



Crisis Scotland Policy Briefing: Programme for Government

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](#)

1. Key recommendations:

The statement of intent to include:

- A central commit to ending homelessness for everyone in the forthcoming Programme for Government; bringing together the social housing and support agendas and ensuring that no one in Scotland sleeps on the streets by the end of this parliamentary term
- Prioritise prevention as the new focus of a more efficient and effective person-centred approach to achieving housing stability for households across Scotland
- A commitment to building and implementing a new, fully funded prevention and early action support system whereby any experience of homelessness is rare, brief and not repeated

A 5-point delivery plan for this parliamentary term (2026-31):

- (i) Produce and deliver on a fully funded systems change implementation plan for the forthcoming homeless prevention duties outlined in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2025
- (ii) Improve the tenancy sustainment support available to people leaving homelessness
- (iii) End rough sleeping by radically upscaling Housing First so it is available nationally to everyone who needs it in Scotland
- (iv) Deliver at least 15,693 social homes per year, of the right type, in the right places to meet current and future housing need in the homeless system.
- (v) Produce a Private Rented Sector strategy for Scotland so that private renting can help in ending homelessness for everyone

2. A longer-term outlook for the Programme for Government: opportunities for ending homelessness for everyone

In the Programme for Government, **Crisis Scotland recommends the Scottish Government commit to ending homelessness for everyone in Scotland, for good.** Achieving this will mean preventing homelessness from occurring in the first place and, where this isn't possible, to ensure that any experience of homelessness is brief, and importantly that it is not repeated.

The forthcoming Programme for Government will provide a five-year vision statement for what this government will seek to achieve before the next Scottish Parliament elections in 2031. Crisis Scotland strongly welcomes this decision by Scottish Government as it turns its attention to long-term priorities and, importantly, long-term outcomes for delivery.

A long-term, strategic approach is necessary to end homelessness for everyone, for good. Any such approach must be delivered alongside long-term, strategic funding that is assigned to clear outcomes which must be measurable, if we are to be able to determine whether actions taken across this parliamentary term have been successful.

“Addressing homelessness requires system-wide reform and a fundamental rethinking of how we respond.”¹

In line with the above conclusion drawn by Professor Duncan MacLennan, the next five years must see a coherent **cross government delivery plan** formulated and implemented that delivers upon the Public Service Reform Strategy as well as the recommendations of 2011’s Christie Commission report on prevention.

Crisis Scotland would welcome Scottish Government using the upcoming Programme for Government to recognise that **ending homelessness for everyone is a cross-portfolio issue**. That **means putting housing stability at the centre of strategic thinking** on tackling child poverty, the cost-of-living crisis and the housing emergency declared by the Scottish Government in the previous parliament.

The costs associated with ending homelessness are not exclusive to housing or the social justice portfolio, more broadly. Local government, justice, health and education portfolios all have an active part to play in preventing, and ending, homelessness and will also reap the benefits associated with it. Meaningful, cross-portfolio work is therefore necessary to ensure that the best possible outcomes are achieved, by preventing homelessness from occurring where possible and ensuring it is rare, brief and not repeated. We would welcome the establishment of a **cross-portfolio cabinet committee** to address the strategic goal of ending homelessness for everyone. Crisis Scotland believes homelessness, in all its forms, can be ended by 2040. That allows for three parliamentary terms to achieve the housing required across Scotland to meet existing and future housing needs, and time for the whole-sale transformation of our public services to intervene much earlier on, stabilising people’s housing and resolving broader support matters that could lead to homelessness arising further into the future.

3. A definition of ending homelessness for everyone; rare, brief and not repeated.

“Only by combining radical housing reform with parallel cross-government and coordinated, cross-sector support can homelessness become rare, brief, and non-recurring.”²

¹

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59b82ed532601e01a494df34/t/68d7a8aaf7755c0349b4187d/1758963882908/Prosperity+begins+at+home%2C+D+MacLennan%2C+David+Hume+Institute+September+2025+FINAL.pdf>

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<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59b82ed532601e01a494df34/t/68d7a8aaf7755c0349b4187d/1758963882908/Prosperity+begins+at+home%2C+D+MacLennan%2C+David+Hume+Institute+September+2025+FINAL.pdf>

Achieving an end to homelessness for everyone requires long-term strategic thinking. It is therefore essential that Scottish Government is clear from the start about what it seeks to achieve by the end of this parliamentary term, and ideally for further thought to be given about what needs to be achieved beyond that period. Ending homelessness for everyone in Scotland must never become a political football, and so gaining cross party support for this goal, and the desired outcomes along the way, is essential. Crisis Scotland recommends establishing a **cross-portfolio cabinet committee** to clearly determine what an end to homelessness for everyone in Scotland constitutes and identify the desired outcomes that it wants to achieve in this parliamentary term. This will enable clearer instructions for government departments and public bodies on what needs to be delivered on the prevention, rapid rehousing and affordable supply agendas to make meaningful progress towards ending homelessness in this parliamentary term.

As guiding principles, Crisis Scotland recommends using **rare, brief and non-repeated** as useful strategic framework. These are the defining standard used by modern housing and social policy frameworks, in the UK and internationally, to describe an end to homelessness and for everyone.

- **Rare:** Prevented wherever possible so that entering homelessness happens to very few people, tracked through local and national data.
- **Brief:** Handled with rapid rehousing and emergency support so that any single episode lasts the shortest time possible.
- **Non-recurring:** Solved with long-term stability and wrap-around care to ensure people do not cycle back into repeat episodes of homelessness

Rare

Scottish Government has long called for the prioritisation of **prevention as one of the best ways to end homelessness**. Crisis Scotland strongly supports this approach, as delivering preventative measures will be vastly beneficial in both financial and societal terms – and crucially for avoiding the trauma and indignity to individuals that homelessness brings.

The Scottish Government's PSR Strategy identifies that *"evidence shows that effective prevention can dramatically cut demand for expensive acute or crisis services, with a median return on investment of more than 14:1. Focussing on prevention can make services easier to plan and afford"*. Delivering effective prevention will not be cheap, or easy, however it will provide the most effective, positive, long-term and long-lasting effects and is imperative if a future Scotland where homelessness is a thing of the past is to be realised.

Brief and not repeated

It is, of course, not always possible to prevent homelessness. There will always remain emergency situations where an individual, or family, faces homelessness. Therefore, **if homelessness cannot be prevented the priority must be to ensure that any experience of homelessness is brief and not repeated**.

The use of terms such as "rare, brief and not repeated" have become common across Scottish Government, local authorities, UK Government and organisations in the third sector. They are

known, recognisable and understood phrases. However, there are currently no measures by which they are to be achieved. There is no set definition, for example, of what "brief" means – there is no timescale to determine what a "brief" experience of homelessness is beyond the 7-day legal limit for the use of unsuitable temporary accommodation.

Experiences of homelessness vary between communities and local authorities, as do volume and availability of housing and support, which will have implications for what "brief" means in that community. For example, in the year up to September 2025, Perth and Kinross Council received 842 homeless applications and people experiencing homelessness had an average length of stay in temporary accommodation of 75 days. In the neighbouring local authority of Dundee City, the equivalent statistics were more than double. Early work must commence, with **outcomes directed by Scottish Government but measures and targets consulted on and designed at a local level** to quantify these terms in a meaningful way.

4. A five-point delivery plan

Crisis Scotland recommends a five-point delivery plan be adopted alongside the statement of intent on ending homelessness for everyone – designed for implementation across this parliamentary term:

(i) Produce and deliver on a fully funded systems change implementation plan for the forthcoming homeless prevention duties

Crisis Scotland recommends the Scottish Government produce a fully costed and funded implementation plan to oversee the systems change transformation of public services to successfully deliver on the new homeless prevention duties. This will transform public service delivery away from the failures that drive people into housing crisis and homelessness and shift to an integrated early action system that works to prevent the harms associated with homelessness.

These duties tie in effectively with the ambitions of the historic Christie Commission, the Scottish Government's public service reform agenda, and its new Prevention Unit. Delivered effectively, they will result in more effective and person-centred service delivery and could once again make Scotland the world leader in ending homelessness by acting wherever possible to prevent it from happening in the first place.

As the new homelessness prevention duties enshrined in Part 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2025 must be commenced by November 2028, the period between now and then is critical to ensure the right systems, structures and arrangements are in place to make this agenda effective and reap the full benefits.

Work is currently underway to identify how this might operate through two pilot programmes. But much greater clarity and strategic direction is needed to ensure there is a shared understanding on what the outcomes that ought to be achieved are, and that the funding, local buy-in, culture shift, training, and wider infrastructure (data sharing systems and diagnostic tools etc) are required for the transition to a new integrated, personalised and early action support system.

Crisis Scotland recommends the Scottish Government commit in the Programme for Government to develop and publish an implementation plan to be enacted for the new homeless prevention duties, both fully costed and fully funded. A clear vision and strong leadership on prevention is needed for the success of this step change in approach.

(ii) Improve the tenancy sustainment support available to people leaving homelessness.

Alongside prevention support, ‘tenancy sustainment’ support must be a cornerstone of the government’s delivery plan for this parliamentary term. People become homeless because there aren’t enough homes available to them, and because they don’t get the help they needed early enough. ‘Rapid rehousing’ means acting early to rehouse people quickly, as soon as they become homeless – which requires housing supply to be sufficient. But it also means giving households the support 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, Government can significantly reduce the reliance on expensive temporary accommodation.

In-tenancy support can be long term and intensive, or short term and light touch; it will vary depending on the household’s circumstances. Embedding key ‘attributes’ of rapid rehousing support must be part of the broader reform to achieve more holistic public services that act early. Wrap around tenancy sustainment support, available early, is a critical component of any credible plan to end homelessness in Scotland.

(iii) End rough sleeping by radically upscaling Housing First so it is available nationally to everyone who needs it in Scotland

In the 2021 Homeless Monitor published by Crisis, a key informant to the publication noted in relation to rough sleeping that *"the gains on rough sleeping achieved during the pandemic were somewhat fragile"*, and that sustaining the progress made on reducing rough sleeping prior to, and during, the pandemic would be very challenging. This has been borne out in recent years as we have seen the number of people reporting experiencing rough sleeping prior to presenting as homeless double since 2021.

Crisis Scotland recommends that Scottish Government, as part of its delivery plan, seeks to end rough sleeping for good within this parliamentary term.

One of the learnings from the Covid pandemic was that long-term housing provision must be in place if rough sleeping is to be ended for good and not just temporarily, as was the case in 2020/21. Ending rough sleeping will require a radical upscaling in Housing First provision across Scotland to meet the 91% ³unmet need that currently exists. A rapid expansion of Housing First, to meet the projected requirement of 3,560 Housing First tenancies per year, should be funded in the early part of this parliamentary term.

Efforts to upscale Housing First and ending rough sleeping go hand-in-hand. As noted in the Scottish Government's report, “Learning from 25 years of preventative interventions in Scotland”,

³ [Housing First joint funding call to support people and families - Homeless Network Scotland: we are all in](#)

"Housing First is an upstream primary prevention intervention aimed at people who have multiple and complex needs and who may have a history of rough sleeping and repeat homelessness". The Housing First Pathfinder programme of 2019-2022 report further noted that, "service users (of Housing First) emphasised the value of Housing First in enabling a sustained escape from harms associated with rough sleeping."

With tenancy sustainment rates at over 83%, Housing First is a proven, effective measure at reducing homelessness, particularly for those with multiple complex housing needs. Radically upscaling Housing First provision can serve as a cornerstone of reforms to ensure the people who require the most support only experience homelessness in a rare, brief and not repeated way.

(iv) Deliver at least 15,693 social homes per year, of the right type, in the right places to meet current and future housing need in the homeless system.

To end homelessness for everyone, building more social homes is essential for both effective prevention and for successful rapid rehousing. According to the latest research⁴, at least 15,693 social homes need to be built per year to meet the current level of demand.

New social homes will not be enough on their own, however. New homes, of all sizes, will be required across a mix of tenures. More social rented and private rented – including mid-market rent properties – comprised of everything from one-bedroom homes for people being supported through Housing First to family-sized homes, will be necessary to meet the current and projected needs of everyone who experiences homelessness.

Delivering new homes at volume alone is therefore not sufficient. The right number of the right type of homes must be delivered in the right places, as outlined in the Housing 2040 Strategy. Crisis Scotland recommends Scottish Government recommit to fully funding and delivering Housing 2040 in order to end homelessness for everyone, and ensure local authorities align their Strategic Housing Investment Plans to their Local Homelessness Needs Assessments.

(v) Produce a Private Rented Sector strategy for Scotland so that private renting can help in ending homelessness for everyone

Making greater use of the private rental market, especially mid-market rents, should be part of a delivery plan to end homelessness for everyone. Private renting is rarely used as a solution for people experiencing homelessness, with only 3% of people experiencing homelessness who secured settled accommodation moving into a private rented tenancy in the year up to September 2025, compared to 77% of people finding secure accommodation in either local authority or housing association tenancy⁵.

With the overwhelming majority of people who experience homelessness moving into social housing, this creates an intense demand that the current supply cannot meet. While part of the solution to this is to significantly increase the number of social homes built each year, such long-

⁴ [Affordable Housing Need in Scotland Post-2026 - UK Collaborative Centre For Housing Evidence](#)

⁵ [Supporting documents - Homelessness in Scotland: update to 30 September 2025 - gov.scot](#)

term investment in housing construction will take time and, as noted above, is not a solution on its own. Private renting could, however, be made a viable option for more people.

The production of a private renting strategy for Scotland would outline what policies are required to make the PRS a viable option for people experiencing homelessness. Increasing the viability of PRS would create a greater level of choice for people requiring a home. It would also reduce pressure on the social rented sector and reduce the number, and length, of stays in expensive temporary accommodation. It would also bring Scotland into line with other countries in Europe that have higher rates of private rented tenancies.

This can only be achieved in collaboration with cross sector bodies including private rental landlords and local authorities. The Scottish Government could further assist better use of the PRS by providing additional support for private renting such as via a targeted roll out of PRS Help to Rent and tenancy deposit schemes, making it a more suitable option for low-income tenants.

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