



Changing Course: Delivering a Preventative Approach to Ending Homelessness through Public Service Reform

MSP briefing paper, October 2026

In advance of the upcoming Scottish Budget, Crisis Scotland has published its new report, *Changing Course: Delivering a Preventative Approach to Ending Homelessness through Public Service Reform*. The report calls for the **creation of a cross-government delivery plan** in preparation for commencement of the new homelessness prevention legislation - Ask and Act -coming into force no later than November 2028. Based on independent research by Alma Economics, the report also calls for **£100 million** investment in the upcoming Scottish Budget to prepare the infrastructure and workforce to be ready for commencement, and **£35-38 million** each year from commencement up to 2031, to fund all relevant public bodies in the delivery of their new legal duties. The report also estimates average net cost avoidance at **£76-82 million** for the post commencement period of this parliamentary term.

The report provides key findings on delivering transformative change, drawing on learning from a broad range of other service transformation programmes across the UK and internationally, as well as pulling learning from the current homeless prevention pilot programmes, which put Ask and Act into practice. The report highlights the clear fit with the public service reform agenda and how, if successful, this new way of working will achieve greater service integration to act much early and offer a more personalised package of support that effectively achieves greater stability for households across Scotland.

The report also contains essays from five experts in the field, outlining what success could look like and how to get there. Finally, the report contains new independent economic analysis, commissioned by Crisis Scotland and conducted by Alma Economics, which models the costs - and cost avoidance - of implementing and delivering the new legal duties – Ask and Act.

Key learnings

- Last year, rough sleeping increased by 20% and numbers of households in temporary accommodation are at record levels, costing over £160 million a year. Some local authorities' homelessness services are in systemic failure.

- Household instability has strong links with poverty, with homelessness being a classic example of ‘failure demand’, absorbing vast resources across emergency healthcare, policing, and temporary shelter without resolving root causes
- Poor quality housing costs NHS Scotland approximately £530 million annually, while acute healthcare use by people with experience of homelessness generates an additional £900 million in demand. Just for people facing severe and multiple deprivation the provision of homelessness assistance costs £530m a year.
- The Scottish Government is seeking to move away from failure demand across the public sector through its Public Service Reform Strategy, by prioritising prevention, integrating services and making them more efficient.
- A new support system must be developed on the back of the new Ask and Act legal duties created by Part 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act, requiring public bodies to work together to prevent homelessness.
- There are already many examples of good practice in preventing homelessness and stabilising people’s housing, both within and beyond the housing world but this is hampered by acute pressures on services and funding uncertainties.
- Emerging findings from the homelessness prevention pilots, funded by Scottish Government, demonstrate the necessity of personalised and relational working styles, co-ordination of support, having an effective national data sharing system in place, co-locating multi-agency services in community hubs, training and deploying multidisciplinary teams, facilitating "warm handovers", the value of data for screening and early identification of predicted homelessness, and offering flexible support such as Cash First. Cross-sector working requires a mass change in working culture across all public bodies, a shared vision of success with shared outcomes stemming from this, pooled budgets where appropriate, and deliberate focus and dedicated time on transformation and transition, with universal senior level buy-in, governance and co-ordination at all levels of government.

A cross-government delivery plan to prepare for implementation should consist of:

- ***Vision, strategy and leadership:*** Scottish Government must articulate a clear national vision and by conducting a theory of change, provide clarity on systemic changes needed across government to drive prevention outcomes.
- ***Urgently scale up the existing pilot work:*** The ‘Ask and Act’ pilots, due to come to an end in December, should be extended to avoid loss of momentum and expertise less than 2 years before national commencement.
- ***Develop national infrastructure:*** Clarity on service transformation direction and funding commitments are needed as soon as possible to support preparation, along with strong statutory guidance demonstrating and requiring collaborative leadership. This will need to be supported by an effective national data-sharing infrastructure to support cross-body working and support early identification and intervention.

A national public awareness campaign will also support early action. Monitoring and accountability are key to effective delivery, including a joint regulatory scrutiny framework.

- **Personalisation:** A person-centred, relational ethic of working, founded on quality conversations, trust and empathy, must be at the heart of the culture transformation, so that support is personalised and co-developed to meet individuals' strengths, needs and goals. This should be underpinned by a universal basic support framework, diagnostic triage tools and Personal Support Plans integrated across service boundaries.
- **Integration and co-ordination of services:** The links between housing, health and social care are deep and recommendations from Public Health Scotland and NICE to support these must be taken forward. Multiagency co-ordination will be an essential element of support for some people.
- **Frontline empowerment and use of lived expertise:** Empowerment of the frontline to be able to freely address households support needs, training for culture change and support to manage the levels of trauma and challenge encountered will be vital, as will the input of lived expertise.
- **Build local ecosystems:** Community Planning Partnerships must provide strategic local leadership, aligning commissioning practices around relational approaches. Pilots show co-ordination of services at strategic and operational levels is vital. Local delivery must incorporate third-sector providers and adapt to geographical challenges in rural communities.

Costings

To create the infrastructure, culture and systems needed to be ready for national commencement, including a new national cross-body data-sharing capability, and a national programme of training and workforce development, the report's modelling has costed that **£100 million** investment is needed to be ready for commencement in November 2028. Running costs thereafter are costed at between **£35 and £38m a year** up to 2031. A significant proportion of the costs sit with local authorities and health boards, including homelessness prevention leads and co-ordinators across services.

The net cost avoidance is estimated **between £76m and £82m** following commencement of the duties, with particular benefit in terms of avoided contact with the criminal justice system, temporary accommodation and need for mental health and homelessness services.

A summary of key recommendations for Scottish Government and partners:

1. Strengthen cross-portfolio leadership by creating an agreed vision of success, alongside a robust implementation plan, and the establishment of governance structures across all relevant government portfolios.

2. Intensify the learning and scaling of the pilot programme; allowing for best practice to be shared nationally to drive forward a two-year implementation programme.
3. Invest early in the national infrastructure required for prevention systems change, in addition to funding for the new legal duties.
4. A cross-departmental approach is taken to developing national guidance.
5. Invest in a new, national data-sharing system and capability between public bodies.
6. Establish clear lines of responsibility for implementation, with accountability measures in place.
7. Fund and deliver a national awareness and engagement campaign, designed to encourage greater public take up of support at a much earlier stage.
8. 'Personalisation' tools are established and embedded into the design and delivery of Ask and Act such as a diagnostic tool and personal support plans.
9. The strategic integration and coordination of services to establish a holistic model of support.
10. A bold new training programme be rolled out nationally to prepare for full commencement and achieve the necessary culture change – devised in part by lived experience.
11. Community Planning Partnerships provide strategic leadership to build a coherent ecosystem of localised co-ordinated support.
12. In the upcoming budget, Scottish Government allocates **£100 million** of funding for a pre-commencement programme of infrastructure and capacity building, and between £35-38 million per year from November 2028 up until 2031 for post-commencement delivery of the new legal duties.

About Crisis Scotland

Crisis Scotland is the national charity for people experiencing homelessness. We help people directly out of homelessness, including through best practice work across Scotland and our Skylight service operating in Edinburgh and the Lothians, and we research and campaign on a national basis for the social changes needed to end homelessness altogether. Our central campaign is to [end all forms of homelessness in Scotland by 2040](#).

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Appendix 1. Table of detailed report recommendations

1. We recommend strengthening cross portfolio leadership by creating an agreed vision of success, alongside a robust implementation plan, and the establishment of governance structures across all relevant government portfolios	- Recognising the importance of housing and household stability in the national indicators supporting the new National Outcomes, so that different legislation and public service priorities align and overcome potential silos in delivery. - Establishing a clearly defined vision for success, specifying the outcomes that a reformed early action support system will seek to achieve, and what an effective operating model should entail. The vision should be explicit in the guidance for the new duties, as well as the training programmes and the associated desired culture change. - Working jointly with the Prevention Unit, develop a coherent theory of change to underpin delivery of the vision. - Establish a cross-portfolio oversight group to provide strategic leadership and overcome barriers to integrated working
2. We recommend intensifying the learning and scaling up of the pilot programme; allowing for best practice to be shared nationally	- Urgently scale up ambitions to expand and evolve the Ask and Act pilot programme through to commencement, so that learning and best practice is shared nationally, progress can continue and barriers to delivery and successful outcomes are addressed locally, or at national government level where appropriate. - Review and implement the Prevention Task and Finish Group recommendations as appropriate. - Consider introducing national coordinator and thematic leader roles to provide the necessary stewardship for scaling up learning and sharing best practice
3. We recommend investing early in the national infrastructure	- Front load expenditure of the £50 million Prevention Fund in the upcoming Scottish Budget to enable the necessary transformation of the systems, culture and infrastructure needed to deliver these new duties successfully. (We discuss the costings in greater detail in section 4 of this report)

required for prevention systems change, in addition to funding for the new legal duties.	- Provide clarity to local authorities and other bodies as soon as possible (and at maximum 18 months prior to full commencement – April 2027) regarding what assistance will be provided centrally by Scottish Government, COSLA and / or other partners to support implementation of the new approach to housing stability, including for example confirming funding levels for each year towards implementation.
4. We recommend a cross-departmental approach is taken to developing national guidance	- We recommend that guidance should have a foreword jointly written by the Cabinet Secretaries for Social Justice and Housing, Public Service Reform and Health and Care to demonstrate collaborative leadership.
5. We recommend investing in a new, national data-sharing capability between public bodies	- In partnership with COSLA and other public sector representative bodies, take a lead coordinating role in the development of new cross-body data sharing capability across public services. This should enable the linkage of data systems and be supported by a clear framework for performance measurement and tracking of outcomes (see below) and guidance around lawful data sharing.
6. We recommend establishing clear lines of responsibility, with accountability measures in place	- Include within the implementation plan a RASCI framework (Responsible, Accountable, Supporting, Consulted, Informed) to provide clarity of roles, particularly given the cross-cutting nature of the work - Publish a clear monitoring framework to track delivery of the duties and prevention outcomes. This must join up with other relevant work including the monitoring and outcomes of homelessness assistance and allow for the monitoring of longer-term outcomes. - Regulators have an important role in ensuring the delivery of new duties leads to better outcomes for people. The Task and Finish Group recommended that Audit Scotland coordinate a strategic scrutiny

	group bringing together the relevant actors to develop a framework for what scrutiny of such a system would like. We recommend that this be revisited. - Given the extreme vulnerability of having no home, Scottish Government should work with partners to consider how accountability can be increased within the new framework beyond internal review processes, both for individuals trying to access support, and for services where there are failures to comply with their responsibilities and work together effectively. As recommended by the HRPG, needs and support should be documented in a personalised support plan, which will support transparency and accountability.
7. We recommend funding and delivering a national awareness and engagement campaign, designed to encourage greater public take up of support at a much earlier stage.	- The communications campaign should be simple in messaging and seek to increase public awareness about the new assistance available to households across Scotland where unmet support needs exist, and homelessness is a risk. It should be designed to encourage people to inquire about the support available at an early stage with a ‘here to help’ ethos.
8. We recommend the following ‘personalisation’ tools are established and embedded into the design and delivery of Ask and Act	- Invest in an effective diagnostic tool, and appropriate training on methods for conducting assessments so that relevant ‘real’, ‘perceived’ and ‘hidden’ needs are all disclosed, root causes are addressed, and holistic support is provided. - Work with local authorities, health and social care services, other relevant partners and people with lived experience of housing instability to create Personal Support Plans for putting together a tailored package of effective support. Support plans should take a person-centred and strengths-based approach to empower people to take control of their own lives.

9. We recommend the strategic integration and coordination of services to establish a holistic model of support	- Through clear cross-government policy directives and associated guidance, ensure the development of a multiagency case co-ordination approach, working across all relevant services, including housing, health, social care and criminal justice services to provide support for people who have multiple or severe needs requiring a co-ordinated or ‘sticky’ approach. - As geographical health boards and local authorities are reformed, thoroughly explore the interrelationship between housing and health and social care, and put in place clear arrangements for joint planning, commissioning, data sharing and linkage, and accountability. - All health settings should review and implement the NICE guidelines on supporting people facing homelessness and Public Health Scotland’s recommendations
10. We recommend a bold new training programme be rolled out nationally to prepare for full commencement and achieve the necessary culture change	- Conduct a mapping exercise at national level, led by Scottish Government and replicated in local areas, to identify the skills, training needs and resources that will be needed by the workforce in different sectors to effectively design and deliver a new personalised package of holistic support, and use this as the basis of a workforce development plan. - People who experience a problem understand it best. Therefore, the voices of lived experience of homelessness should be at the core of designing the training programme. Learning can be drawn from highly successful models such as ‘The Right To Family Life’ training module for social workers, designed and run by families in poverty and overseen by the charity ATD Fourth World¹.
11. We recommend that Community Planning Partnerships provide strategic	- Local senior leaders should ensure effective strategic and operational integration and co-ordination of local services, and this should be clear in guidance.

¹ <https://atd-uk.org/projects-campaigns/giving-poverty-a-voice/right-to-family-life/>

leadership to build a coherent ecosystem of localised co-ordinated support.	- Commissioning guidance should emphasise the goals of reducing failure demand and prioritising preventative work to achieve housing and household stability, ensuring services are relational and collaborative. - Guidance should be produced for Community Planning Partnerships to take forward this agenda. Scottish Government should agree with partners who is best placed to develop this guidance. It should be made clear that this work supports other work to prevent harm within the local population. - National guidance should support flexibility to adapt support and service infrastructure to locally identified priorities and needs, including the challenges faced by rural communities and services, while ensuring a consistent minimum offer. - Provide clarity in guidance on what role the third sector may play in operationalising the framework, to support appropriate commissioning of services.
12. In the upcoming budget, we recommend that Scottish Government allocates funding for a pre-commencement programme of infrastructure and capacity building, and for post-commencement delivery of the new legal duties	To sufficiently resource the development and delivery of a new system-wide approach to stabilising households and preventing homelessness, - pre commencement funding of £2.3 million in 2026, £49.4 million in 2027 and £48.1 million between January and October 2028 is required - post commencement funding of £16.3 for Nov- Dec 2028, £34.8 (2029), £38.2 (2030) and £36.1 (2031) is required - Funding allocations must consider particular pressures, including the specific nature of rural prevention, and how areas with the greatest housing pressures can prioritise prevention while continuing to meet the high demand for acute homelessness services.