



Crisis



Ending homelessness in Scotland by 2040

About Crisis

Crisis is the national charity for people experiencing homelessness. We help people directly out of homelessness, including through our Skylight service operating in Edinburgh and the Lothians, and we research and campaign for the social changes needed to solve it altogether.

Acknowledgements

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Matt Downie

Chief Executive of Crisis

Scotland has a commitment to end all forms of homelessness, which is in the Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan. This plan was developed in partnership with Crisis and many others in the sector, including people with lived experience of homelessness, back in 2018. The action plan helped bring forward a series of progressive policy decisions in Scotland over the past parliament, including but not limited to the prevention measures that make up Part 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Bill. If implemented well, these, alongside other reforms such as rapid rehousing transition plans, could help to create one of the most progressive homelessness systems in the world.

Yet, in the past couple of years demand for housing support has grown as levels of homelessness have increased. Since the declaration of a national housing emergency in 2024, the Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan has had less traction and is at risk of being forgotten. This illustrates the weakness of having a political commitment without proper measures to scrutinise its delivery and ensure accountability. We have seen this with past commitments, when homelessness statistics go up, bold commitments on ending homelessness quietly get dropped.

By aligning a commitment to end all forms of homelessness in Scotland with the existing goal of the Housing to 2040 strategy, we will put in place a date that government must work towards to achieve this ambition. Furthermore, by calling for it to be enshrined in legislation, such a commitment stands the test of time – both in terms of changes in political governance, changes to national policy priorities and in terms of funding decisions – irrespective of which way the national homelessness statistics

are going. Agendas like these are just as easily dropped when such a state of national emergency doesn't exist, and homelessness is less visible to the public. And it's at these times that the most pressure should be applied, not only to get us over the line of ending homelessness, but importantly to make sure such an achievement is sustainable.

Our manifesto for the 2026 Scottish Parliament elections sets out clear policy proposals for a long-term, strategic approach to ending all forms of homelessness. It will not be easy to achieve but achieve it we must. It must be a national priority, and one shared by all parties contesting these elections.

Scotland has historically been at the forefront of homelessness initiatives including the abolition of priority need and local connection, moves that we fully supported. By making the mission to end homelessness a national priority, the next and future Scottish Governments can leave an invaluable legacy for generations to come – of a Scotland that has ended homelessness and that can act as an inspiration to the rest of the world.

Together – following our proposals – we not only can, but we must, end homelessness.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt Downie".

Matt Downie MBE
Chief Executive, Crisis



Lived Experience Foreword

If more people had lived experience of homelessness it's hard to imagine that ending it wouldn't be the single biggest priority of political parties in Scotland.

As the Lived Experience Campaign Group we know the damage that homelessness does. People can be left for months, or even years, in accommodation that is totally unsuitable for their needs. They can be forced to live in damp or mouldy accommodation, in places infested with rats or mice, or in hostels or B&Bs that leave their safety at risk. They may be forced to turn to friends or family to get a roof over their head. In other cases, people are being left with no option but to sleep on the street, or in cars or any shelter they can find.

That does huge damage to people – to their physical and mental health, and to their ability to plan for the future. It causes enormous pain and often trauma. It can damage personal relationships – forcing people to lose touch with friends or family – and it can make employment almost impossible.

But we also know that more people are having to go through those sorts of experiences all the time. The number of people living in temporary homelessness accommodation in Scotland is at its highest on record. So is the number of people being forced to sleep rough. More and more people are being forced into homelessness – often people who never would have imagined it could happen to them – and as a result the support available to them is becoming ever more stretched.



This can't go on. Homelessness is the result of political decisions, and Scotland can end it altogether with the right political will.

That's why we are calling on every political party to back our call to end all forms of homelessness in Scotland by 2040 – by building more homes, especially social homes, improving the support available for people who may be at risk of homelessness, so they get the help they need, and targeting resources, so the funding required to make this work is available.

We all have a choice. We can sit back and watch as homelessness keeps rising, or we can take action to end it. The upcoming election is a huge opportunity to do that – it is vital that, as the vote gets closer, politicians and policy-makers listen to people with first-hand experience of the homelessness system.

**The Crisis Lived Experience
Campaign Group.**

In political party manifestos, Crisis is calling for:

A commitment to end all forms of homelessness in Scotland by 2040, enshrined in legislation by the second half of the next Parliament.

To achieve this commitment, a three-pronged approach is needed.

- The right number, of the right type of homes need to be built in the right places;
- The support available to people in housing need should come about much earlier on and be offered in a more holistic way;
- And long-term, multi-year funding should be guaranteed for all public services delivering on an end to homelessness in Scotland.

In the next parliamentary term (2026-31)

We are seeking manifesto commitments from all political parties on the following:

1. Deliver the right number, of the right type of homes, in the right places

A commitment to invest £1.64 billion per year in the Affordable Housing Supply Programme, and to construct 15,693 homes per year over the next 5 years, is needed to meet demand for housing across Scotland. New homes, of all sizes, will be required across a mix of tenures (e.g. social rented and private rented- including mid-market rent) to ensure accommodation is available to meet the needs of all of people who experience homelessness – from single people to large families.

2. Improve the support available to people in housing need

A commitment to reform public services so that people across Scotland get the help they need to stay in their home, or to move into more suitable housing, much more quickly. This means embedding the new prevention and rapid rehousing agendas, so fewer people end up in the homeless system, including in expensive temporary accommodation.

3. Strategic, long-term funding assigned to clear outcomes

A commitment to strategic, multi-year funding that is assigned to specific outcomes. This will be essential to deliver on a commitment to end homelessness in Scotland. In the first Spending Review of the new parliament, the new government must prioritise investment in the Affordable Housing Supply Programme and prioritise investing in a new prevention and early action homeless support system.

Ending all forms of homelessness in Scotland by 2040, enshrined in law

Housing to 2040 serves as a national, long-term housing strategy for Scotland. The same long-term thinking must be given to homelessness, if we are to end it for good. By aligning a national house building programme with a goal of ending all forms of homelessness in Scotland, the new government can build the homes that people in dire housing need really require. Only with this strategic focus can the new government future-proof against future housing emergencies.

There is a housing emergency in Scotland. More than one third of councils have declared a local housing emergency, on top of the Scottish Government's national declaration. This has come about because people struggle to pay their rent, due to the cost-of-living crisis, and people across Scotland are living in overcrowded, insecure and unsafe homes.

Homelessness isn't just rough sleeping.

This, combined with a dysfunctional housing market has led to not enough homes being built in the places where people need them the most.

Put simply, the housing emergency has resulted in a homelessness emergency.

A commitment to ending all forms of homelessness in Scotland by 2040 will bring together house building plans with efforts to end homelessness, and we believe this requires legislation. A legally binding goal, with interim targets, will measure progress and allow the public and parliament to hold to the next government, and future governments, to account. These measures should be developed in the first half of the next Parliament, following extensive cross-sector, cross-party and cross-government consultation. Legislation should then be introduced in the second half of the parliamentary term.

Ending homelessness by 2040 will have huge benefits for Scotland; improved health, increased employment levels, ending child poverty and a reduction in crime and reoffending. This will, in turn, have a significant, positive impact on public finances.

Enshrining into law a goal to end all forms of homelessness in Scotland by 2040 will bring the long-term, cross-party focus, resource and commitment necessary to making this goal a reality. Ending homelessness is not and should never become a political football.

This is about ending the most acute form of poverty, which has no place in Scotland. Doing so is entirely dependent on political will.



More of the right type of homes, in the right places

People across Scotland urgently need more homes of various sizes and tenures.

To end homelessness, building more social homes is essential. According to the latest research,¹ 15,693 need to be built per year to meet the current level of demand, and this should be reflected in forthcoming manifestos.

Volume alone, however, is not the only thing that matters to people. The types of properties, such as more one-bedroom homes for people being supported through Housing First, is equally important. It is vital to know what the local housing needs are, and making sure the local housing market is equipped to deliver to these requirements. One housing solution will not fit all. Instead, a local homelessness needs assessment must be used to determine local strategic investment decisions, and the next Scottish Government must put in place policies to ensure councils deliver on this.

Making greater use of the private rental market, especially mid-market rents, should be part of a housing strategy to end homelessness by 2040. Private renting is rarely used as a solution for people experiencing homelessness, resulting in greater demand for social rented properties. However, considerable, long-term investment in building social housing will take time and private renting could be a viable option for many people if they choose that's where they want to live. Producing a private renting strategy for Scotland will outline what future policies are needed – with the aim of increasing the choice available to people seeking housing. It will also reduce pressure on the social rented sector and reduce the number, and length, of stays in expensive temporary accommodation. This can only be achieved in collaboration with cross-sector bodies including private rental landlords and local authorities. Additional support for private renting could be targeted through the roll out of PRS Help to Rent and tenancy deposit schemes, making it a more suitable option for low-income tenants.

1 https://downloads.ctfassets.net/6sqqr11sfj/6lIKiRhZ9QlyWAMLeiAGvi/d5672c586c26fdf4c8f691ec073d21fa/Affordable_Housing_Need_2025_-_Full_report.pdf

Improve support available to people in housing need

The next Scottish Government will be responsible for one of the most important shake-ups of the homeless system in a generation, when new, world-leading laws to prevent homelessness come into force by the end of 2028. A commitment on reforming public services to work better together to stabilise housing is essential for ending all forms of homelessness in Scotland. Otherwise, the new government will remain in an expanding vortex of emergency responses to the housing emergency.

The current homelessness system is not sustainable. The number of people experiencing homelessness is continuing to increase despite more homelessness cases being closed each year. There is a desire to do more preventative work from councils, as well as other services in health, social care, employment, prisons and education etc.

The next Scottish Government will need to evaluate and implement learnings from the £4 million pilot project, currently underway. The learnings will inform how new 'Ask' and 'Act' duties should work in practice for a range of public bodies, as well as helping shape secondary legislation and statutory guidance. These new duties can provide a legal framework to help fulfil the ambitions of the Christie Commission – bringing prevention to the front and centre of work across all arms of the next government. A clear vision and strong leadership on prevention is needed for the success of this step change in approach. A priority for the new government will be to create an implementation plan, for preparation for the commencement of the prevention legal duties by 2028.

Alongside prevention, 'rapid rehousing' must be a cornerstone of the reforms. Rapid rehousing means acting early to rehouse people quickly, as soon as they become homeless. It also means giving households the support tools they need to sustain their accommodation, so they don't become homeless again. This can be financial support, or more person-centred support related to health and wellbeing. By focusing on getting people back into permanent housing as quickly as possible, and offering tenancy support upfront, the new government can significantly reduce the reliance on expensive temporary accommodation, even putting in place targets to reduce the reliance on temporary accommodation, alongside targets for securing settled homes. In-tenancy support can be long term and intensive, or short term and light touch; it will vary depending on the household's circumstances. A rapid expansion of Housing First, to meet the projected requirement of 3,560 Housing First tenancies per year, must be part of the tenancy sustainment solution.

Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans have been in place in Scotland since 2019 and the degree of 'transition' across all councils has been varied. Embedding key 'attributes' of rapid rehousing, alongside targets to reduce temporary accommodation, must be part of the commitment to reform public services. In recognising that homelessness is the most acute form of poverty, reforming our public services to be better at prevention and early action will contribute towards poverty reduction, in all its forms. People become homeless because there aren't enough homes available to them, and because they don't get the help they needed early enough. Wrap around support, available early, is a critical component of any credible plan to end homelessness in Scotland.



Strategic, long-term funding assigned to clear outcomes

These are not easy solutions and they will not come for free. However, investment now will provide for long-term financial gains. Investing in people today – ensuring that everybody has a safe, suitable place to live that meets their needs – will not only make those people better off, and prevent the trauma of homelessness, but it will have more widespread societal benefits. Preventative spending has demonstrable benefits in improving health and economic outcomes as well as reduced inequalities, improving employment outcomes, and reducing demands on public services. Moreover, significant financial savings can be made across multiple government portfolio budgets therefore securing a long-term saving to the public purse.

The learnings from the prevention pilots project will be crucial in helping to determine the level of ‘outcome’ focused spending required for the full implementation of the new prevention duties, full commencement being no later than the end of 2028. Under-investment risks jeopardising their effectiveness.

The same is true for the Affordable Housing Supply Programme. This fund must not only be sustained in the long-term, but enhanced to ensure the right homes are provided in the right areas for the right people. Guaranteed, long-term funding for Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans – that is annually uprated at least

in-line with inflation – will enable local authorities to genuinely ‘transform’ their support model to move people into settled accommodation more quickly, thereby reducing use and duration of stay in expensive temporary accommodation that traps people out of the labour market and leaves people living in limbo.

The cost of ending homelessness in Scotland is a fraction of the cost of simply managing it.

We need a gear change and that requires long term, strategic thinking, underpinned by long term strategic investments.

Spending on firefighting alone will never end the housing emergency and it will certainly never end homelessness.

View from our services

Julie Woods
Support worker at Crisis
Skylight Edinburgh

At Crisis we regularly encounter people through our frontline service that have been pushed into homelessness in circumstances where it could have been prevented. That can be extremely frustrating – knowing that with the right help, someone could have avoided homelessness altogether, along with all the pain and trauma that comes with it.

But instead of getting the support they need to keep their home, people are being pushed into a point of crisis with their housing before they can get help. Then, once someone is in the homelessness system, it's common for them to end up trapped there for months or even years at a time. That does extraordinary damage to a human being.

The lack of housing, and especially social housing, means there just aren't enough homes available. So instead of moving out of homelessness accommodation, and being able to take the next steps in the rest of their lives, people get trapped, while services get more and more reliant on the worst forms of temporary accommodation.

And with demand growing, the situation is getting harder and harder every day. It feels like we're firefighting the problem all the time.

This can't go on. We need to move beyond short-term solutions and address the underlying problems that drive homelessness. That means building enough homes for everyone, providing support for people that need help, so they can keep their home, and backing up homelessness services with the funding they need to do their jobs.

If we can do that, we can end homelessness in Scotland.





Conclusion

By committing to ending all forms of homelessness in Scotland by 2040, enshrining this in legislation, and putting in place the reforms, investment, and infrastructure projects needed– all which Crisis believes are fundamentally necessary – it is possible to see a real step change in the number of people avoiding the trauma and indignity of homelessness, improving the lives of thousands of people across Scotland.

No action means no change. We cannot allow that to happen, especially as we can make decisions that improve the life opportunities for thousands of people now, and in the future. We can not only end homelessness, but we can future proof our society and public services from having to experience another such housing emergency again.

The time for action is now. The time to commit to end all forms of homelessness is now.





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