

MSP Briefing - Scottish Government Debate: Scottish Government Priorities: Eradicating Child Poverty

11 June 2024

KEY LINES FOR MSPS

1. Homelessness is the most acute form of poverty. 8% of people in Scotland have been homeless.
2. In 2022/23, more households and children than ever before are living in temporary accommodation, and households with children spend longer in temporary accommodation than any other cohort of people.
3. Young people receive lower rates of benefits, lower minimum wage and are more likely to be in insecure employment, which means housing affordability and stability is a greater issue.
4. Without preventing homelessness, we cannot end child poverty in Scotland. The prevention measures outlined in the Housing Bill have the potential to make a significant impact on reducing child poverty in Scotland.

What we know about children and young people's experience of homelessness

Children and families

- **Homelessness is the most acute form of poverty.**
- **Over 16,000 children were officially homeless in 2022/23**, the highest on record.
- Households with children spend longer in temporary accommodation than the national mean. Research suggests children in temporary accommodation often arrive at school tired, late or hungry, struggle to maintain friendships and have greater mental health and behavioural concerns.

Young people

- Homelessness among young people (aged 16-24) is more than twice the rate of that for older people, with young women disproportionately affected. 1 in 20 homeless households containing someone under 25 state they were previously looked after by a local authority. Young people are also more likely to experience "hidden homelessness".
- **Young people receive lower rates of benefits, lower minimum wage and are more likely to be in insecure employment, which means housing affordability is a greater issue.**

Recommendations to prevent homelessness for children and young people

For young people, housing and homelessness services need to meet the specific needs of this group in relation to age-appropriateness, independent living skills, a strong relational focus with appropriate management of risk. The Homelessness Prevention Review Group recommended:

- Housing and homelessness services should be designed to meet the needs of young people at risk of homelessness, in partnership with relevant partner agencies.

- The housing bill currently before Parliament contains measures to ensure services work together to prevent homelessness, meaning that children and their families won't have to endure the trauma and indignity of homelessness: this is one of the most effective ways of tackling poverty.

What needs to happen now

Young people should be prevented from becoming homeless.

Following the work of the Homelessness Prevention Task and Finish Group on behalf of the Scottish Government, we recommend that the Scottish Government should carry out a full financial assessment to ensure that all public bodies affected by the new duties to “ask and act” have the budget to fulfil their duties, beyond local authorities. Similar to Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan funding, **the Scottish Government should provide an option for councils and wider partners to apply for further funding to tackle specific challenges and promote innovative ideas and solutions.** If young people do become homeless, there should be a clear youth-specific pathway in place which offers direct access to accommodation and moves a young person onto stable and long-term housing as quickly as possible.

Learning from good practice

Existing good practice supporting children and families with housing needs

Much good practice is already being done in this space. The following examples of good practice are taken from Crisis' guide to good practice in preventing homelessness, *75 Ways to Prevent Homelessness*, published in 2022. More details of each project can be found in the guide.

- **Universal early intervention in schools:** Llamau and partners in south Wales adapted the Australian Geelong project – a universal screening and support programme in schools credited with significantly reducing youth homelessness. Results from the original Australian project over three years, found youth homelessness reduced by 40% and early school leaving reduced by 20%. A short online survey covering wellbeing, resilience, school engagement and housing risk (such as family moves, conflict with parents or guardians, and staying away from home overnight). 20% of pupils were identified as at least medium risk of homelessness. Many of these pupils showed no signs of any difficulties within a school setting, providing an opportunity to offer proactive support. A pilot began in a college in Aberdeen in late 2021.
- **Embedding advice and support for parents in schools:** Community Housing Advice Initiative (CHAI), in partnership with Children First, are reaching families in need of advice (including on housing), family support and employability assistance through their embedded Maximise! service in schools

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