during the crisis as well as those who were waiting for access to a social home before the pandemic hit.

**Our shared ambition is to see a significant increase in the proportion of social homes allocated to people who are homeless while we are still in phase three of Scotland's route map.<sup>7</sup>** The shared ambition to reduce homelessness and the number of households in temporary accommodation should be a key consideration in social home allocation at a local level. This will be achieved through joint working between councils and social landlords, maximising the allocation of accommodation to homeless households and adopting a rapid rehousing response.

## Affordable housing supply

The Scottish Government remains committed to increasing the supply of affordable homes. We recognise the positive social and economic impact that investment in social housing contributes and we are committed to expanding our social housing stock.

Ensuring everyone has access to a safe, warm and affordable home is at the heart of our ambition for a fairer Scotland. That is why the Scottish Government has committed more than £3.5 billion to deliver our target of 50,000 affordable homes.

Between 2016 and the end of March 2020, we had delivered 34,791 affordable homes, of which over 23,000 were for social rent. This means that in the four years to 2019, we had delivered over 80% more affordable homes per head of population than in both England and Wales, 50% more homes per head than in Northern Ireland, and over eight times more social rented properties per head than in England. In total since 2007, the Scottish Government has delivered almost 96,000 affordable homes, of which over 66,000 were for social rent. The pandemic has had a significant impact on the construction industry, but we are working with partners across the housing sector to **complete the delivery of our current 50,000 affordable homes target as soon as it is safe to do so.**

To end homelessness, there is an urgent need for housing that provides people on low incomes with security, decent living conditions and affordable rents. Greater availability of social housing has been identified as the most important resource needed to help local authorities meet the needs of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This is a point regularly raised by people with lived experience of homelessness.

The need for affordable housing continues to outstrip available supply in some areas, which has led to a growing reliance on expensive and sometimes unsuitable temporary accommodation to house homeless households.

<sup>7</sup> Phase three of Scotland's route map began on 10 July 2020. If, after easing any restrictions, the evidence tells us we are unable to contain the transmission of the virus, then the Scottish Government will have to re-impose them, possibly returning to lockdown with little notice. See [COVID-19: a framework for decision making](#).

The affordable housing supply programme continues to offer flexibility and long term quality housing solutions, by funding a range of interventions to improve local housing supply. The interventions are based on the strategic priorities set out in a local authority's local housing strategy and strategic housing investment plan. They depend on local need and can include site acquisitions, new build and acquisitions of existing homes. In some areas, increasing the number of homes may not be the answer and it can be more effective to replace obsolete homes or refurbish existing stock. Local authorities are required to consider how the existing stock can be better used, including bringing empty homes back into use, as part of their local housing strategies.

A joint letter from the Scottish housing minister and COSLA's community wellbeing spokesperson was sent to the housing sector in May 2020 urging housing providers to prioritise the process of bringing empty rented properties back into use. Many local authorities and housing associations have found creative ways to overcome the challenges of returning homes to a lettable standard during the pandemic. We will continue to engage across the social and private rented sectors to support good practice, maximise housing options and remove barriers to supporting people experiencing homelessness.

**We will encourage the housing sector to prioritise the process of bringing empty homes back into use** and we will continue to share and promote good practice.

We will continue to work with the sector to support effective housing planning through local strategies and rapid rehousing transition plans.

## Maximising housing options

The Scottish Government is increasing the provision of homes across all tenures through a range of measures including the affordable housing supply programme, the Rural and Islands Housing Fund, the Building Scotland Fund, the Housing Infrastructure Fund and innovative measures such as build-to-rent.

Initiatives that bring empty homes and obsolete buildings back into use as affordable housing can help tackle homelessness, meet local housing needs and improve housing conditions. The Scottish Government continues to support the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership, which works with local authorities and other organisations to engage with owners of empty homes in the private sector. We doubled funding for the partnership in 2018-19, providing £423,000 for three years. The partnership has shown real benefits with more than 5,000 homes brought back into use since 2010. We want all local authorities to recognise the benefits of this approach and our ambition is to have dedicated empty homes officers operating in every area. The funding also supports the development of an enhanced empty homes advice service and new online resources.

Given the impact of COVID-19, we agreed with the empty homes partnership to adjust our focus to ensure continued employment of empty homes officers during the crisis, and to maintain this skilled capacity to support economic recovery as we emerge from lockdown.

Where it meets a tenant's needs, 'flipping' temporary accommodation to permanent accommodation in the social and private rented sectors is another option that can result in more households being placed in suitable and settled accommodation. As it is a relatively new approach, we

will explore methods of flipping privately rented temporary accommodation and share examples amongst local authorities.

Many local authorities already work with the private rented sector to increase the availability of private rented stock for people who are at risk of homelessness either through rent deposit guarantee schemes or private rented sector access schemes. Local authorities will continue to consider ways to facilitate access to the private rented sector where appropriate, and how to help people sustain tenancies there.

**Perth and Kinross Council has a well-established range of private sector initiatives which have assisted more than 1,500 households to access good quality accommodation in the private rented sector since 2009/10.**

**The council has an in-house social letting agency, PKC Lets. A more traditional rent bond guarantee service is also offered. Empty homes work is linked into the private rented sector team, and grants are offered to owners of empty homes on condition that properties are rented at local housing allowance rate levels for at least five years.**

**We will support local authorities to build stronger relationships with the private rented sector and to develop their empty homes services and private rented sector access schemes.** We will take this forward through the [Joint Housing Resilience Chairs Group](#), which was set up to share housing issues arising from the COVID-19 pandemic across the different housing resilience groups<sup>8</sup>.

We know we need to increase access to housing stock to meet demand and prevent homelessness and we will consider all options for moving people safely from emergency or temporary accommodation to a settled home within a community.

We will consider the scope to extend the criteria of existing buy back schemes and to facilitate the transfer of empty private rented properties to the social rented sector.

In January 2020, the Scottish Government announced that local authorities would be given new powers to regulate the density and standards of short-term lets where they decide this is in the interests of local communities. The impact of COVID-19 delayed our work to regulate short-term lets in Scotland. However, we are aiming to lay secondary legislation in December 2020 to give local authorities powers to license short-term lets and introduce control areas so that they can be in force by spring 2021. These powers will allow local authorities to balance the need for more homes and the concerns of their communities with wider economic and tourism interests. On 14 September, the Scottish Government launched a [consultation](#) on detailed proposals for regulating short-term lets in Scotland.

The UK chancellor announced an increase in local housing allowance rates in March 2020 after a long freeze, meaning more of the private rented sector is available to people facing homelessness. It is, however, unclear how long these rates will remain in place and we will continue to press for local housing allowance rates to be lifted further. The increase has returned us to the minimum of where we need to be and means that people can currently get more money towards their rent if they are in receipt of certain benefits.

<sup>8</sup> Social Housing Resilience Group, Local Authority Housing Resilience Group and Private Rented Sector Resilience Group.

**The Scottish Government is funding Cyrenians, Crisis and Simon Community to conduct a pilot to facilitate settled accommodation in the private rented sector for around 15 individuals who were living in emergency hotel accommodation in Edinburgh. This includes people who had previously been rough sleeping, using the night shelter or people who had been moved from hotels into temporary accommodation. Four people have already moved into new homes. The pilot also includes medium-term support to help maximise tenancy sustainment. Learning will be captured and outcomes evaluated during the project, including tenancy sustainment rates. The findings will inform decision making on a Scotland-wide proposal for increasing access to the private rented sector. Learning from the pilot can also inform discussions of how to include private rented sector stock in Housing First projects effectively.**

## Housing to 2040

We have asked people across Scotland to help us plan for how our homes and communities should look and feel in 2040 and what we need to do to get there. We will use this to set out a 20-year plan for continuing to drive government investment to deliver good quality, energy efficient, zero carbon housing with access to outdoor space, transport links, digital connectivity, community services and our continued investment in delivering affordable housing.

The Housing to 2040 route map will be published later in 2020. The route map will draw on information gathered during the last two years of consultation and work with partners, including the members of the 'housing system policy circle' (part of the [Social Renewal Advisory Board](#)). We will ensure that the Ending Homelessness Together action plan and a longer term ambition to prevent homelessness are built into Housing to 2040. We will also make sure Housing to 2040 reflects our learning from the experience of the pandemic about the fundamental importance of safe housing for all.



# Actions we will take 4: we will respond quickly and effectively whenever homelessness happens

## Keeping people safe now and in the winter months

While rough sleeping is not acceptable at any time of year, we know that in cold weather it can be fatal. As the winter months approach, we must take action to reduce the impact of coronavirus and protect people experiencing homelessness, particularly those at risk of rough sleeping.

Following an exceptional response to the public health emergency by partners across the public and third sectors, hundreds of people who had previously been rough sleeping or in unsuitable congregate accommodation were rapidly offered a place of safety. While we are moving through the phases of [Scotland's route map](#) through and out of the crisis, the pandemic is far from over. We must continue to protect all those at risk of ending up on the street. We know too that there will be new cases of homelessness during this difficult period.

We acknowledge that hotels and other emergency accommodation are a short-term solution. More sustainable options are needed both for individuals and for local authorities so that people are supported into a settled home that keeps them safe and meets their needs. Many people who were accommodated during the crisis have already moved on to more settled accommodation. Local authorities will continue to carry out regular audits of the numbers and needs of people in emergency and temporary accommodation and the options available to them. **Summaries of these audits will be shared with the [Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group](#).**

**We will continue to support local authorities and health and social care partners with their efforts to provide appropriate move on support and stable accommodation for all those currently in emergency accommodation.**

We know that a 'housing-led' approach reduces the need for many forms of temporary accommodation. We will therefore continue to support local authorities and partners to transition to a culture of rapid rehousing by default, where the emphasis is on helping people into permanent accommodation before addressing any other needs.

While there has been fast tracking of people from hostels to hotels and from hotels to other temporary accommodation during the pandemic, a settled home must be the



priority and we must ensure that other needs are met – from furniture and starter packs to mental health support and connection to others within communities – so that tenancies do not break down. We already fund a scheme that allows frontline homelessness organisations to make instant pay outs to people to pay for clothing or copies of lost documents.

We also provided funding to Homeless Network Scotland to create a ‘staying in fund’ so that cash payments of up to £100 could be made available to people experiencing homelessness in Scotland. The fund closed within three days of opening and awards were made to 1,025 people<sup>9</sup>.

We have an opportunity to learn and document what worked well, and what did not work well in our response to the pandemic. There has already been positive evaluation of the effectiveness of the ‘staying in fund’. **We will consider what further support is needed to help people with the transition out of the crisis.**

**“I plan to use the voucher to purchase items in preparation for when I have secure accommodation and achieve a positive move on. It will make such a difference, it is helping me get started and on my feet.”**

**“Wow! Thank you so much! This will help me so much right now. Feel like I’ve won the lottery and actually cried a wee bit with happiness when I read this email. Phone bill, gas and electric and some left to stock up the freezer. You’ve made my day/week/month.**

**Totally renewed my faith in humanity with this gesture, thank you once again.”**

Quotes from staying in fund recipients

**“We have been able to encourage people to shop in their local stores and supermarkets as well which has helped them connect with their communities. The fund has had an incredibly positive impact on all. For those really feeling the effects of increased isolation and boredom, the receipt of the voucher was a huge pick me up and really lifted their spirits.”**

*Service manager, Salvation Army*

**“The staying in fund made a massive difference for our residents. As they were in their flats more, their fuel bills were more, so they were able to top up their meters. The relief was seen in the residents as some did not know where they were going to get extra money for this.”**

*Hostel Support Worker,  
South Ayrshire Council*

## Ending the use of night shelters

No-one should have to sleep rough in Scotland or stay in unsuitable congregate accommodation. The pandemic has highlighted the challenges of infection control in dormitory-style settings. We are therefore committed to seeing a planned move away from night shelter provision in favour of rapid and settled housing options. Scotland’s night shelters closed at the start of this pandemic and have not reopened. Instead, people were accommodated in hotels and other self-contained accommodation. Frontline staff have been using this opportunity to work with individuals to offer them better options than they had before so that they do not return to unsuitable communal settings or to the streets as we move through and out of the crisis.

<sup>9</sup> £100 ASDA shopping vouchers were posted to 357 individuals and a £100 direct bank transfer was made to 668 individuals.

Scotland's Everyone Home Collective published its first route map, [Ending the need for night shelter and hotel room provision](#), in June 2020. It proposes actively phasing out the use of hotel accommodation and night shelters by scaling up rapid rehousing and Housing First.

In our [programme for government 2020/21](#), we agreed to modify night shelter provision this winter, with the aim of ending the use of night shelter and dormitory style provision in future.

We know we will always need some form of emergency accommodation. In the short term, night shelters will be replaced by rapid rehousing welcome centres. This approach will build on existing good practice to provide an under-one-roof and multi-agency triage for people at the sharpest end of homelessness, providing rapid access to Housing First where required. Where there is no alternative option, welcome centres will provide a bed for the night as well as support to enable guests to move on to preferred accommodation as quickly as possible – and ideally within 24 hours.

**We will continue to work with local authorities and other partners to provide access to safe and self-contained accommodation during the pandemic.**

**We will support our partners to modify existing night shelter provision in Edinburgh and Glasgow in winter 2020/21 by contributing to the cost of rapid rehousing welcome centres and actively end the use of night shelter and dormitory-style provision in future.**

## Support for people with no recourse to public funds

The UK Government applies a condition of no recourse to public funds to people staying in the UK who are subject to immigration control, including people on visas, people seeking asylum and people with insecure status. This means a significant number of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness are unable to access the safety net offered through the benefits system or earn an income through paid work. The UK immigration legislation also restricts access to local authority accommodation for people who are subject to immigration control.

The task of supporting people with no recourse to public funds who are experiencing homelessness and destitution during COVID-19 has been left to the third sector, local authorities and devolved governments, using the limited powers we have.

COSLA has published [guidance](#) for local authorities setting out how they can fulfil their safeguarding duties towards people with no recourse to public funds during this period. The Scottish Government has also introduced emergency legislation (the National Health Service (Charges to Overseas Visitors) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2020) so all overseas visitors in Scotland – regardless of their immigration status – will not be charged for the diagnosis and treatment of the coronavirus.

The Scottish Government and COSLA have committed to publishing an anti-destitution strategy to support people who have no recourse to public funds. The strategy will set out measures to protect human rights and help support people out of destitution. Work on the strategy was temporarily paused

to focus on the response to COVID-19 but will now resume. The draft strategy has been informed by engagement with local authorities, support organisations and people with lived experience. It will be enhanced by lessons learned during the pandemic.

To reduce the spread of the virus, Scottish local authorities are providing support and accommodation to people with no recourse to public funds to protect public health. The Scottish Government provided over £1.5 million to third sector organisations in Edinburgh and Glasgow to enable them to acquire emergency hotel accommodation for people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness, including people with no recourse to public funds.

However, this is not sustainable in the longer term. To enable the Scottish Government and local authorities to continue to provide accommodation for people with no recourse to public funds as we transition out of the crisis and to support people to meet their own housing costs over time would require the UK Government to suspend the no recourse to public funds condition. The UK Government's policy on no recourse to public funds is one of the greatest barriers in our efforts to end homelessness and rough sleeping. We need to be able to act early and preventatively to support people with no recourse to public funds, who do not have an adequate income or secure immigration status, in order to tackle migrant homelessness. However, Scotland lacks the policy levers required and, without access to the mainstream benefits system, this will continue to be a significant challenge.

The UK Government's immigration policy stands in our way. The no recourse to public funds condition has pushed some of the most vulnerable people in our communities into destitution; severely affected people from outside the UK who face homelessness in Scotland; and made it harder for homelessness services to help people. The complexity of the rules means that many of those who are eligible for support from the asylum system or for a change of status to access public funds do not understand their rights or how to access them. Application processes can also be slow. Evidence has shown<sup>10</sup> that the majority of people with no recourse to public funds who receive support from local authorities are eventually granted access to public funds by the UK Government and have their right to be in the UK recognised, but first have to endure years of poverty and uncertainty. This includes families with children and adults with care needs.

Despite repeated calls from Scottish ministers, the UK Government has given no indication that it will change its position. We will continue to press for change and, to this end, **we are forming alliances with like-minded partners, including other devolved nations and cities.**

We do not want to see basic human rights to food and shelter withdrawn. Individuals who are currently in a place of safety should not face destitution or be forced to resort to desperate means in the aftermath of the crisis. We recognise that we have an opportunity now to do things differently and to rebuild a stronger and fairer future.

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<sup>10</sup> [NRPF Connect – Annual data report 2019-2020](#)

This aim is supported by the Everyone Home Collective, which published its second route map, [Scotland's ambition to end destitution and protect human rights](#), in August 2020. The route map proposes a cross-government, cross-sector approach to protect the rights of people at risk because of their immigration status.

**We will continue to work with the Everyone Home Collective so that the route map informs our forthcoming anti-destitution strategy.**

The Scottish Government and COSLA will continue to press the UK Government to address migrant homelessness; to review its inhumane policy on people with no recourse to public funds; and to clarify the protection to be afforded to those without recourse to public funds. We believe people have a right to be treated with dignity and respect. We will therefore continue to work to the limit of our devolved powers and explore any potential flexibilities we have to support those with no recourse to public funds who are facing destitution.

**We will explore alternative routes, such as philanthropic investment, through which to provide accommodation to people with no recourse to public funds.**

**We and our funding partners will extend funding for the humanitarian and legal projects that provide advocacy and legal advice to destitute asylum seekers and people with no recourse to public funds.**

In order to end homelessness for people with no recourse to public funds, local authorities must also be able to develop and resource housing pathways for vulnerable adults and families with children, and partners must support people to access appropriate immigration and legal advice. Work is already underway to look at how to improve housing outcomes for women and children with no recourse to public funds experiencing domestic abuse. We will take the lessons learned here and review the housing needs of those with other statutory entitlements to strengthen the provision of statutory support on human rights and safeguarding grounds. COSLA will further support this work by assisting local authorities in the development of effective referral pathways between housing, social work and third sector partners.

**A national model of frontline outreach**

In 2019, we worked with stakeholders and developed six strategic priorities<sup>11</sup> for a national model of frontline outreach to support people off the streets, whether they are sleeping rough and/or street begging.

We will continue to explore the reasons why people continue to beg and/or sleep rough. We know that mental health and addiction problems can play a part but for some begging offers a sense of community. We need to better understand the consequence of social isolation and the desire for connection. A model of effective frontline outreach needs to consider interventions to prevent street homelessness as well as immediate responses when rough sleeping and/or begging is occurring.

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<sup>11</sup> The six priorities are: (i) develop support provision for those with no recourse to public funds; (ii) combat rough sleeping and begging; (iii) better joined up working on human trafficking and organised crime; (iv) better joined up working on mental health and addictions, including reducing the risk of drug-related death; (v) support implementation of the Sustainable Housing on Release for Everyone (SHORE) standards on discharge from prison; and (vi) combat social isolation.

We will continue to embed a no-wrong door approach across all frontline services to prevent people from entering street homelessness in the first place, but also to support them off the streets when the situation arises.

We have already made progress against some of the strategic priorities. As a result of the concerted efforts of local authorities, the Scottish Prison Service and their local partners during the early release scheme, the ambitions set out in the Sustainable Housing on Release for Everyone (SHORE) standards were met in full. No-one was liberated from prison without an offer of accommodation. The Scottish Government, local authorities and the Scottish Prison Service are now reflecting on this experience to ensure we capture and implement this way of working as we transition through and out of the crisis. In the same way, joined up efforts by frontline services mean that we have been better able to support people with no recourse to public funds during the pandemic.

We will continue to explore different models of frontline outreach services across the country to increase our understanding about what works. Over the next 12 to 18 months, we will identify and share good practice to inform a national model of frontline outreach across third sector and statutory services as we deliver the remaining strategic priorities.

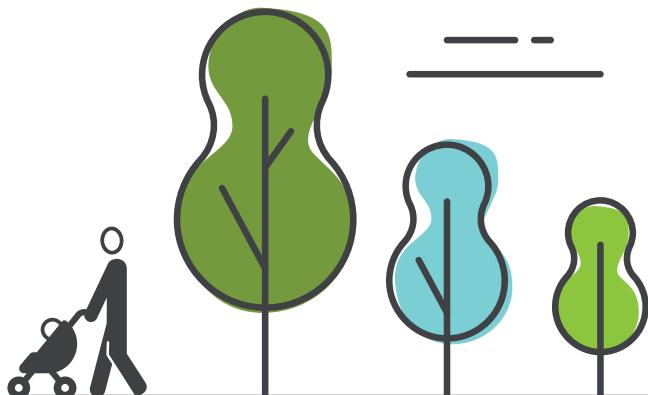
We know a well-trained workforce is essential to the effective delivery of frontline services. The housing options hubs are developing a training toolkit made of six modules covering the knowledge and skills involved in delivering housing options services. The first two modules have been tested successfully and signed off by the steering group overseeing the project. Work on the third module is now well advanced. We expect the first three modules to be available in early 2021 with the final three modules completed later the same year.

## National data collection/shared case management system

We published the options appraisal for a new national data collection system in May 2019 and set out plans in our [annual report](#) for a programme of engagement and development. This work has been on hold due to COVID-19.

A shared case management system will enable confidential and relevant information to be made immediately available to organisations supporting people experiencing homelessness. This will ensure people receive the support, advice and accommodation they need quickly. The new system will be developed in collaboration with frontline organisations, local authorities and people with lived experience of homelessness to ensure it is fit for purpose.

We have heard from third sector and local government partners that the successes of the past months in moving people to a place of safety would not have been possible without joint working and information sharing between organisations. We will therefore restart this work by the end of 2020 with the aim of starting a pilot in 2021.



## Temporary accommodation

Temporary accommodation is an important safety net but it should be high quality, short-term and provide the right support to the people who live there. We had already said in our action plan that the length of time some households spend in temporary accommodation, in bed and breakfasts in particular, was unacceptable.

In spite of all efforts, recent homelessness statistics – which cover the pre-pandemic period from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 – show we have a significantly increased number of people in temporary accommodation. We must take bold steps to reverse this trend.

**"In B&B I only ever got a place for a couple of days. Having to think ahead all the time is exhausting, and so is moving every couple of days. I couldn't settle."**

To prevent any backward movement, we have fast-tracked plans to extend the Unsuitable Accommodation Order, which currently prevents pregnant women or families with children from being placed in accommodation such as bed and breakfasts and hotels for more than a week, to include all homeless households. This means that after 31 January 2021, no-one will stay in unsuitable temporary accommodation without access to basic facilities and support for more than seven days.

Local authorities need to have a range of options for different groups of homeless households. With the extension of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order, we have widened the types of accommodation that can be considered suitable for particular people in particular circumstances. We will continue to encourage local authorities to share alternative models that allow homeless households a greater degree of choice and control over their temporary accommodation placement. We will also encourage the diversification of property portfolios in order to provide applicants with a wider range of options for temporary and permanent accommodation.

## Legislation

### **Local connection**

Section 8 of the Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 gives Scottish ministers powers to modify the use of local connection rules. The section 8 provisions were commenced on 7 November 2019. This legislation currently allows local authorities to refer a homeless applicant to another local authority in certain circumstances. The intention of the modification is to give people making homelessness applications as much choice as possible, including helping them settle where they choose to live.

In August 2020, we published a [consultation](#) inviting views on the statement for exercising the power of Scottish ministers to modify the operation of local connection referrals between local authorities in Scotland. The consultation closes on 23 October 2020 and the statement will be published by 7 May 2021.

### **Intentionality**

The Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 (Commencement No. 4) Order 2019 was commenced on 7 November 2019, introducing discretion for local authorities in assessing homelessness applications for intentionality.

There was limited consensus in our 2019 [consultation](#) about the option of removing intentionality entirely and we will continue to work with partners, lawyers and other stakeholders as we consider next steps. As we have made intentionality discretionary since November 2019, we are using local authority reporting data to understand the impacts of this change to inform next steps. We will start a review in November 2020, 12 months after the legislation commenced, and report by July 2021 as set out in the updated code of guidance.

### **Code of guidance and code of practice**

The Scottish Government worked with partners to publish a factual update of the [code of guidance](#) in November 2019. The updated code reflects best working practice and current relevant legislation, and is a vital step in assisting local authorities to deliver the best possible service to households who experience homelessness or are threatened with homelessness. Our plans for a comprehensive review and update of the code have been put on hold due to COVID-19 and we intend to take this forward in 2021. We will also develop a process to make regular updates when legislative and policy changes are introduced.

### **Temporary accommodation standards**

Building on the responses received to the consultation on improving temporary accommodation standards and the revisions made to the Unsuitable Accommodation Order, we will set up a working group to develop a legally enforceable standards framework by the end of the year. The group will bring forward concrete proposals in 2021.

### **Unsuitable Accommodation Order**

**We will publish guidance later in 2020 on the Unsuitable Accommodation Order and bring forward a further Scottish statutory instrument that will provide clarity on the changes to the Order now that it has been expanded to all homeless households.** This will provide detail on the circumstances in which the exemptions created for community hosting, rapid access accommodation and shared tenancies can be applied. It will also set out a clear framework for local authorities to help them plan to end the use of unsuitable accommodation, apart from in emergency situations.

# **Actions we will take 5: we will join up planning and resources to tackle homelessness**

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## **Partnership working**

Homelessness is about much more than housing, and homelessness prevention will be most effective when it is recognised as a priority for a range of public services. We have already set out our intention to develop protocols with public institutions as part of the prevention pathways work. This should ensure there is a multi-agency approach to the allocation of specialist accommodation (e.g. supported housing) for the small number of people who – for various reasons – do not feel ready for a permanent tenancy.

We know that there is a strong relationship between homelessness and health in Scotland, and clear evidence of a relationship between repeat homelessness, drugs, alcohol and mental health. Dr Andrew Waugh's report, [Health and homelessness in Scotland](#), found that homelessness affects a sizable minority of people in Scotland (at least 8% of the population as at 30 June 2015 had experienced homelessness at some point in their lives). The report showed:

- increased interactions with health services preceded people becoming homeless;
- a peak in interactions with health services was seen around the time of the first homelessness assessment; and
- higher levels of interactions with health services followed the first homelessness assessment for people experiencing repeat homelessness.

By preventing homelessness we can improve health outcomes. In turn, improved health will support people to keep their homes while they focus on other goals. This is why the cross public sector homelessness prevention duty is vital and remains a central priority to this plan. But legislation alone will not bring about the shift we need. We will continue to take forward a range of activity to build, embed and maintain partnership approaches to prevent and respond to homelessness and to achieve our vision of everyone having a settled home that meets their needs.

**Dundee Survival Group provides accommodation with housing support to people experiencing homelessness in Dundee. Currently, they are working in partnership with the Housing Service and Dundee Health and Social Care Partnership on a 'Test of Change' project providing wheelchair accessible flats as step down accommodation. This helps provide early discharge from hospital for people made homeless because their accommodation is no longer suitable for them post treatment.**

One of the more positive impacts of COVID-19 has been the way in which people have pulled together to introduce measures that might have previously taken months or years to implement. We saw swifter and more open information sharing; and more collaboration between organisations. We saw more rapid decision-making, especially when it came to funding decisions. We saw more and better cross-sector and partnership working. We saw a willingness to embrace new technologies and connect over online platforms. We saw more joined-up responses to meeting clinical and emotional needs. We also saw a reduction in bureaucracy, which led to people getting the support they needed more quickly, and with fewer barriers.

The pandemic galvanised partners to focus efforts on what was important: protecting people from imminent harm. As a result, we found solutions to problems associated with remote working and organisational structures. We want to retain the best aspects of these ways of working. When people are encouraged to rally around a common aim with a sense of urgency we see better results. Those principles apply to the ongoing challenge of homelessness and will be crucial in bringing about an end to homelessness and rough sleeping for good.

**“The multi-agency approach, that has seen everyone come together to ‘get the job done’ has in the past not been adopted by all agencies. This crisis has seen it happen and, if nothing else can be taken away from the situation we have found ourselves in, it can be built on to provide a more person-centred joined-up approach for all service users, which in turn will achieve better outcomes.”**

Homelessness service provider

## Health and homelessness

We know people experiencing homelessness are more likely to have some form of mental or physical health problem. People who have been rough sleeping face particular risks during the pandemic as they are more likely to have chronic health conditions.

To help keep people safe, Public Health Scotland produced [guidance on infection prevention and control](#) measures in non-healthcare settings, including homelessness settings, in March 2020. This guidance has been updated regularly during the crisis. Anyone in Scotland who is self-isolating because they are showing symptoms of coronavirus is eligible for a [test](#).

**We will continue to work with Public Health Scotland to ensure this guidance remains fit for purpose. We will also work with partners to develop separate guidance for homelessness services in Scotland.**

In recognition of the links between homelessness and poor health outcomes, collaboration between health and homelessness agencies has been strengthened in recent years. We are already seeing the value from joint working being demonstrated through joint initiatives and learning from local pilots:

- At the [Victoria Hospital](#) in Kirkcaldy, health staff refer patients who are homeless or at immediate risk of losing their home to Shelter Scotland advisers based in the hospital.
- The [Housing First pathfinder](#) is jointly funded from Scottish Government housing and health budgets.
- Healthcare Improvement Scotland’s iHub and Shelter Scotland are working together to design a personal housing plan template.

- Public Health Scotland is undertaking research on the impact of COVID-19 on marginalised groups. Lived experience research is being carried out in partnership with Homeless Network Scotland, Strathclyde University, Healthcare Improvement Scotland, and CLiCK and is expected to report in March 2021.
- NHS Health Scotland has worked with three social housing providers to produce case studies that detail what they have learned about trauma and changes they have made to practice. These case studies will help build understanding of trauma-informed services in the housing sector. They are due to be published in autumn 2020.
- Recognising that staff working in primary care have a unique opportunity to positively impact the health and wellbeing of people experiencing homelessness, Public Health Scotland will launch a new learning resource for primary care staff later this year.
- At a national level, both the [Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group](#) and the [rapid rehousing transition plans subgroup](#) now include health representatives.

Many people with experience of rough sleeping have mental health and substance use problems. In areas where there is an integrated approach to service provision, people with complex health and social problems are better supported. We have already committed to a ‘no wrong door’ approach to remove barriers to services. We will continue to promote an integrated and holistic model of care. To that end, **we will improve how we use Public Health Scotland data and intelligence capabilities to ensure improved outcomes following hospital discharge into a community setting.**

The [Hard Edges Scotland](#) report, which highlights the complexity of the lives of people facing multiple disadvantage in Scotland, was published in 2019. Building on this work and on the learning during the pandemic, we are making sure that our responses to people experiencing homelessness take into account the compounded impact of substance use, experience of the justice system, poor physical and mental health, trauma, violence, domestic abuse and poverty.

**“Despite hugely effective emergency measures that have seen many people transition away from experiencing chronic rough sleeping, there remain significant barriers for those with the most extreme mental health challenges who as a result are unable to accept the support on offer. Nationally we need to examine why and re-examine what needs to be done to provide effective mental health interventions for people experiencing chaotic street lifestyles along with alternative supported accommodation solutions that they will feel more able to accept and sustain.”**

*Homelessness service provider*

During the pandemic, we received positive responses from some people about a relaxation of the approach to the supervision and frequency of dispensing of opioid substitution therapy (methadone in particular). The Scottish Government also relaxed rules around the use of naloxone – a drug that can reverse opiate overdoses – and made longer-acting drug treatments more widely available.

**We intend to learn from this period to further improve drug and alcohol treatment and harm reduction services.**

Public Health Scotland is committed to working closely with COSLA and local authorities to support implementation of the housing, health and social care actions in this plan. Public Health Scotland will join forces with health and social care partnerships to explore what further contribution can be made to tackling and preventing homelessness, including through the equivalent of housing contribution statements where appropriate.

## Employability

Employment provides a sense of achievement and confidence, contributes to equality and inclusion, results in improved general health and mental wellbeing and helps lift people out of poverty.

We had already agreed to explore how local housing strategies and personal housing plans might incorporate employability support for people at risk of homelessness as part of the housing options service. Employment support is an important part of the Scottish Government's work to support Scotland's recovery from the public health crisis, and additional resources have been made available to reflect this. Local work led by councils will ensure that tailored support is available to those who need it. We will work with local authorities to ensure employment and housing support is provided in a joined-up way so that people are fully aware of the range of help and advice available to them.



# Other actions

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## Supporting transformational change

The Scottish Government previously committed in the programme for government 2019-20 to creating a third sector homelessness fund. We promised that funding of up to £4.5 million would be provided over three years to third sector organisations on the frontline to innovate and transform the services they provide. This scheme was delayed because of the pandemic. As a short-term measure, we agreed to provide funding to those organisations who had applied to the new fund and had previously received funding from the Housing Voluntary Grant Scheme. This will remain in place until the end of June 2021.

**We will relaunch the third sector homelessness fund by the end of 2020 and awards will be made in 2021/22.**

Applicants will need to demonstrate that the work they are doing supports transformation of the homelessness system and is aligned with the vision, approaches and priorities set out in this updated action plan. Applicants will also be required to assess the equality impact of their proposals, for example, by considering factors that prevent women's and children's homelessness.

## Equality breakdowns of homelessness data

We had already committed to publishing equality breakdowns of the homelessness statistics. We published additional [equalities analysis](#) for the first time in November 2019.

We intend to continue to publish updates to this analysis through the annual homelessness statistics in future years, with the most recent data published in August 2020. This will help build understanding of the experiences of all groups with protected characteristics.

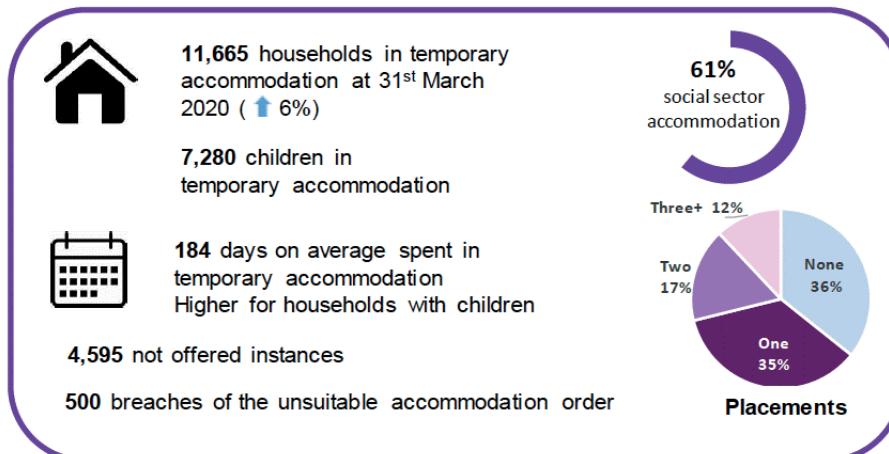
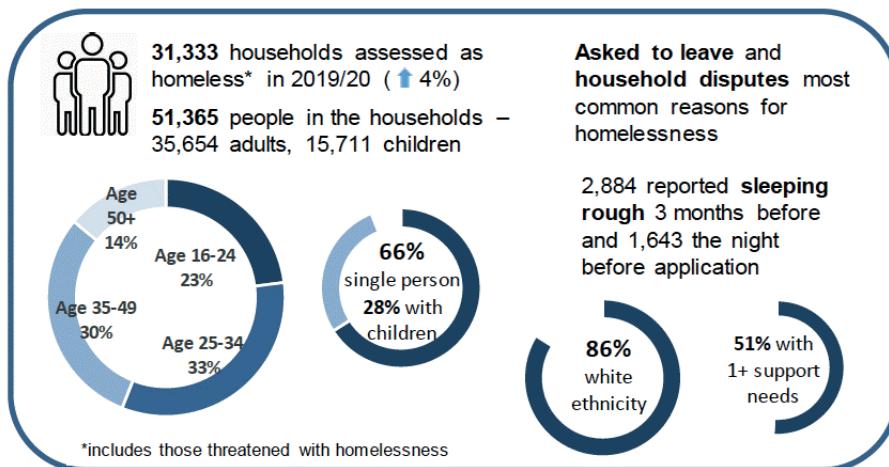
**We will also work with local authorities, the Social Housing Regulator and other partners to review the homelessness data collection (HL1) to improve our understanding of the causes of homelessness and outcomes and to improve our data on people with protected characteristics.** This will inform development of equality impact assessments as we take forward the actions and policies set out in the plan. We are also aware that not all households experiencing homelessness approach their local authority for support. We will therefore progress plans regarding a broader evidence base, including through the development of the new case management system described earlier in the report.



# ANNEX 1: homelessness statistics

## Understanding the context

As we highlighted in [Ending Homelessness Together](#) and our [annual report](#) of January 2020, to respond well to homelessness we need to understand as much as possible about people's individual experiences of homelessness, including the causes and impacts. Ensuring that people with lived experience help shape policy and practice is an important part of building this understanding. We also collect statistics from local authorities which provide us with local and national evidence about how many people are experiencing homelessness; the reasons they make applications; their previous circumstances; and a range of figures on the use of temporary accommodation. This annex highlights some of the key homelessness statistics across these important areas. More detail about what the statistics tell us can be found in our most recent [homelessness statistics](#) publication.



## The impact of coronavirus

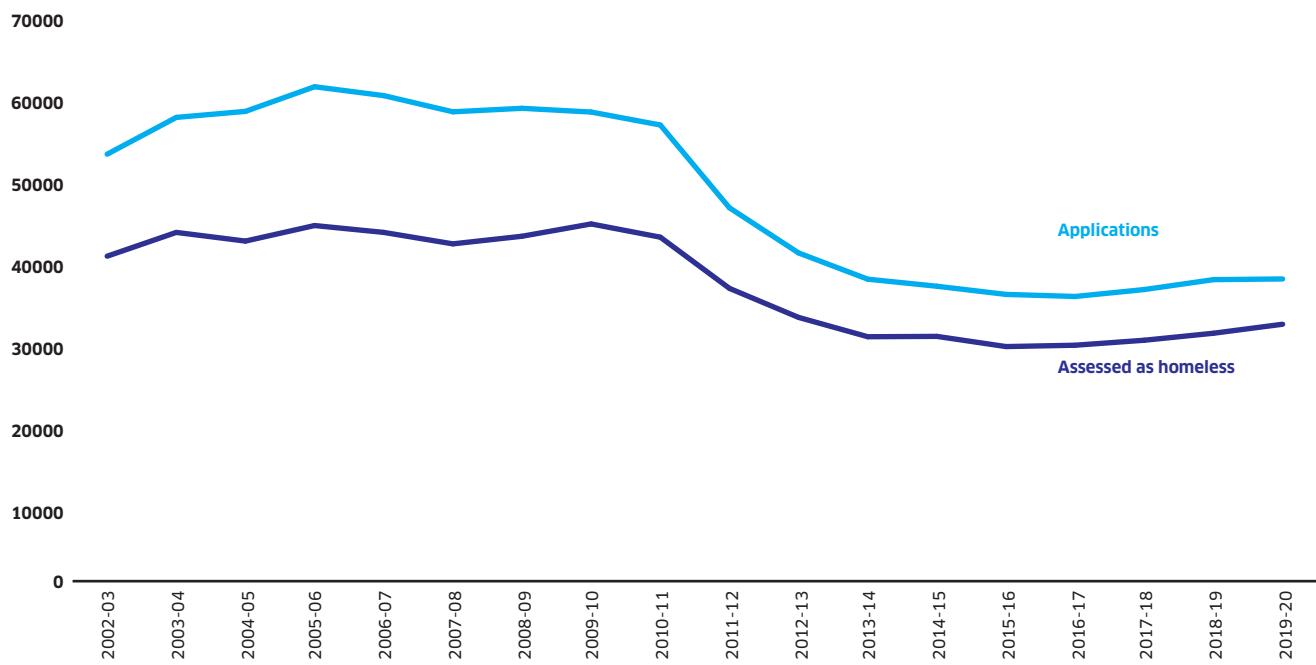
The tables and charts in the following pages contain data from the end of March 2019 up until the end of March 2020. This only crosses over with around a week of coronavirus restrictions and changes in practices being in place. Therefore, changes in trends in homeless data as result of coronavirus will be minimal over this reporting period, particularly for annual figures.

COVID-19 may have had more of an impact on snapshot data recording households in temporary accommodation as at 31 March 2020 as actions in response to coronavirus were taken before this date.

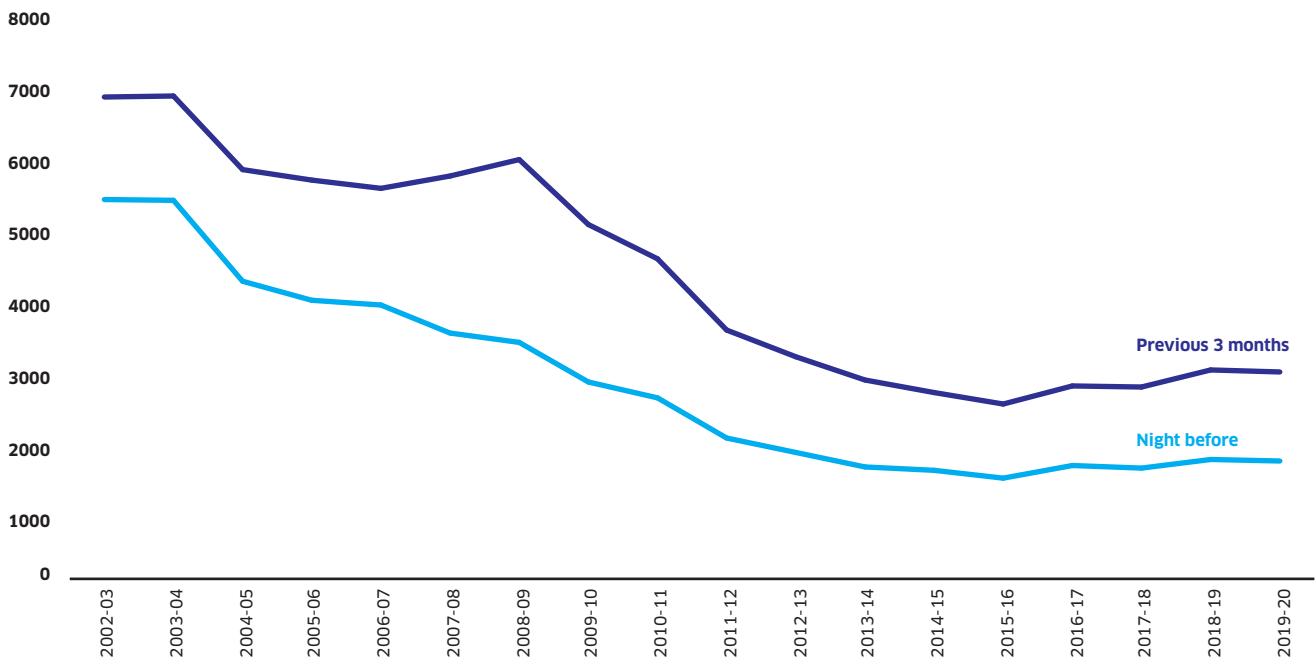
## The extent of homelessness in Scotland

In the longer term, applications have fallen since the peak of over 60,000 in 2005/06. In recent years, the number of applications has increased slightly, although there was only a very slight increase of 84 applications (0%) in 2019/20, compared to 2018/19. This compared to a 4% increase in the number of households assessed as homeless in 2019/20 compared to 2018/19.

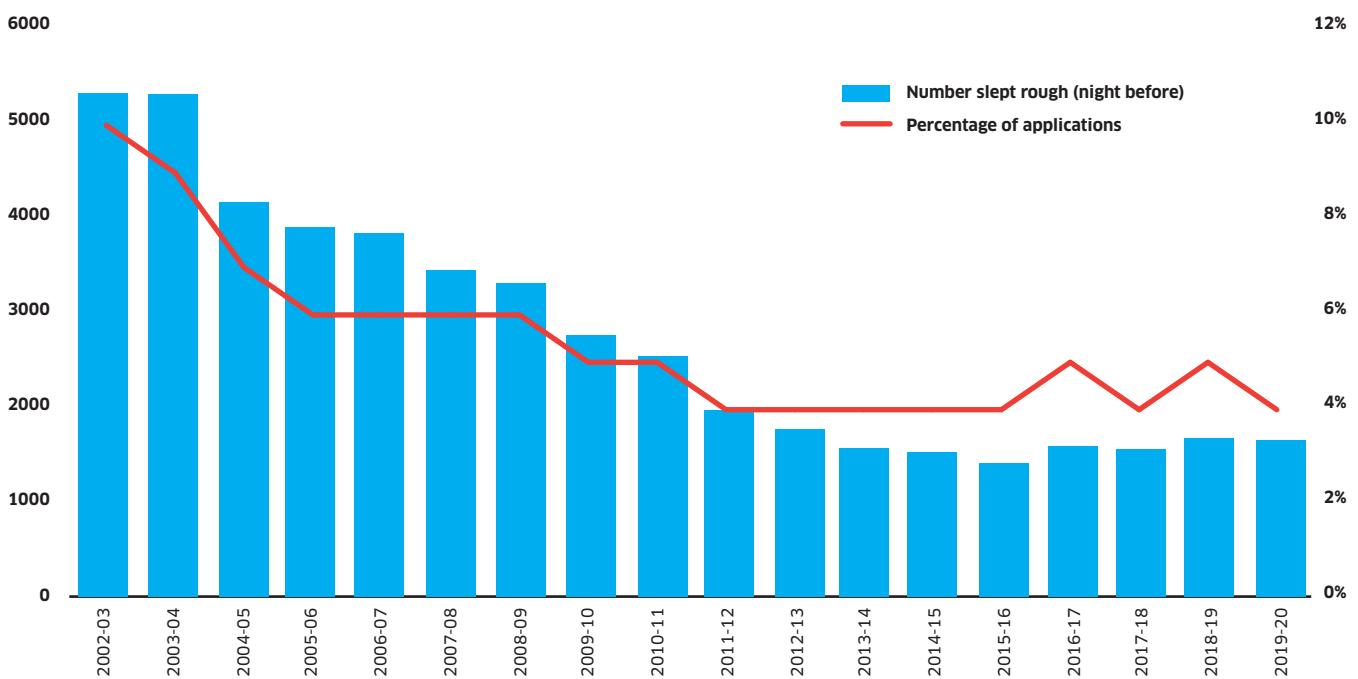
**Figure 1: Number of applications and those assessed as homeless: 2002/03 to 2019/20**



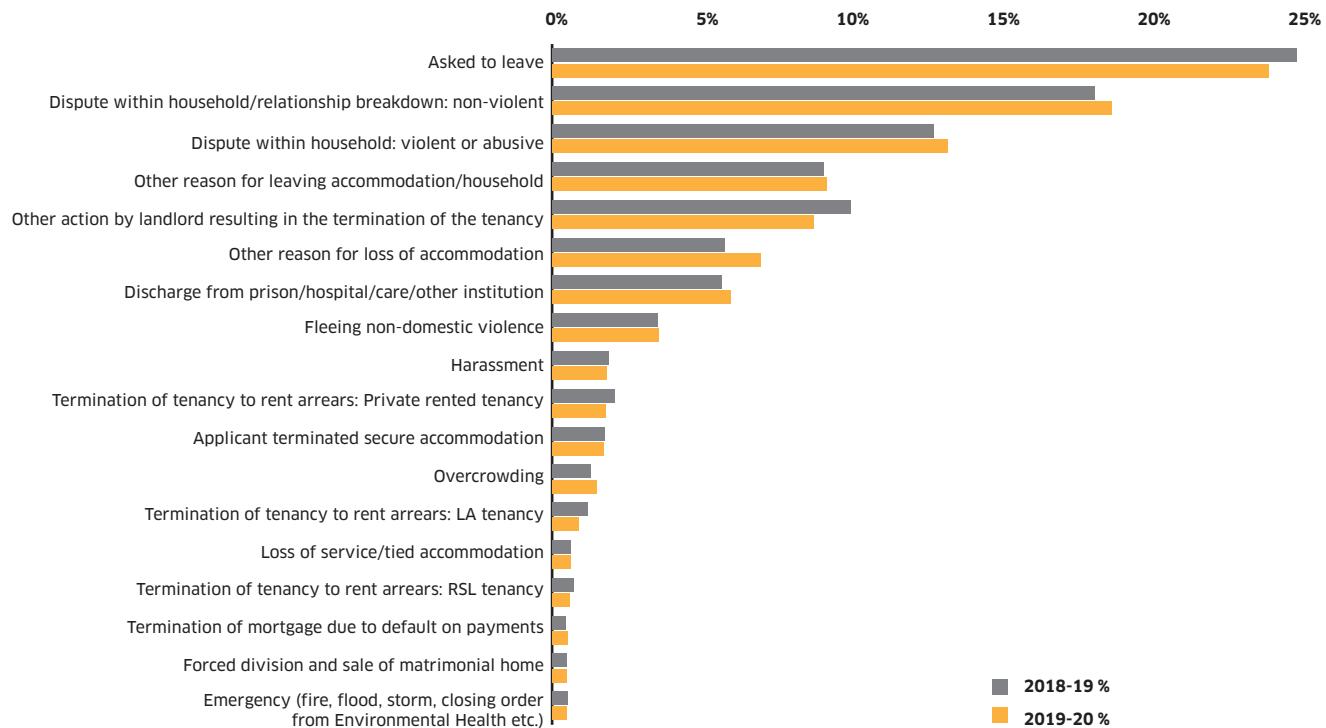
**Figure 2: Households where at least one household member experienced rough sleeping the night before their application and in the three months prior to their application: 2002/03 to 2019/20**



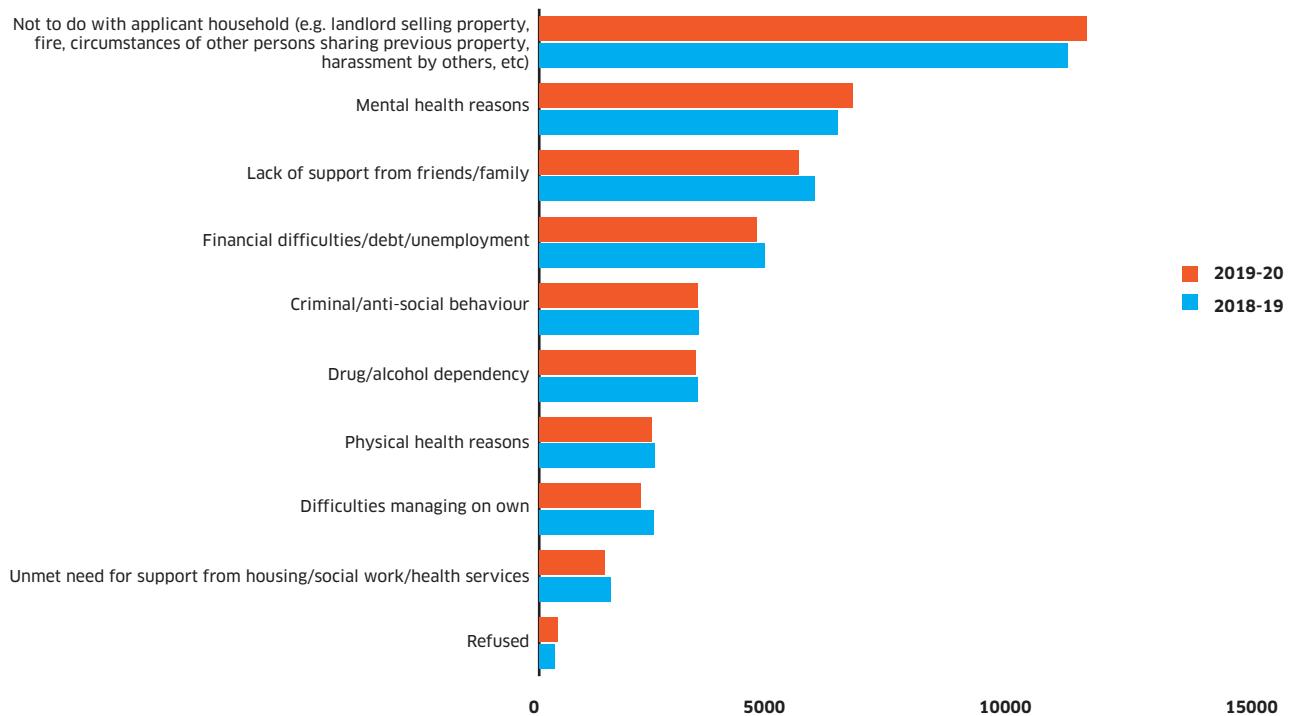
**Figure 3: Rough sleeping the night before application: 2002/03 to 2019/20**



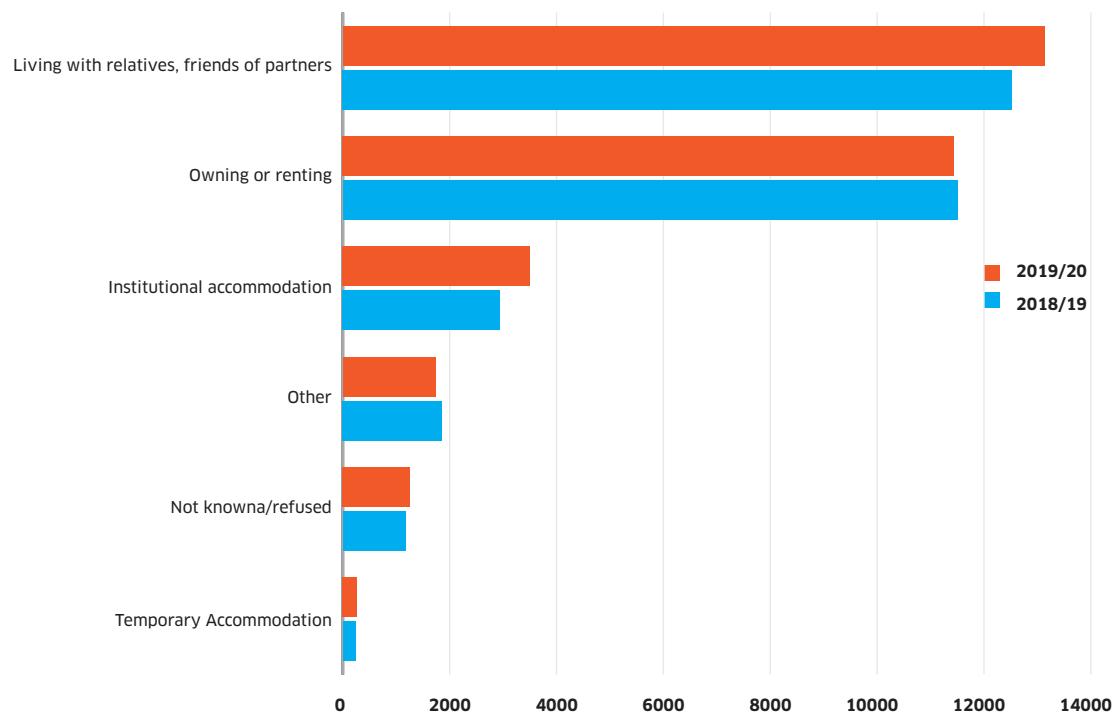
**Figure 4: Main reason for making a homelessness application: 2018/19 to 2019/20**



**Figure 5: Reasons for failing to maintain accommodation: 2018/19 to 2019/20**



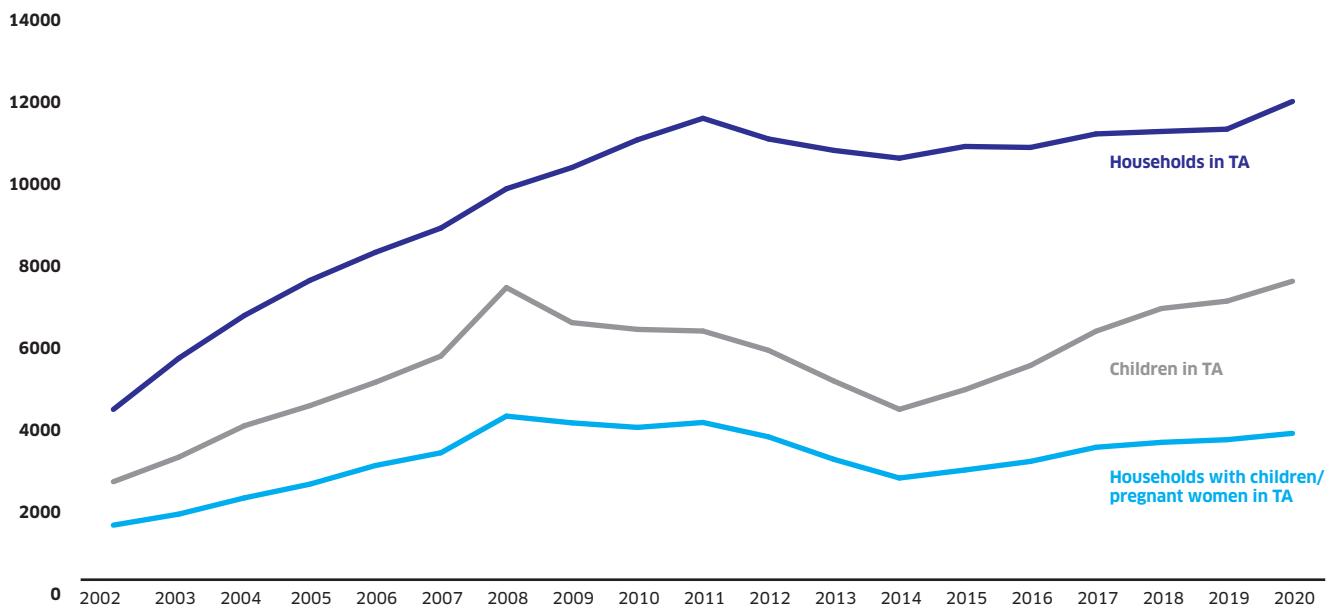
**Figure 6: Prior housing circumstances of applicants: 2018/19 to 2019/20**



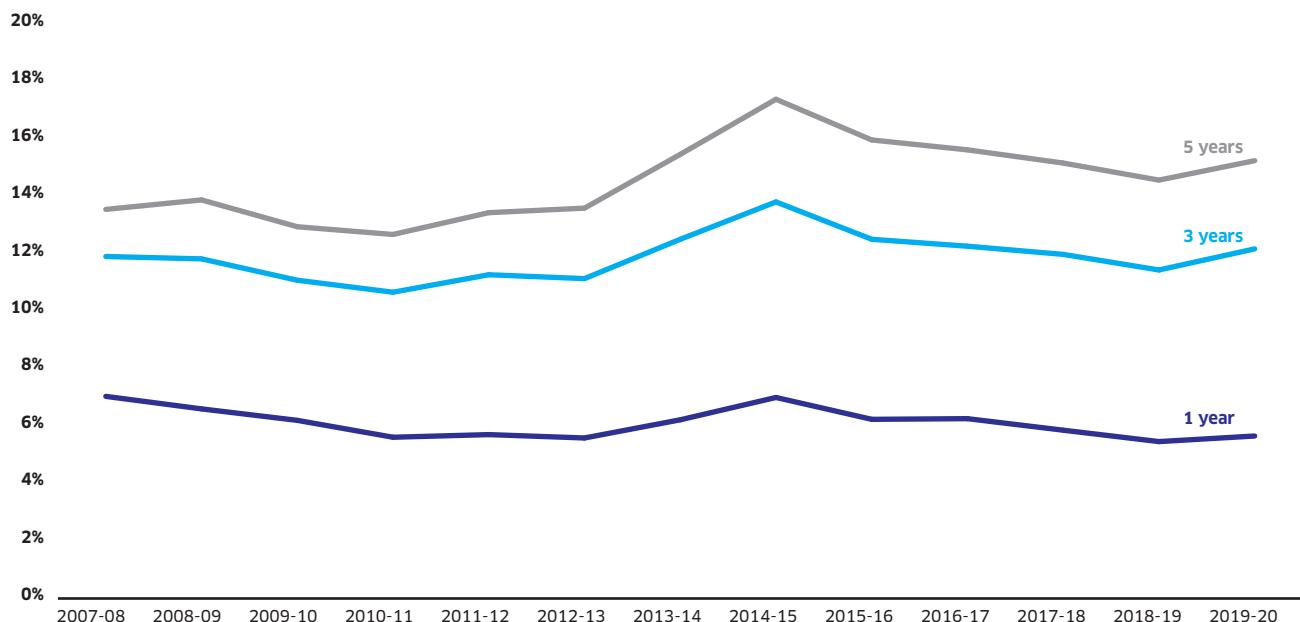
**Table 1: Support needs of households assessed as homeless: 2018/19 to 2019/20**

	2018-19	2019-20
<b>All assessed as homeless</b>	<b>30,236</b>	<b>31,333</b>
Mental health problem	7,486	8,313
Learning disability	844	929
Physical disability	1,554	1,818
Medical condition	2,907	3,070
Drug or alcohol dependency	3,386	3,498
Basic housing management/independent living skills	6,929	7,253
Households with at least one support need identified	14,700	15,991

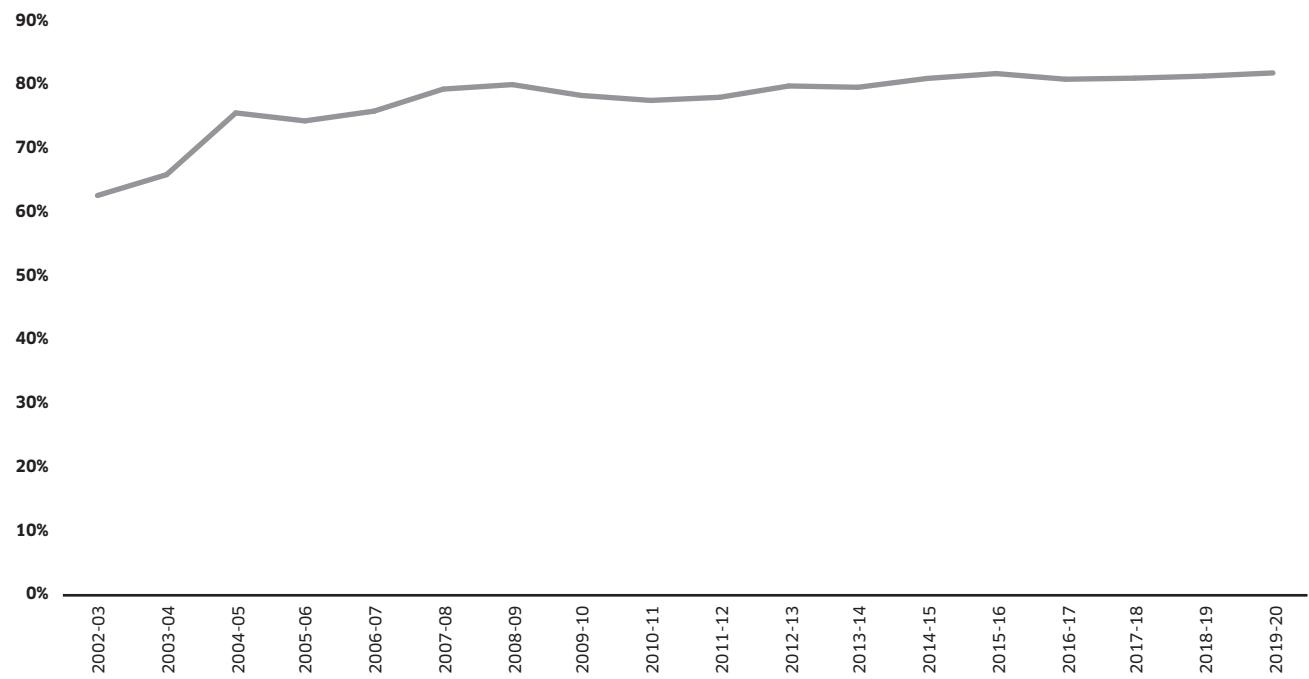
**Figure 7: Number of households in temporary accommodation as at 31 March, by local authority: 2002 to 2020**



**Figure 8: Households assessed as homeless that have previously been assessed as homeless in the previous one, three and five years: 2007/08 to 2019/20**



**Chart 9: Proportion of unintentionally homeless households securing settled accommodation: 2002/03 to 2019/20**





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ISBN: 978-1-80004-102-8

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Produced for The Scottish Government by APS Group Scotland, 21 Tennant Street, Edinburgh EH6 5NA  
PPDAS750906 (10/20)