



# PRIORITISE PREVENTION

Homelessness prevention  
is everyone's business

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Together  
we will end  
homelessness



# Why do we need to prioritise prevention?

Scotland has some of the best protections in the world for people who lose their home. But with 8% of Scots having experienced homelessness – or around 1 in 12 people - it is clear far too many people are being forced to experience the trauma of homelessness. It doesn't have to be this way.

The best way to end homelessness is to stop it happening in the first place.

Ending homelessness does not mean that no one will ever lose their home again. It means that, through prevention, homelessness only happens very rarely, that when it does happen it is brief, and that once it has happened to an individual or family it is prevented from happening again.

**By acting earlier, and offering support before someone hits a point of emergency, we can reduce the number of people pushed into homelessness.**

By changing the law around prevention, Scotland can become a world-leader in ending homelessness.

Scotland rightly has a reputation for having strong rights for people who become homeless. But rights for those threatened with homelessness, and current prevention duties, are less clear cut. A change in the law is needed to clarify the place of homelessness prevention in the current system, so that prevention is not perceived as gatekeeping, and so that the law can move into line with best practice.

In England and Wales, the introduction of legislation to prevent homelessness led to a 46% drop in homelessness applications in the first year in England and 59% over the first two years in Wales. During the same period, Scotland experienced a slight rise in the rate of people making homeless applications. Without action, Scotland risks falling behind.

Over the past decade, there have been around 11,000 households living in temporary accommodation at any one time, though this has increased since the pandemic started.

**Homelessness prevention needs to become a strategic priority, nationally and locally.** The pandemic has shown how important it is for everyone to have a safe and stable home. We need services to work strategically together in a joined-up way, to ensure people don't fall through the gaps and end up with nowhere to call home.



# What work has already been done?



Building on the recommendation of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG) and the commitment to take this forward in the Scottish Government / COSLA Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan in 2018, the Scottish Government asked Crisis to convene an independent group of cross-sector experts to take forward the Scottish Government commitment to introduce a new homelessness prevention duty on Local Authority and public bodies. The focus was on developing specific recommendations for legal change to strengthen prevention.

The Homelessness Prevention Review Group, made up of experts from local government, the homelessness sector and academia, and chaired by Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick, produced recommendations on how best to do this. To meet its task, the Group consulted with over 100 stakeholders and was supported by the Prevention Commission<sup>1</sup>, a group of people with lived and frontline experience of homelessness, whose views shaped the proposals.

In February 2021, the Homelessness Prevention Review Group published proposals to reform the homelessness system and ensure that early action is taken so that people do not reach housing crisis.

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1. MHCLG (2020) Statutory Homelessness Annual Report, 2019-20, England; Fitzpatrick, S. et al (2017) Homelessness Monitor: Wales 2017. Crisis

# What is being proposed?

The detailed recommendations focused on two areas:

1. To place duties on a range of public bodies based on the principles of asking people about their housing situation, and where necessary acting upon that information. For example, by making a referral to the local authority homelessness department or taking action within their remit to address the issues causing the problem.
2. Changing the current statutory homelessness framework, so that:
  - Local authorities must assist people at risk of homelessness in the next six months, working in partnership with relevant partners and with services designed to meet the needs of particular groups at risk of homelessness;
  - The existing Housing Options framework is put on a statutory basis, providing a menu of “reasonable steps” which would address people’s risk of homelessness;
  - The assessment process is more person-centred, focusing on the causes of the situation and working with the individuals affected to identify the preferred next steps and housing outcomes, and providing support so that it does not happen again in future;
  - People can choose from a wide range of housing options according to their needs to resolve their homelessness. Strong safeguards would make sure the accommodation is suitable to the needs of the household (including affordability and accessibility), and is stable;
  - Strong accountability and transparency through an enhanced review process and the ability to take cases to the housing chamber of the tribunal.

**Becoming homeless is one of the most damaging situations someone can find themselves in.**

**There is a moral imperative to prevent homelessness, and it is often much easier to prevent than to fix.**

- Crisis

The Group also proposes further duties on specific bodies including health and social care and social landlords to work closely with homelessness services to address the needs of people they have contact with, and to help those facing particular risks, including young people, and those experiencing domestic abuse or with complex needs.

# What would this change in the law achieve?

Crisis strongly supports the work of the Homelessness Prevention Review Group. The principles underpinning its work are driven by people with first-hand experience of homelessness, and they set the direction of travel for an ambitious new legal framework that would once again put Scotland in a world-leading position.

These proposals could bring many benefits. They would require more assistance to be provided to households facing housing problems at an earlier stage – preventing them from reaching crisis point, while retaining strong rights for individuals and giving them a stronger voice and more control during the process. They would help clarify the legal framework, join up services and provide more accountability.

The proposal for widening housing options came from the Prevention Commission who wanted to increase choice and control for people facing homelessness. The proposal would help ensure people can move on as fast as possible into a home which meets their needs, making the best use of the options available within the local housing market. The Prevention Review Group's recommendations also set out strong protections to ensure these households are not at risk of homelessness in the future.

If properly implemented these proposals would prevent many people in Scotland experiencing the trauma and stigma of homelessness and ensure they have stable and suitable housing.

# What has been committed to?

This call to prioritise prevention has wide political support, with every party expressing support for calls to strengthen the law and introduce new duties to prevent homelessness.

In its 2021-22 Programme for Government, the Scottish Government committed to:

“Strengthen existing homelessness prevention legislation and introduce new duties on public bodies to ask people about their housing situation and take action if needed, supporting the development of a culture of early intervention.”

The Scottish Government will consult on this package of proposals between December 2021 and March 2022.

[Scottish Government Consultation](#)

[Prevention Review Group](#)



# What can you do?

Ending homelessness is everyone's business. You can contact your local politicians to express support for preventing homelessness, and also help us spread the word to your colleagues, friends and family.

Keep up to date on our work in Scotland by visiting [www.crisis.org.uk/about-us/scotland/](http://www.crisis.org.uk/about-us/scotland/)

For more information about how to get involved, please contact:

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