

Briefing for Ending Homelessness Together debate

Thursday 29th November 2018

Crisis is the national charity for homelessness. Earlier this year we published a comprehensive, evidence-based [Plan to End Homelessness](#), setting out what needs to be done to end homelessness in Scotland and across Great Britain. Through our *Everybody In* campaign, we are calling on all governments in Britain to commit to ending homelessness for good, and publish an action plan to achieve this.

Projecting homelessness in the future

Homelessness should only ever be rare, brief and non-recurrent. It should be prevented wherever possible. However, [research](#) commissioned by Crisis from Heriot-Watt University shows that without intervention, there will be a 42% increase in the worst forms of homelessness in Scotland, particularly sofa surfing and the use of unsuitable temporary accommodation.

Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan

Crisis therefore warmly welcomes this week's publication of an [Action Plan](#) to end homelessness in Scotland. The Scottish Government is the first government in Great Britain to make a concrete commitment in this way. The plan is in response to the recommendations of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG), a group chaired by Crisis Chief Executive, Jon Sparkes.

It is an ambitious plan with a vision to see homelessness ended and everyone with a home that meets their needs. The action plan makes preventing homelessness a priority and puts homeless people at the heart of decision-making about solutions. Notably, we welcome:

- The link to the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework, ensuring that ending homelessness takes its rightful place as a top priority for a just and fair Scotland
- Plans to ensure work on future housing supply will be informed by the pressures faced by homeless people in accessing appropriate homes
- The recognition of the need to focus on migrant homelessness so that we end homelessness for every person in Scotland
- The recognition of the need to shift public perceptions to challenge misconceptions about homelessness

At this stage, many of the 49 actions are high level in detail and will require more work to flesh out the details and timings for taking work forward. In our view, the following areas are key priorities:

- **Restricting the length of time homeless people are housed in unsuitable temporary accommodation.** No homeless household should be housed in unsuitable accommodation except in an emergency. The Action Plan commits to this, but does not state when this will be achieved. We want to see a change in the law [this parliamentary year](#) to extend the current law to all homeless people, not just families and pregnant women. Crisis is calling for this to happen with our [Life in Limbo](#) campaign (more detail below).
- **A legal backstop for preventing homelessness is urgently needed.** The Plan contains an action to develop a new prevention duty and commits to publishing a timetable for this in 2019. Action will be needed swiftly after this to build on Scotland's world-leading homelessness legislation. A duty would minimise the number of people who need statutory homelessness support by requiring local authorities and their partners to take actions to stop people becoming homeless in the first place. This can be through things like mediating between parents and young people, tenancy sustainment and supporting individuals with benefits and debt advice.
- **There must be clear oversight and accountability at national and local level via a shared Outcomes Framework** to ensure the effective delivery of the action plan, including through parliamentary mechanisms. We welcome the commitment to an annual report to Parliament,

and ask MSPs to prioritise scrutiny of the implementation of this Action Plan so that we achieve the ambition of ending homelessness in Scotland.

- **The ambition to end homelessness must be built into policy agendas across national and local government**, including poverty, health and social care, justice and mainstream housing policy. All agencies must ensure that their actions do not lead to homelessness.
- **The creation of a robust cross-departmental prevention agenda** The plan commits to listen to front-line staff across a range of departments and support them to prevent and end homelessness. However, it does not outline the mechanisms and infrastructure which will be implemented to support this.
- **The plan needs to maximise the opportunity to use devolved welfare powers.**

Ending the use of unsuitable temporary accommodation for long-term living

Crisis' *Life in Limbo* campaign highlights the devastating effects that long stays in unsuitable temporary accommodation, such as Bed & Breakfast, can have on people who are homeless. It seeks to end its use for single people by bringing the law into line with that for families, and bring equity to the provision of all temporary accommodation.

In October, Crisis published [research](#) examining the experiences of people who have lived in unsuitable accommodation across six council areas in Scotland. Since our first [report](#) a year ago, things are getting worse. Scottish Government statistics have shown:

- 9% increase (2017/18) in the number of people 'living' in unsuitable temporary accommodation (UTA) than in the previous year.
- Fewer people are leaving this type of accommodation than previously: 4,730 households entered B&B last year but only 2,510 left, meaning more people are being trapped in inappropriate living conditions.

Our research shows that:

Living an everyday life

- 60% of people were subject to a curfew
- 3 in 4 people said they were not allowed visits from family or friends
- 81% of people with restrictions on visitors found their relationships had worsened
- Pets were prohibited for 84% of respondents
- 45% of people said they had no access to a kitchen with over half of this number saying this meant they regularly skip a meal.

Feeling safe and well

- 88% of respondents stated that they experienced depression because of their living situation
- Over half reported feeling unsafe with many saying that the anti-social – and, at times, criminal – behaviour of other residents contributed to this unease
- 6 out of 10 people said it had a negative impact on their drug or alcohol use

Planning for the future

- 9 out of 10 people surveyed who had spent time in unsuitable temporary accommodation said they felt their future was uncertain

[Research](#) commissioned by Crisis, undertaken by PwC, shows that councils could save £29 million in 2018 alone by supporting people in more appropriate forms of temporary accommodation.

The law must be changed in this parliamentary year so that no one has to live in unsuitable temporary accommodation for more than seven days.

Ahead of the debate we will be emailing our campaigners to ask their MSPs to attend the debate and speak up on the issue of unsuitable temporary accommodation.

Crisis is happy to assist MSPs in questions for Thursday's debate. For further information please contact Camille Furtado, Senior Campaigns & Public Affairs Officer on camille.furtado@crisis.org.uk or 0131 209 7719.