

Tackling homelessness in Scotland following the coronavirus pandemic- Recommendations from Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group

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Thank yous

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group would like to thank

- All of the people in local authorities and frontline services who have worked so hard to get people into safe housing during the lockdown period
- All those who took part in the consultation process for HARSAG, responding quickly to make recommendations for a way forward, including members of the Change Team with first hand experiences of homelessness
- Ashleigh Simpson and Judith Chisholm from Crisis for providing the secretariat for HARSAG's work at this time
- The Scottish Government team for providing support to HARSAG and compiling information to inform the group's recommendations

Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic has had and continues to have a profound impact on all our lives. However, people facing homelessness, particularly those who were sleeping rough or staying in shelters or hostels with shared facilities, are hit uniquely hard by this crisis. They found themselves in an impossible situation - unable to protect their own health by self-isolating and worried about how to get access to the basic resources they are dependent on to survive.

As an initial response to the pandemic, the Scottish Government, local authorities and charities moved quickly to get people off the streets and into safe accommodation to protect people's health. The response was impressive, meaning that virtually all people sleeping rough or staying in congregate shelters were supported into self-contained accommodation during the immediate crisis.

Another concern was that the coronavirus could lead to more people being at risk of losing their homes. To tackle this, the Scottish Government created stronger protections for most renters during lockdown to help prevent evictions from taking place until the end of September. In addition, the Scottish Government also decided to move the ban on using unsuitable accommodation for people who were homeless to much earlier, from April 2021 to October 2020. This sent out a strong signal that temporary accommodation, such as B&Bs and hotels, are not to be seen as a replacement for a safe and stable home.

Before the coronavirus crisis, work was already underway to tackle homelessness through the national action plan published by Scottish Government and COSLA called *Ending Homelessness Together*. In many ways, the coronavirus crisis has reenergised the move to end homelessness in Scotland. The pandemic fundamentally changed many aspects of our society and has created new challenges. Relationships have been placed under pressure during lockdown, domestic abuse has increased, and the full impact on the economy is yet

to be realised. All these factors will mean more households will be at risk of homelessness. Due to these changes, the national plan to end homelessness needs to be looked at again.

That is why in June 2020 the Housing Minister Kevin Stewart asked the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group, or HARSAG as it has become known, to reconvene and look at what can be done to tackle homelessness right now and into the future, including changes to the *Ending Homelessness Together* plan.

What did HARSAG do?

After the Housing Minister asked HARSAG to reconvene, the group held two meetings during June 2020. We decided to look at four questions:

1. What needs to be in place right now for the ongoing emergency?
2. What do we need to do so that people don't get back to sleeping on the streets or staying in homeless shelters?
3. How can we accelerate the pace of work to prevent homelessness?
4. What needs to change in the national Action Plan to end homelessness to recognise the changing circumstances caused by coronavirus?

Before HARSAG was reconvened, over 20 charities and academics had come together to form the 'Everyone Home' collective. They had agreed and published a framework for action, which formed the basis of the initial HARSAG recommendations. We then sent our draft recommendations out to people working in national government, local councils, charities and other organisations working with people affected by homelessness. Within two weeks, we received feedback from 66 organisations and groups. A full list is in the annex at the end of the report.

We also wanted to know what people with lived experience of homelessness felt would be needed to make a difference. So we met with the Change Team, a group of people with lived experience of homelessness who have been helping the Scottish Government in taking forward the national action plan to end homelessness. As always, we greatly valued their contributions and insight into what matters most to people affected by this issue.

HARSAG recommendations

The Group addressed the questions one by one, and developed a detailed set of recommendations. While the majority of recommendations are directed towards the Scottish Government, some recommendations, such as those around benefits and support for people regardless of their immigration status, are urgent requests of the UK Government.

HARSAG is aware that homelessness comes in various forms, and the causes and impact of it will vary. Further work around equalities considerations will therefore be needed to inform how change is delivered.

HARSAG's recommendations in response to the four questions are set out below, accompanied by introductory paragraphs for each.

Question 1: What needs to already be in place for the ongoing emergency?

One of the first priorities during the pandemic was to ensure safe accommodation for anyone sleeping rough or staying in shelters, where people had no opportunity to socially distance. This needs to be an ongoing priority for as long as the pandemic is having an impact. People must be able to access self-contained suitable accommodation regardless of their immigration status, or any other reason, so they can stay safe, self-isolate and reduce the risk of spreading the infection.

While numbers of people rough sleeping have significantly decreased across Scotland and this is to be welcomed, we know that some people still continue to sleep rough. Every effort should be taken to engage with these individuals and to offer them somewhere safe to stay. Once people are in emergency accommodation, it is important that they know where to turn to get support and assistance to help them move into more permanent housing. We also know that domestic abuse has increased during lockdown, and it is crucial that those experiencing or at risk of domestic abuse can access help so that they do not become homeless. There is an opportunity to put plans in place to support to people who have not been able to access it before.

It is also vital to know and understand what is happening on the frontline to link people with resources and support and to plan for the future in the rapidly changing. The following recommendations cover the need for emergency self-contained accommodation; support advice and advocacy for people most exposed; and the need for full and frequent audits.

A - Ongoing access to suitable emergency self-contained accommodation to ensure people are not exposed to coronavirus by rough sleeping or staying in congregate settings

- 1. While the coronavirus crisis is ongoing, continue to ensure (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) that any household that needs it will be provided with self-contained emergency accommodation instead of sleeping rough or in a congregate night shelter. Agreement of onward funding for people in emergency accommodation, and ongoing messaging from Scottish Government that new presenters are to be accommodated regardless of immigration status.*
- 2. Ensure everyone has access to somewhere safe and appropriate to stay regardless of immigration status. Rapidly develop options for people with no entitlement to Housing Benefit, to rehouse those in emergency accommodation and prevent new cases of rough sleeping including among people with no recourse to public funds.*
- 3. Ensure that households in need of emergency accommodation are triaged according to Covid19 status, and provide accommodation enabling those needing to self-isolate to do so. Minimise infection risks of those with underlying health conditions or other vulnerabilities.*

4. *Provide clear national guidance on infection-management processes and effective social distancing in all emergency and temporary accommodation.*
5. *Continue to maximise opportunities nationally and locally for forms of self-contained emergency accommodation so there is no shortage if demand grows (e.g. student accommodation, holiday parks, hotels).*

B- Support, advice and advocacy for all people rough sleeping or in emergency accommodation during the coronavirus crisis period

6. *Assertive multidisciplinary outreach strategy in every location where people continue to rough sleep or leave emergency accommodation during the crisis response and return to rough sleeping.*
7. *National and local communication with all households experiencing homelessness, in a way which is accessible to them, providing information on where to get support, advice, advocacy and emergency accommodation (if needed) during the coronavirus pandemic.*
8. *Full equalities and trauma informed assessment of need, including physical and mental health needs, and Personal Housing Plan, for everyone in emergency accommodation (hotels, etc) acquired during the pandemic, with full by-name list approach to moving on to permanent, settled housing. Ensure these assessments of need and Personal Housing Plans are acted on quickly.*
9. *National and local plans to ensure people experiencing domestic abuse or at risk of domestic abuse, including those with No Recourse to Public Funds, can immediately access housing advice, emergency accommodation (if needed) and other support to prevent homelessness.*
10. *All households provided with emergency accommodation during the coronavirus emergency to have access to information, basic amenities, food, wifi and equipment for digital inclusion, as well as training in how to use it if needed.*
11. *Sustain flexibility around harm reduction responses, for example low threshold treatment for addictions and highly accessible same day low threshold prescribing.*

C - Full and frequent audit of current situation

12. *Frequent (at least weekly, but to be agreed between local authorities and the Scottish Government on a case by case basis) point-in-time local audit of people in emergency and unsuitable temporary accommodation by local authorities and*

informed by homelessness service providers – i.e. what does every household need in housing/support terms (including support with EU Settled Status and including on an equalities basis – e.g. BAME, gender, LGBTQ+, age, disability, Gypsy/Traveller communities).

- 13. Frequent (as defined and agreed between Scottish Government and local authorities) point-in-time local audit of available housing options and support capacity by local authorities and informed by providers.*
- 14. Make full use of both routine and emergency networks supporting households to gather insight and evidence on highest areas of homelessness risk locally and what is needed to prevent this by local authorities and informed by providers.*
- 15. Audits to be local, but also aggregated by Scottish Government at Hub and National level, with updates provided to the Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group (HPSG).*

Question 2: What needs to be done to ensure people move forward from emergency accommodation, and not back to the streets or congregate shelters?

The increase in the number of people in temporary accommodation because of the pandemic means we must plan for what happens once the immediate crisis has ended so that people housed during the pandemic, and those who were already in emergency accommodation before that, can move away from homelessness.

Action taken during the pandemic has shown that rough sleeping is not inevitable. Providing people with shelter or temporary accommodation is helpful, however this is not the same as ensuring people have a home. We need to start planning, quickly and creatively, to make the most of all the available housing options and ensure good partnership working across services. This will help people move into accommodation that meets their needs in the longer term.

To avoid rough sleeping or a return to the use of congregate shelters, there needs to be enough accommodation available straight away. People must also be able to have choice and control over which accommodation they choose to live in. The pandemic has led to shifts in practice and culture. We must learn from the response, reflect on how it has impacted particular groups and embed and promote the best work that has been done as we move forward.

The housing market has also changed during lockdown, which has affected the amount and type of accommodation available as well as its affordability. This presents new challenges – the re-letting of empty social and private properties has slowed down and the building of new properties has ceased. Meanwhile, changes to housing benefits has meant that private housing is now a more affordable option for some people.

It is essential that we make the most of current opportunities while also identifying how we can create more housing options for more people. Recommendations under parts D, E and F address these key areas.

D- Ensure there is an immediate flexible supply of affordable housing for all in emergency accommodation or rough sleeping

16. Maximise all available housing options and increase immediate local housing supply across the social and rented sector, including buy-backs and new acquisitions (not as a substitute for social house building, but to complement it). Recommend, for example, that any underspend from 2020/21 affordable housing supply programme should be made available as grants to support targeted acquisitions on the second-hand market.

17. Facilitate assertive access to the private rented sector during the temporary Local Housing Allowance (LHA) increase period through rent deposit guarantee

programmes, tenancy sustainment / renting ready programme and local access schemes.

- 18. Announce national roll out of Housing First, building on the and learning from the pathfinder programme, and rapid procurement of additional lets for Housing First from social and private landlords, supported by housing representative and umbrella bodies.*
- 19. Ensure stable funding for the existing Housing First consortia across the 6 pathfinder areas. National Framework developed to support rapid scaling of Housing First across all 32 areas in Scotland and consider options for commissioning and procurement.*
- 20. National Challenge Fund – inviting partnerships across all sectors to submit ideas and methodology to increase immediate (available within 6 months) housing supply and options (with clear statement of required standards and longevity).*
- 21. Work with social investors to deliver large-scale social investment as low-cost capital to increase housing supply in the medium to longer term (6-12 months) targeted to areas of greatest housing capacity pressure, through buy-backs, repurposing and upgrading assets (with clear statement of required standards and longevity).*
- 22. Priority focus on restarting voids processing and lettings including making use of empty homes officers. By Phase 3 of the Scottish Government’s route map, all social sector landlords should seek to return to at least 75% of normal voids management work.*

E - Maximise housing options for everyone

- 23. Maximise the allocation of social housing voids to homeless households for a limited emergency period to enable people to move on from hotels and other emergency accommodation. While recognising local variation, we expect this being in the region of 80-90% or more during Phases 2 and 3 of the Scottish Government’s route map through and out of the coronavirus response. Quickly review what % of social housing voids should go to people experiencing homelessness as we move forward from the coronavirus crisis, and how long any changes should last for.*
- 24. Adopt a local policy of pre-lettings against the social housing stock that has continued to become available but not yet ready to let – so that people can move when safe. Prioritise these as Housing First tenancies where needed to redress the severest disadvantage, and support this with guidance and practical mechanisms to enable people to view properties remotely.*

25. *Maximising housing options into the PRS, both generally, but also during the period of increased Local Housing Allowance and possible downward market pressure on rents. This should include an enhancement of grants support for owners to improve empty homes, so they are suitable for homeless households to move into. Quickly ensure there is a PRS access service in every local authority area, assistance and resourcing for capacity building with private landlords a nationally funded (or underwritten) rent deposit guarantee/bond scheme and help to rent support. RRTPs to also consider establishing shared tenancies as an option of choice for single households moving out of unsuitable temporary accommodation during 2020/21.*
26. *Revise RRTPs in light of Covid19 impact (ensuring time for effective consultation) recognising increased numbers of people coming into the housing system as emergency provision is stepped down. Develop a plan for step-down in use of hotels, short-term lets and holiday parks, and tied to local audit of temporary capacity and movement, so that hotel rooms are not inadvertently 'designed-in' to local homeless systems post pandemic. Agree enhanced funding for supporting move-on for enlarged number of households in the system – targeted to local authorities with greatest need.*
27. *Very clear agreements between Housing and Health & Social Care/NHS to ensure seamless support for move-on from hotels and other emergency accommodation, including occupational health and funding for adaptations where necessary. The involvement of health with people given hotel rooms and emergency accommodation has been positive. Work needs to be done to specify exactly what is needed from health and social care partners.*
28. *National procurement approach to support voids in social lets being furnished and repaired for rapid move-in for people who have been in hotels or other emergency accommodation.*
29. *Ensure people have access to digital 'move in pack' (including equipment, wifi and the skills to use them) to enable people to move on effectively and sustainably through digital access to information, advice and support.*
30. *Bring forward previously announced new powers for Local Authorities to regulate the density of short term lets, such as Airbnb, so that they are in place ahead of the peak of summer 2021.*

F - Learning from the Covid19 response and sharing best practice

31. *Rapid learning from the urgency of the Covid19 response and the experiences of people affected and involved, including those under threat of homelessness – working with the Change Team, but also a broader piece of commissioned research.*

Learn from and build on joint working during Covid19 by reducing competitive culture and inefficiencies in the homelessness system.

- 32. Local and national equalities assessments of impact of Covid19 on housing and homelessness risk for particular groups (BAME, gender, age, Gypsy/Traveller community, disability / pre-existing health conditions), including access to appropriate temporary and settled housing options. Adjust the Ending Homelessness Together action plan accordingly.*
- 33. National learning/sharing programme of what's worked to prevent/rehouse in year one of RRTPs (including an evaluation of the Housing First pathfinders) and practical resources made available for Local Authorities to use now.*
- 34. Benchmark best practice on how quickly housing can be made available to ensure rapid housing access – recognising the impact of different geographies and demographics, but also recognising difference in practice.*
- 35. Recognition of key workers and accelerate workforce development for front-line housing and homelessness roles ensuring understanding of their critical role in social care provision locally and nationally.*
- 36. Deliver clear national guidance on No Recourse to Public Funds, in line with roadmap being developed by Everyone Home and the Scottish Government and COSLA, with regional hubs acting as coordinators by providing resources and training on best practice*

Question 3: How can we do to prevent as much homelessness as possible?

Rough sleepers and people with complex needs often fall through the gaps between services or end up relying on emergency provision that cannot address their long term needs. People can often end up circulating through the system again and again without getting the help they really need. In order to prevent and end homelessness in Scotland, services need to join up and be reshaped to close the gaps and stop the cycle of homelessness.

It is also important that people can access information and advice, and are empowered to know what options are available to them to prevent them from being made homeless. There is an opportunity to build on the positive interventions which have been implemented during the pandemic and also to further develop early intervention approaches to stop homelessness.

This section of the recommendations also acknowledges that some of the changes needed to address and prevent homelessness in Scotland, including around benefits and migrant homelessness, are within the powers of the UK Government rather than the Scottish Government.

Recommendations G-L below address the prevention priorities required across both devolved and reserved areas of government to ensure we accelerate work to prevent and end homelessness in Scotland.

G - Emergency immediate prevention activity for groups facing an increased risk of homelessness during and following the coronavirus crisis

- 37. Rapidly develop prevention focus and targeted activity based on evidence of groups facing increased homelessness risks due to Covid19 (such as those facing income shortfalls, at risk of eviction starting/ restarting post emergency legislation period, those facing relationship breakdown, survivors of domestic abuse, perpetrators of domestic abuse, people in the criminal justice system, young people, LGBTQ+, Gypsy/travellers) and assessment of impact on other at risk groups.*
- 38. Establish system-wide early warning system for example, for people in arrears, and immediately offer help with access to support and tenancy sustainment.*
- 39. The second wave of new eviction cases that may come as a result of the economic impact of Covid19 can be mitigated by extending the period of forbearance before a pre-litigation notice can be served from 30 September to 31 March 2021. The Scottish Ministers have the power to do so from current legislation.*

H - Extend emergency protections for renters created for the coronavirus pandemic

- 40. Immediate strong and permanent pre-action protocol for tenants in Private Rented Sector, including protection against eviction for tenants with agreed arrears repayment plans.*
- 41. Alongside pre-action protocols, ensure funded access to dedicated money advice, welfare advice and housing rights support.*
- 42. Greater protections through the tribunal for tenants facing evictions initiated prior to the pandemic, and an extension of the tribunal's emergency discretionary powers over eviction in social and private rentals from 6 months to 18 months.*
- 43. Work towards both the social and private rented sectors no longer evicting into homelessness. The Scottish Government to lead a cross sector project to establish the mechanisms to enable this to happen. The Prevention Review Group to consider the role of the PRS in a homelessness prevention duty*
- 44. There should be no evictions into homelessness from the Private Rented Sector or social housing sector until at least April 2021. There should also be no evictions for households where notices to evict were served before 7 April 2020 (this needs to be subject to reasonable caveats).*

I - Prevent rough sleeping for people with complex needs and those excluded from services

- 45. Transforming the use and function of overnight shelters in Glasgow and Edinburgh to design them out of local homeless systems, adopting the road map recommended by the 'Everyone Home' collective.*
- 46. Upscaling Housing First to extend support to those with complex needs who are a) housed, but at risk of repeat homelessness b) currently in public institutions including Local Authority care (on the basis of 'if you can predict it, prevent it').*
- 47. Establish a Housing First pathway for women with complex needs.*
- 48. Introduce, where there is no social work statutory duty, multiagency case management practices and protocols for people with complex needs and sharing of best practice.*
- 49. Rapid protocols with all public institutions (including prisons, Home Office for people leaving asylum support, health settings, etc) on not discharging without a managed housing pathway being put in place and implemented.*

50. *Clear guidance from Scottish Government to local authorities and social landlords that households who don't have or have lost full homelessness duty (for whatever reason) must still be housed.*
51. *Targeted transition support, for example mental health support, for everyone with complex needs being moved into any form of mainstream accommodation from the emergency response, to minimise return to crisis situation.*

J - Strengthen and accelerate prevention programmes

52. *Strengthen prevention activity in every area, drawing on best practice, including section 11s, social lettings agencies, youth housing protocols and access to mediation.*
53. *Test and target homelessness prevention approaches across wider public services, including for those at risk of eviction due to rent arrears or income shortfalls, those experiencing or at risk of domestic abuse, or women engaged in commercial sexual exploitation.*
54. *National and local advice and information strategy on what to do if you risk homelessness/support someone at risk – addressing the fact many households won't have ever been in this situation before. Ensure reliable information on the number of households at risk of eviction due to rent arrears.*
55. *A proactive housing management approach focused on earlier intervention, with independent advice, information and advocacy for tenants and access to housing support on a longer-term basis where necessary.*
56. *All areas to develop a private rented sector access scheme and rent deposit guarantee scheme which dovetails with national schemes.*
57. *Continued investment in and awareness raising of Discretionary Housing Payments and Scottish Welfare Fund to ensure tenants who need it are supported to pay their rent and living expenses, including where they have accrued arrears for reasons related to the pandemic.*
58. *Develop homelessness and housing pathways for those experiencing or at risk of domestic abuse, avoiding homelessness in every case and enabling survivors to remain in their home where this is their preferred option. This should be based on the work of the CIH / SWA working group and social landlord guidance and include strengthened social housing protocols, support for those in private rented and owner occupied sectors, work for private landlords and letting agents, domestic abuse awareness training for all Local Authority housing staff, and ensure housing /*

homelessness is represented at all relevant Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs).

K - Prevent migrant homelessness and destitution

Note that work by Scottish Government, COSLA, academics and third sector is underway to identify the limits of the Scottish Government's flexibility. The recommendations in this section are subject to that work and legal guidance.

- 59. Prevent destitution and exclusion by ensuring access to decent and safe accommodation (including community hosting solutions) and the practical, legal and emotional support people need, regardless of immigration status.*
- 60. A programme to rapidly support EU citizens to apply to the EU settlement scheme. Ensure people who are homeless get enough support to apply and have access to independent specialist advice, including OISC accredited advice, housing and benefits advice, and information and technology needed to make the application.*
- 61. Support EEA nationals and people with leave to remain and with a condition of No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), and who are ready to work, to access support to find employment and housing in the private rented sector.*
- 62. Ensure migrant homelessness is addressed in all RRTPs to prevent homelessness and destitution for asylum seekers, EEA nationals and people with NRPF, and that Local Authorities have the guidance they need to do this.*
- 63. Develop gender-sensitive prevention pathways and access to specialist services for women experiencing or at risk of domestic abuse who have insecure immigration status as well as work to prevent trafficking and exploitation.*
- 64. Ensure people have access to immigration advice, and support to return to their country of origin or other place if they make an informed choice to do this.*
- 65. Local authorities to provide social work assessments and referral pathways to suitable accommodation.*
- 66. Scottish Government to explore options to create new social security benefits, which are within its devolved power, to support people with NRPF. Alternatively, change the eligibility of devolved benefits, such as Discretionary Housing Payments, so that entitlement to reserved benefits are not the only or main qualifying criteria.*

L - Urgent requests of the Westminster Government

67. In relation to migrant homelessness:

- a) Temporary suspension of NRPF conditions for at least the next 12 months for people who have a NRPF restriction attached to their visa so they can access Universal Credit and homelessness assistance.*
- b) Temporary suspension of the habitual residence test so that EEA nationals can access benefits.*
- c) More clarity on what funds local authorities can use for people seeking or refused asylum.*
- d) Extend the suspension of evictions from asylum accommodation so no one is evicted into homelessness.*

68. In relation to welfare:

- a) Extend Local Housing Allowance (LHA) uplift by ensuring the rates continue to cover at least the 30th percentile of rents after the current temporary uplift.*
- b) For the duration of the pandemic, suspend the benefit cap and/or increase the cap by the corresponding LHA uplift to ensure it does not unintentionally hinder the support given by the investment in LHA rates and the increase of the UC standard allowance, and suspend the two-child limit.*
- c) Continue the suspension of sanctions to prevent people becoming homeless as a result of the pandemic.*
- d) End the 5-week wait for benefits to start.*
- e) Immediate suspension and then removal of the spare room subsidy.*
- f) Remove the Shared Accommodation Rate in LHA.*
- g) Reinstate three-month rule (present in HB but not UC) when claiming help for first-time housing costs, based on actual rent.*
- h) Consideration should be given to the extending the current suspension of direct deductions from benefit to repay third party debts, and benefit overpayments, and this suspension should be extended to advance payments of Universal Credit.*

Question 4: What needs to change in the national Action Plan to end homelessness to recognise the changing circumstances caused by coronavirus?

In order to end homelessness in response to the pandemic we need to continue to build on the progress of the Scottish Government and COSLA's Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan by implementing changes which strengthen the national plan.

It is crucial that cross sector work on ending homelessness continues and this is why we have proposed a change to the National Performance Framework for Scotland which would see a specific indicator created on homelessness. This will also help ensure that preventing and ending homelessness becomes a longer-term, cross sector government commitment.

We also have an opportunity to look at Scotland's housing needs on a national level and to plan based on what the population needs. This will help ensure that everyone will have access to an affordable home which meets their needs.

It is preferable for everyone if we prevent homelessness from happening in the first place rather than only looking to solve it once it happens. This is why we have included several recommendations which set out best practice methods of preventing homelessness, as well as recommending the introduction of legal duties on housing and wider public bodies to prevent homelessness.

Sections M-P expand on the detail of the recommendations.

M - Continue to strengthen national plan for ending homelessness

- 69. Build the expectation of ending homelessness into the National Performance Framework for Scotland, with specific indicators to measure progress and explicit links related to government agendas such as social renewal, to help ensure cross sector working on homelessness. Recognise the impact and importance of continuing national Government leadership on homelessness, that supports local infrastructure but is sensitive to local need.*
- 70. Ensure rapid implementation of legal changes recommended by HARSAG, including options for deliberate manipulation protections as alternative to intentionality provisions, and a clear framework and timescale to remove local connection restrictions.*
- 71. Review timescales and sequencing of the Ending Homelessness Together action plan to ensure continued progress and maximise benefit to homeless households.*
- 72. National commitment beyond the current 5 years to 2023 on action to end homelessness.*

- 73. *Major effort to get building of social housing back on track as coronavirus crisis restrictions are removed.*
- 74. *A review of the housing and homelessness Regulatory Framework to encompass implementation of all the HARSAG recommendations to ensure consistent enforcement of existing housing rights.*
- 75. *Scottish Government to pursue a right to adequate housing through a Human Rights Bill.*
- 76. *Digital inclusion has become a critical housing sustainability resource. Digital access with the provision of hardware, access to data, training and support should become an integral and vital part of personal housing plans and rapid rehousing responses.*
- 77. *All recommendations to recognise that ending homelessness requires more than providing people with housing. It is also about their connections with the community, their support networks, their personal health and wellbeing, and a sense of structure and purpose.*

N - Strategic housing needs

- 78. *National and local plans to maximise housing supply capacity e.g. purchase into social rented sector, mortgage to rent, alternative ways of financing more social housing and potential role for Scottish National Investment Bank.*
- 79. *Identification of type/size of homes most needed in local area, using this to inform procurement options for homeless households.*
- 80. *Flip temporary accommodation to permanent or settled accommodation in the social rented sector and the PRS. This should only happen where the household has settled into the accommodation and it meets their housing, social and educational needs. Choice of location has to be balanced with housing demand and availability, and the responsibility of the Local Authority to discharge the homeless duty within a reasonable timescale (normally 3-12 months).*
- 81. *Develop strategies to acquire additional properties for social rental from private sectors for settled housing use.*
- 82. *Prioritise social housing supply programme as construction industry restarts.*
- 83. *Renewed government commitment to ambitious affordable and suitable housing supply with strong focus on social housing beyond 2021, targeted to areas of highest demand with properties of the size people need and with clear definition of affordable housing linked to household income. The Ending Homelessness Together*

plan recognised a target of 50,000 affordable homes of which 35,000 would be for social rent. Since then, further independent analysis commissioned by Shelter Scotland, CIH and SFHA recommends that these numbers should now be 53,000 and 37,100.

- 84. Consider options for greater flexibility in the private rented sector, including requiring insurance providers to allow tenants receiving benefits, and a scheme to support selling of properties with sitting tenants.*
- 85. To take account of the pending economic recession, rent levels need to be affordable in the social sector and private sector. Rents should be assessed to ensure they are affordable to people in low paid employment and who may become unemployed. It is noted that there is a current Scottish Government Working Group reviewing the social rents model. A review should also be carried out to examine the current level of PRS rents.*
- 86. First Tier Tribunal (FTT) must produce more data, so that we have full transparency on how it is working and if tenants are able to successfully assert their rights.*

O - Rapid rehousing and maximum housing options for all

- 87. Add non-statutory homeless and potentially-homeless households into the RRTP process.*
- 88. More clarity on the exemptions of the extension to the Unsuitable Accommodation Order (UAO), including definitions of rapid access accommodation and shared accommodation.*
- 89. Explicit requirement for addressing the Unsuitable Temporary Accommodation Order in next iteration of RRTPs.*
- 90. RRTPs to include housing solutions for those in night shelters, high levels of lost contacts and accommodation refusals, and youth homelessness.*
- 91. Development of alternative non-institutionalised forms of temporary and permanent accommodation, both to provide range of options, and facilitate compliance with the Unsuitable Accommodation Order – such as community hosting or culturally appropriate homes such as caravans for the gypsy/traveller community.*
- 92. Develop strategy for balancing need to procure more temporary accommodation in the short term with avoiding use of B&B, and the avoidance of a surge of long-term temporary accommodation solutions to the detriment of PRS being available as settled housing.*

- 93. *Ensure where it is necessary despite all efforts temporary accommodation meets people's needs and that people have choice and control over what temporary accommodation they accept.*
- 94. *Legally-enforceable standards must be set for temporary accommodation as soon as possible.*
- 95. *Development of range of affordable housing options and housing pathway for young people including options for flat sharing and other relevant non-institutional options.*

P - Prevention

- 96. *Financial modelling to show what will happen and what that will cost if accelerated action is not taken to prevent homelessness, as well as highlighting where the pressure points are nationally.*
- 97. *Acceleration of upstream prevention activity across local authorities and RSLs, up to 6 months prior to homelessness (pre-empting new prevention duties and the work of the Prevention Review Group (PRG) for "mandated set of activities").*
- 98. *Develop commitments and practice with all relevant public bodies to take steps to prevent homelessness, including asking about housing situation and acting by referral to local authority, expectation of eliminating evictions or discharge into homelessness.*
- 99. *Develop equivalent of Housing Contribution Statement to Health and Social Care Partnerships on what Health and Social Care Partnerships will contribute to local authority work to prevent and end homelessness (except where homelessness is a delegated function from Local Authority to IJB) (likely to pre-empt PRG work).*
- 100. *Co-ordinated/shared multiagency approach to allocation of specialist accommodation for the small proportion of people who are currently not ready for a tenancy for reasons of safety or choice (for example, specialist accommodation for mental health, learning disability, high risk offenders, or those with complex needs who do not feel ready for their own tenancy).*
- 101. *Share best practice among landlords on eliminating evictions into homelessness, pre-empting work of Prevention Review Group. Consider regulatory element of eliminating evictions into homelessness.*
- 102. *Ensure prevention activity is prioritised by introducing legal duties on housing and wider public bodies to prevent homelessness following the recommendations of the Prevention Review Group (PRG) – see below. The Prevention Review Group to consider the role of a prevention duty in the private rented sector.*

The current PRG draft recommendations for legislative change are as follows:

- *Single housing and support assessment process whether homeless or at risk within six months; (Temporary Accommodation provided where required).*
- *Specified set of reasonable steps to be taken by Local Authority to prevent or resolve homelessness, captured in Personal Housing Plan.*
- *Discharge of both prevention and resolution duty via ‘maximal housing options’ that require to be both “settled” (12 months minimum) and “suitable” (tailored to the household’s specific needs, to be defined in regulations and guidance).*
- *Prevention duties on wider public bodies (health/social care, prisons, police, social work, social landlords): (a) a duty to ask: about housing situation where there is a risk of homelessness (b) a duty to act: specified/tailored for each type of public body (c) no discharge/eviction into homelessness: i.e. must have somewhere else to go (d) duty on Local Authorities to act on referrals from other public bodies.*

103. Acceleration of national public awareness campaign to reduce stigma and ensure early action by those at risk of homelessness, and encourage public discourse on homelessness and ending homelessness in line with the framing research by the Frameworks Institute.

104. Permanent pre-action protocol for tenants in Private Rented Sector – see Recommendation 40 (above)

Finally, we recommend that the Scottish Government publish a plan in response to the HARSAG recommendations, and that the Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group oversee the implementation of this plan.

ANNEX 1 List of organisations who provided feedback

ALACHO
A Way Home Scotland (collective group of x members)
Aberdeen Cyrenians
Bethany Christian Trust
Change Team
Chartered Institute of Housing
Child Poverty Action Group Scotland
Churches Against Homelessness Scotland
Citizen's Advice Scotland
Community Justice Scotland
COSLA
COSLA No Recourse to Public Funds Framing Consortium
Crisis
Cyrenians
Disability Equality Scotland
East Lothian Council
Engender
Falkirk Council
Fife Council
Frontline Fife
Glasgow Alliance (membership x)
Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations
Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership
Glasgow City Mission
Govan Law Centre
Homeless Network Scotland
Housing Options Scotland
Housing Support Enabling Unit
Hunter Street Homelessness Service
ISPHERE/Heriot-Watt University
Neil Morland Housing Consultants
PATH (Scotland)
Perth & Kinross Council
Police Scotland
Prevention Review Group
Public Health Scotland
Queens Cross Housing Association
Rock Trust
SAY Women
Scottish Federation of Housing Associations
Scottish Prison Service
Scottish Refugee Council
Scottish Women's Aid
SeAscape Ayrshire

Scottish Government Connected Communities - Asylum and
Refugee Integration
Scottish Government Disability, Equality and British Sign
Language Policy Team
Scottish Government Equality Unit
Scottish Government Fuel Poverty Team
Scottish Government Human Trafficking Team
Scottish Government Islands Communities Expert Team
Scottish Government Looked After Children Unit
Scottish Government Prison Release Policy Team
Scottish Government Social Justice Strategy Unit
Scottish Government Tackling Poverty Team
Scottish Government Violence against women and girls' team
Shelter Scotland
Simon Community Scotland
Streetwork
The Change Team
Transform Dundee
Turning Point Scotland, Aberdeen
University of Stirling
West Lothian Council
Wheatley Group
Who Cares? Scotland
Women's Support Project

ANNEX 2 Background to coronavirus and the reconvening of HARSAG

Coronavirus and homelessness

With the onset of the coronavirus crisis in early 2020, the Scottish Government responded positively and quickly to recognise that people who were sleeping rough or staying in shelters or hostels with shared facilities would be particularly hard hit by the virus for several reasons:

- The association of homelessness and rough sleeping with a range of health conditions that could make the effect of coronavirus more serious
- Limited access to sanitation facilities for the regular and frequent handwashing that was a key element of reducing the spread of the virus
- Lack of facilities to self-isolate in the event of contracting the virus and/or showing symptoms

The Scottish Government, local authorities and charities moved quickly to provide self-contained emergency accommodation for hundreds of people who were rough sleeping or staying in shelters or hostels with shared facilities. The Scottish Government has also been proactive about subsequent phases – making it clear that it didn't want people forced to go back to rough sleeping or congregate facilities, and seeing the opportunity to move further with its ambition to end homelessness in Scotland.

It was decided at the Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group on 1 June 2020 to reconvene the HARSAG to review the Scottish Government's plan for moving to this next phase; a phase of ensuring that people facing homelessness during the coronavirus crisis would be supported to move on from emergency accommodation to settled housing rather than going back to the street or congregate facilities.

Reconvening HARSAG

The HARSAG met on 5 June 2020 to start its work. It was quickly agreed that the HARSAG would address the following four questions:

1. What needs to already be in place for the ongoing emergency?
2. What do we need to do to ensure people move forward from covid emergency accommodation, and not back to the streets or congregate shelters?
3. Prevention priorities to ensure we accelerate the 'Ending Homelessness Together' work to prevent and end homelessness
4. Other changes to 'Ending Homelessness Together' following the coronavirus crisis

It was also agreed that the work being developed under the banner of the Everyone Home Collective (19 charity and academic organisations) to propose a way forward would be the foundation for the considerations of HARSAG.

It was also agreed that this would not be a re-write of the original HARSAG reports, or that there would be a recommendation to re-write the Ending Homelessness Together action plan. Instead, HARSAG intends this work to add-value to previous work and to help the Scottish Government to prioritise action in the delivery of Ending Homelessness Together and additional actions caused by, or made possible by the response to, the coronavirus crisis.

Finally, it was agreed to consult far and wide, while recognising the need to respond rapidly with recommendations for the Scottish Government as the clock was already ticking in relation to questions 1 and 2. A Starter for Ten document was developed setting out the initial view of HARSAG on the solutions required. Responses to this document were received from 63 organisations and groups, including clear feedback and comments from the Change Team, the group of people with lived experience and front-line expertise which already advises the Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group.

The HARSAG met again on 18 June 2020 to review a revised set of recommendations in response to the feedback received in the 2 weeks between HARSAG meetings. Following an extensive HARSAG discussion, agreement was reached on the recommendations set out below.

In the interests of pace, the recommendations are presented as brief statements, rather than in the form of policy proposals with references and background material. As previously outlined, equalities considerations should be taken into account to inform the delivery of these recommendations.

Following submission of these proposals to the Scottish Government, additional consultation meetings took place with a round table of people with expertise in women's homelessness, and a joint HARSAG / Change Team meeting. The views and insights expressed during these meetings will feed in to the Scottish Government's response to the HARSAG recommendations.

ANNEX 3 Background to HARSAG

In 2017, the Scottish Government created the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG). This was a group of 12 experts in homelessness and housing, brought together to advise the Scottish Government in achieving their ambition to end homelessness in Scotland. The HARSAG was tasked with developing recommendations and consulting extensively to address the following questions:

- How to reduce rough sleeping in the winter of 2017/18
- How to end rough sleeping
- How to transform the use of temporary accommodation
- How to end homelessness in Scotland

The HARSAG worked intensively over a period of 9 months and consulted with several hundred experts in homelessness, housing and associated subjects, including 425 people with lived experience of homelessness. Full details of the work of the HARSAG can be found here - <https://www.gov.scot/groups/homelessness-and-rough-sleeping-action-group/#:~:text=The%20Homelessness%20and%20Rough%20Sleeping,of%20temporary%20accommodation%20in%20Scotland.>

Following consideration of HARSAG's recommendations (which were very quickly agreed in principle on receipt of each of the Group's reports), the Scottish Government and COSLA published 'Ending Homelessness Together' high level action plan for ending homelessness in Scotland. The Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group was reconfigured to oversee the implementation of the plan, and the Scottish Government has made strong progress on the implementation of the plan.

ANNEX 4 Change team

Members of HARSAG and the Change Team met as part of the consultation. The Change Team is supported by Homeless Network Scotland, Cyrenians and Scottish Community Development Centre with the structure funded by Scottish Government. It is led by people with direct experience of homelessness or with frontline responsibilities; some members have both. It has a role helping implement the Ending Homelessness Together action plan on the ground, reviewing and reporting regularly to the Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group what is helping and what is getting in the way.

Change Team priorities are across 4 perspectives.

For people currently in the system:

- For ending rough sleeping to continue to be at the top of the list when prioritising public spend.
- People having informed choices of where they want to live and strong community-based support to help people integrate into a community.
- Continued person-centred relationships with people currently accommodated in hotel rooms coupled with a strong accommodation offer to prevent them from returning to rough sleeping.

For those who work within the system, the Change Team's priorities are:

- To create a clear set of shared values for all homelessness services to commit to.
- To see more resources to help people and services work in partnership with a common goal to end homelessness.
- To explore how support services could be more flexible for people to choose what's important to them, with a focus on consistent, non-judgemental relationships.

For those at risk of entering the system, the Change Team's priorities are:

- To see an end to night shelters and large hostels as an emergency response to homelessness and more suitable options being made available to people in crisis.
- Where there is pressure on housing stock, we want to see as many void properties as possible being allocated to households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- Investment in communities to break down perceptions of 'undesirable' neighbourhoods and build from the existing strengths of the community.

For those locked out of the system, the Change Team's priority is:

- We want to see more in Scotland to make things easier for people with No Recourse to Public Funds.

ANNEX 5 Equalities considerations

Given the timescales of the coronavirus outbreak and the speed at which HARSAG was required to work it was not possible to carry out an equalities analysis as part of the Group's work. However, the Group recognises that the impact of the coronavirus will disproportionately affect some groups over others, because these groups are disproportionately affected by the virus, by different types of homelessness and / or by socioeconomic factors that contribute to homelessness.

A roundtable meeting was held as part of the consultation to focus on the needs of and response to women.

Based on the engagement which HARSAG undertook, we note the following points:

- It is recognised that people from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic backgrounds may be at greater risk of COVID19 for a variety of socioeconomic factors. A greater proportion of homeless applicants are from non-White Scottish backgrounds than the general population. People from migrant backgrounds who do not have full access to public funds are at great risk of homelessness.
- People with existing health conditions may be more vulnerable to the virus. People who are homelessness have high instances of additional health conditions.
- It is recognised that single men make up a majority of homelessness applicants, and particularly of rough sleepers.
- Women and men have different experiences of homelessness. Women are disproportionately likely to be victims of domestic abuse and become homeless as a result of domestic abuse. They are also more likely than men to become homeless with their children.
- Young people are disproportionately affected by homelessness and may be at greater risk of unemployment as a result of the pandemic. Young LGBTQ people are disproportionately affected by homelessness.

Homeless Network Scotland also published an equalities breakdown during the pandemic, available here:

<https://homelessnetwork.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Equalities-Homelessness-and-Covid-19-v270420-PUBLISHED.pdf>