

## Briefing for debate on Challenge Poverty Week 2024

October 2024

### Key points

- Homelessness is one of the most acute forms of poverty. 8% of people in Scotland have experienced homelessness.
- In 2022/23, more household and children than ever before are living in temporary accommodation. Households with children spend longer in temporary accommodation than any other cohort of people.
- The Housing Bill represents an unprecedented opportunity to join up services and strengthen the safety net. New legal duties will prevent people losing their homes and enduring the trauma and indignity of homelessness, as well as being trapped in expensive and damaging temporary accommodation for months or years.
- This could have a significant impact on reducing child poverty in Scotland, as well as making public services more effective, much earlier on.

### Housing costs and poverty

- 1 in 10 people on low-income benefits being pulled into poverty by their housing costs alone<sup>1</sup>.
- Two in three of all people trapped in poverty live in a rented home; 44% in the social rented; and 22% in the private rented sector. One in four private renters live in unaffordable properties<sup>2</sup>.
- Homelessness is one of the most acute forms of poverty. 8% of people in Scotland have experienced homelessness<sup>3</sup>.
- 53,500 people were homeless in 2023/24, including 15,500 children<sup>4</sup>.
- 10,000 children were in temporary accommodation, 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, face multiple moves, struggle to maintain friendships and have greater mental health and behavioural concerns<sup>5</sup>.
- There was a 28% increase in rough sleeping last year<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2024) Poverty in Scotland 2024

<sup>2</sup> JRF 2024

<sup>3</sup> National Records of Scotland (2018) Health and homelessness in Scotland

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Government (2024) Homelessness in Scotland 2023/24

<sup>5</sup> Shelter Scotland (2009) Acting in the best interests of homeless children - children and young people's views on where they live; Campbell, R. (2019) Health Needs Assessment of children experiencing homelessness in Lanarkshire, Online: NHS Lanarkshire

<sup>6</sup> Scottish Government (2024)

## Preventing homelessness means tackling poverty

Measures to tackle poverty are often synonymous with measures to prevent homelessness. Creating a stronger safety net means:

- Ensuring people have access to benefits checks, debt and money advice to maximise income, and other types of financial help to ensure housing security.
- Tenancy sustainment support can stabilise housing and make it more manageable for both tenant and landlord. Helping people remain in their homes through landlord negotiation and/or family mediation can prevent increased costs associated with moving and setting up a new home.
- Losing a job can be the tipping point for someone losing their home. Employability support helps people facing poverty get back on their feet and is an essential aspect of support for those facing homelessness. Adequate wages must cover the cost of housing.
- Escaping domestic abuse – the biggest cause of homelessness for women – often means people leave the family home with nothing. Supporting people to leave in a planned way, or remove the perpetrator instead of the victim / survivor will prevent these women having to endure the poverty and trauma of homelessness.
- Housing is the most important, and often most significant, cost that households face. Adequate supply of affordable housing is essential to preventing poverty. Research<sup>7</sup> highlights “over £500 million of ‘failure spend’ related to housing – through responding to low income and a broken UK welfare system and tackling homelessness.”

## Unprecedented opportunity to join up services

New research by Crisis (A Window of Opportunity<sup>8</sup>) shows we are missing many opportunities to intervene early. People who became homeless said on average they’d been in touch with five public services including housing, health and jobcentre services in the six months before they lost their home.

The homelessness prevention measures in the Housing Bill (part 5) could have radical implications for the way that a wide range of services co-operate together to help people facing housing insecurity. New duties to ‘ask’ about people’s housing situation and ‘act’ on any risk to housing, along with strategic responsibilities to consider the need to prevent homelessness, could mean we intervene before situations escalate to a crisis point. These measures have the potential to dramatically reduce one of the most acute forms of poverty in Scotland.

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<sup>7</sup> IPPR, JRF and Save the Children (2023) *Tipping the Scales: The Social and Economic Harm of Poverty in Scotland*.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/services-and-interventions/a-window-of-opportunity>