



Coronavirus Homelessness Action Plan

People facing homelessness, particularly those who are rough sleeping, are hit uniquely hard by this pandemic. They are three times more likely to experience a chronic health condition such as asthma and COPD. As the weeks and months continue, we know that many more people will be at acute risk of homelessness too.

We must all play our part in protecting the people who need us most. Our committed frontline staff are working with people in need across Edinburgh. Across GB, we are helping other grassroots homeless charities provide vital services.

Governments across Great Britain also have a fundamental part to play. Earlier this week we, along with sector partners, [published an open letter to the Prime Minister](#) and the First Ministers of Scotland and Wales calling on a comprehensive plan to support people facing homelessness.

We've prepared an action plan outlining the key steps the Scottish Government, local authorities and others should follow to protect people facing homelessness and prevent more people from experiencing homelessness at this challenging time. These actions are intended to prompt a swift and comprehensive response, and are intended to help decision-makers locally and nationally.

1. Ensure that there are no legal barriers to accessing self-contained accommodation for people facing homelessness

- All homeless households should be able to access self-contained temporary accommodation, along with any necessary support, regardless of the outcomes of local connection or intentionality tests.
- The Scottish Government should clarify with local authorities that people with no recourse to public funds should be offered temporary accommodation as part of a humanitarian response to the current crisis. Local authorities should consider the use of social work powers to provide accommodation and care as a public health measure where this is appropriate.
- Local authorities should ensure that no household is evicted from temporary accommodation and statutory homelessness duties are not ended for any household that does not have access to self-contained accommodation.
- We encourage the Scottish Government to publish a written statement setting out their expectations of local authorities in relation to the recommendations above. This is key to ensure that people who are homeless and their advocates are clear on what is expected.

2. Secure self-contained accommodation for people

- Local authorities should ensure all night shelters and large-scale shared accommodation with shared facilities are closed due to the severe health risks of common air space
- Local authorities should continue to work closely with the third sector to coordinate access to hotel style accommodation with en-suite bathrooms to allow people who are homeless to self-isolate where this is the only solution available
- Scottish Government should provide funding for local authorities to ensure all homeless households living in emergency accommodation can access specialist housing support.
- Where possible people should continue to be accommodated in settled housing including Housing First and supported to access private tenancies
- Scottish Government and local authorities should co-ordinate the development of safe processes for letting self-contained housing stock which is currently empty, so that homeless households can access them and do not have to continue to live in temporary accommodation, including shared accommodation or sofa surfing.
- Lettings agents and private landlords assisting local authorities and charities to house people moving on from homelessness should be able to carry out the lettings functions necessary to enable people to take up new lettings, making appropriate adjustments to ensure social distancing requirements are followed. This might include increased use of online technology for interviews and virtual viewings
- Consideration should be given to the opportunities currently presented for engaging the private rented sector in rapid rehousing more fully and to the role it can play in the response to COVID-19.

3. Provide support for local authorities and health services to ensure people facing homelessness have rapid access to health care assistance to test for and treat cases of the Coronavirus

- Local commissioned outreach teams should coordinate with healthcare professionals to engage in active case finding (i.e. proactive testing of people facing homelessness) on the streets and in hostel and shelter accommodation
- Each area should have a plan for immediate triaging so that people who have not contracted the virus can be supported safely and do not have to use shared spaces



4. Protect renters from eviction

- Crisis welcomes the Scottish Government's pledge to stop all evictions in both the private and social rented sectors for six months
- Scottish Government should ensure that tenants whose tenancies are currently at risk are not evicted, either by suspending current prevention proceedings or backdating the legislation to avoid evictions occurring before the legislation comes into force
- Scottish Government should also ensure that arrangements are in place so that any rent repayment plans are affordable for tenants, particularly those in the private sector who currently have little protection. Six months of rent, even over a long period, would be unmanageable for a lot of people
- In the longer term, Scottish Government should work with the Westminster Government to ensure that when the emergency increase in LHA rates comes to an end, tenants do not face eviction from private tenancies as a result of a drop in LHA

5. Funding and strategic support for homelessness services

- Scottish Government should ringfence crisis funding for homelessness services and keep the amount under review
- Scottish Government should consult the Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group and other relevant strategic partners to ensure that funding is allocated strategically to frontline services, particularly as smaller charities will not have the capacity to apply for funding during this challenging time
- We encourage the Scottish Government to consult with the Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group, local authorities, the homelessness and housing third sector and health representatives to ensure good communication and review what is needed on the ground across Scotland.
- Scottish Government should review guidance on Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) to ensure that people who need to access DHPs as a result of the current crisis are not disadvantaged if they need to use them in the future

You can also read about our calls for action for the Westminster Government and the Welsh Government [here](#).

While we've already begun to see some action in key areas, this plan identifies more that can and should be done to ensure people facing homelessness during the pandemic are properly housed and provided with the support and health care they need. We will continue to work closely with the Scottish Government and the sector to make sure the response to COVID 19 is comprehensive, consistent and robust.