

Crisis'
manifesto to end
homelessness

2016 SCOTTISH ELECTION

Crisis

2016 Scottish election: Crisis' manifesto to end homelessness

Crisis is the national charity for single homeless people. We are dedicated to ending homelessness by delivering life-changing services and campaigning for change. Our innovative education, employment, housing and well-being services address individual needs and help people to transform their lives.

As well as delivering services, we are determined campaigners, working to prevent people from becoming homeless and advocating solutions informed by research and our direct experience. We work with politicians, policy makers and the Scottish and Westminster governments to bring about change and share good practice, using expertise from working with single homeless people and our understanding of the issues they face to shape policy and practice.

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

Homelessness in Scotland

A home provides roots, identity, a sense of belonging and a place of emotional wellbeing. Homelessness is about the loss of all of these. It is an isolating and destructive experience and homeless people are some of the most vulnerable and socially excluded in our society.

Scotland has led the way on addressing homelessness. Following the abolition of priority need at the end of 2012 we now have some of the most progressive legislation in the world. Yet while official statistics show that the numbers of people making a statutory homelessness applications are falling, the numbers coming to the council because they are homeless or threatened with homelessness have remained static¹. Some homeless people have several experiences of homelessness before they approach their council for support², and there is evidence that homeless people are increasingly likely to have support needs³.

Homelessness should be the barometer of a fairer Scotland. The 2012 target to end priority need set an ambitious agenda for addressing homelessness in Scotland. Having achieved this, Government must maintain the momentum to maintain its role as a world-leader in tackling the injustice of homelessness.

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1. Fitzpatrick, S, Pawson, H, Bramley, G, Wilcox, S, Watts, B (2015) Homelessness Monitor Scotland 2015. London: Crisis
 2. Mackie, P, Thomas, I (2014) Nations Apart? Experiences of single homeless people across Great Britain. London: Crisis
 3. Scottish Government (2015) Operation of the Homeless Persons Legislation in Scotland 2014-15



1. A new cross-departmental strategy for tackling homelessness

Commit to the development and implementation of a national, cross-departmental strategy to tackle the causes and consequences of homelessness. This should include outcomes on housing, health, social care, safer communities and employability and skills and should be developed in consultation with the homelessness sector in Scotland.

Background

The Scottish Government's Joint Housing Delivery Plan and Homelessness Prevention Strategy Group provides a national level of focus on homelessness that could be used to bring together a range of government departments to deliver on a number of specified outcomes. The Children and Families Division, which focuses on early intervention and awareness raising programmes, provides a key opportunity for cross departmental working for the development of a single governmental strategy.

With continued cuts to local authority budgets and social security, a new cross-departmental strategy, underpinned by clearly defined outcomes, is needed to maintain momentum so that Scotland remains an international leader on tackling homelessness.



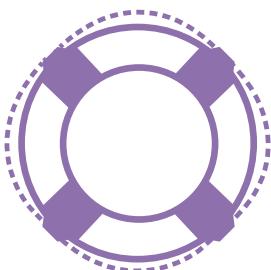
2. Stronger prevention and early intervention

Commit to investing in a more proactive approach to prevention. Preventing homelessness is not only better for the individual, it will result in significant savings across a range of public services in Scotland. Under the Public Bodies Act 2014, the new Integrated Joint Boards should include responses to homelessness prevention, potentially via the Housing Contribution Statement.

Background

There is a clear financial and moral case for investing in prevention, as well as supporting for those who do experience homelessness so that their needs do not become entrenched. Research by Crisis shows intervening at an early stage can make savings of between £3,000 and £18,000 per person in the first year, particularly for health and criminal justice services. This compares to a typical cost of a homeless intervention of around £1,500⁴.

To date the Scottish Government has provided £950,000 of funding over five years to support the development of the Housing Options approach in Scotland. Initial monitoring suggests that the majority of prevention work is relatively light touch, focusing on ‘active information’ and signposting⁵ rather than actively resolving the situation. Clearly there remains more to be done to prevent homelessness.



3. Increase support for homeless people with complex needs

Include homelessness in the new Integrated Strategic Commissioning Plans so that homeless services are commissioned strategically across a range of agencies.

Commit to increasing the number of rapid rehousing models such as Housing First, and make better use of the devolved employment support commissioning powers to include a one-stop shop models of support for people with complex, multiple needs.

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4. Pleace, N (2015) At what Cost? An estimation of the financial costs of single homelessness in the UK. London: Crisis
 5. Mackie, P, Thomas, I (2015) Single homelessness in Scotland. London: Crisis; Fitzpatrick, S, Pawson, H, Bramley, G, Wilcox, S, Watts, B (2015) Homelessness Monitor 2015

Background

The profile of people needing help with homelessness is becoming more complex. 61% of single homeless people in Scotland have four or more support needs⁶ but too often people fall through the gaps between services. Over 11,000 homeless people were identified as having at least one support need⁷. The most common need for support is with housing management or living independently (18% of all homeless people), mental health needs (14%), substance dependency (11%) and medical conditions (7%).



4. Time limit Temporary Accommodation

Extend the ‘universal right’ principle to Temporary Accommodation by reducing the length of time homeless people have to spend in unsuitable Temporary Accommodation to 14 days and extend provisions on standards in the Homeless Person’s Order 2004 to include single homeless people and families without children.

Background

The use of Temporary Accommodation in Scotland rose by over 170% between 2002 and 2011⁸. While this has now tailed off, local authorities report significant increases in the length of time spent in Temporary Accommodation⁹. Typical stays in Temporary Accommodation are now over seven months and for some people it can be up to two years. Some local authorities in Scotland use ‘medium term Temporary Accommodation’, which can accommodate people for several years at a time.

Long stays in Temporary Accommodation can leave people in limbo, unable to plan for the future and move on with their lives. Some people may be

6. Lawson, H, Bramley, G, Wilcox, S, Watts, B (2015) Homelessness Monitor 2015

7. Mackie, P, Thomas, I (2014) Nations Apart?

8. Fitzpatrick et al (2015) Homelessness Monitor Scotland 2015

9. Scottish Government (2015) Operation of the Homelessness Legislation in Scotland

unable to afford to move into employment because the high costs of Temporary Accommodation create a benefits trap. Away from social networks people can become isolated and their mental health can deteriorate.

In addition, Temporary Accommodation is likely to pose an increased cost to local authorities in the future as Universal Credit is expanded to a wider client group and the amount of housing costs support available through the benefit system reduces. One estimate puts the expected shortfall at £25m¹⁰. Proactive local strategies are needed to reduce the use of Temporary Accommodation, for example through more focused prevention work.



5. Commit to using devolved powers on social security to prevent homelessness

Use the devolved powers acquired through the Scotland Bill to ensure the Scottish social security safety net protects people from homelessness. Make best use of the devolved powers to better support people in Scotland by;

- allowing Universal Credit claimants the option of splitting payment between household members and allow for payments to be issued more frequently;
- allowing Universal Credit housing costs to be payable direct to landlords for tenants in the private rented accommodation;
- making use of powers to vary the rate of Local Housing Allowance so that housing costs within Universal Credit are sufficient to cover rent and ensure no one is made homeless;

- extending the age range and exemptions for the Shared Accommodation Rate, (SAR) to ensure people don't have to share accommodation where it is clearly inappropriate;
- linking public subsidies of housing costs in the rented sector to housing standards

Background

Though limited, the Scotland Bill will confer some powers to the Scottish Parliament in relation to the housing costs within Universal Credit. Whilst no additional budget has been allocated, powers have been devolved which, if used wisely, could have a significant impact on homelessness.

Crisis believes that if adopted, this package of measures would allow Scotland to maintain its role as a world-leader in tackling the injustice of homelessness and become a fairer Scotland. Ending homelessness in Scotland can be a reality within a generation. All parties need to commit to making this happen.

For further information please contact Beth Reid, Policy Manager (Scotland) on **0131 209 7726** or **beth.reid@crisis.org.uk**

Crisis

Crichton House
4 Crichton's Close
Edinburgh, EH8 8DT
Tel: 0131 209 7700

www.crisis.org.uk

Company Number: 4024938
Charity Numbers: England and Wales 1082947, Scotland SC040094

Homelessness ends here