

Challenge Poverty Week 2023

Policy Briefing 2

A Scotland where we have safe, secure and sustainable homes.



What is Challenge Poverty Week?

Challenge Poverty Week was launched by the Poverty Alliance in 2013. We wanted to highlight the injustice of poverty in Scotland, and to show that collective action based on justice and compassion can create solutions. The week is an opportunity to raise your voice against poverty and unite with others in calling for a just and equal Scotland. Each year, hundreds of organisations in Scotland do just that, including elected representative, charities and NGOs, local authorities, faith groups, businesses, school and colleges, trade unions, professional bodies and more.

What are we calling for?

Ensure that everyone has access to a safe, secure and sustainable home that meets their needs.

How do we get there?

- **Adequately fund the delivery of new social homes through the Affordable Housing Supply Programme to meet a target of delivering 38,500 social homes by 2026.**
- **Implement a homelessness prevention duty on public bodies and ensure that public bodies are funded to meet that duty.**
- **Adequately fund, and advertise, support to improve energy efficiency in the home, including offering grants for energy efficiency measures for those on the lowest incomes, disabled people and those living with long-term or terminal illnesses.**

1. Introduction

Access to a warm, safe and sustainable home is the cornerstone of a good life. Sadly, this is a human right that too many people are being denied due to inadequate housing. Housing costs are the largest expenditure for most households. While poverty rates in Scotland have remained generally lower compared to the rest of the UK due to a higher proportion of the Scottish population living in social housing, our housing policy continues to be a key barrier to tackling poverty in Scotland. The rising cost of housing in all sectors, combined with a low supply of social housing and inadequate increases in the numbers of new builds, is pushing people into inadequate homes that they cannot afford and pulling people into poverty.

This is especially true for people in groups more vulnerable to poverty such as people receiving low income social security payments, disabled people, older people and households with children. These groups face compounded issues accessing adequate housing due to their particular housing needs; something that our housing sector is not funded to meet. This means these groups are pushed into housing that does not meet their accessibility requirements or is overcrowded. Many families are forced to pay over the odds for private rented accommodation which pushes people into deeper poverty.

2. How do we get there?

If we are to tackle poverty in Scotland, housing requires a drastic overhaul to ensure it is affordable and sustainable. Our policy asks are only some of the many changes we need to see to ensure housing in Scotland can provide the stability and safety it should.

Adequately fund the delivery of new social homes through the Affordable Housing Supply Programme to meet a target of delivering 38,500 social homes by 2026.

The shortage of housing stock in Scotland is driving people into unaffordable and unsuitable housing. Despite this, the housing budget has seen real terms cuts of 16% in the most recent Scottish budget, delaying the provision of urgently needed affordable homes with far reaching consequences. Shelter Scotland have called attention to the fact record numbers of children are living

in temporary accommodation - last measured to be sitting at 9130 children, a 120% increase since 2014.¹

The Scottish Government have committed to build 110,000 affordable homes by 2032, with at least 70% for social rent.² Despite these welcome commitments, research by IPPR Scotland, Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Save the Children, note that current trajectories indicate these goals will be missed. Data highlights that from 2010 to 2020, the net increase in social housing homes was around 10,000. The Scottish Government must match rhetoric with investment to meet their housing targets.

The lack of social housing is pushing people into private renting which is more expensive. IPPR Scotland found that investing in social housing is a key lever to tackling poverty. Their analysis showed that on average over the 2010s, had low income private renting households instead been in social tenancies they would have seen each year around £2,200 lower housing costs, received £800 less in benefits and been left £1,400 better off.³ More social housing reduces expenditure and helps to tackle poverty. In line with our policy ask relating to income adequacy, social housing and affordable social rents also helps to bring people closer to the Minimum Income Guarantee level by reducing essential costs.

Affordability and access were pressing issues across Scotland, but particular needs have been identified in rural areas. In rural Scotland, there are acute issues with the availability of housing including a lack of affordable housing options and issues with the quality of private rented accommodation.⁴ This is often tied to there being a high number of second homes and holiday homes in rural and Island communities.⁵ This is why the Scottish Government must make good on its commitment to build 110,000 more homes with 10% of these in rural and remote locations.⁶ Targeted investment in social homes in

¹ Shelter Scotland (2023) *Shelter Scotland Briefing: Ministerial Statement on The Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-26 Progress Report*. Unpublished

² Scottish Government (2021) *Housing to 2040*. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-2040-2/documents/>

³ IPPR Scotland, Save the Children, Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2023) *Tipping the Scales: The Social and Economic Harm of Poverty in Scotland*. Available at: <https://www.ippr.org/files/2023-05/tipping-the-scales-may23.pdf>

⁴ SRUC (2022) *Improving our understanding of child poverty in rural and island Scotland* available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/improving-understanding-child-poverty-rural-island-scotland/documents/>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Scottish Government (2022) *Best Start Bright Futures: Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-2026*. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/best-start-bright-futures-tackling-child-poverty-delivery-plan-2022-26/documents/>

rural locations would help to introduce more affordable options for people living in rural communities which could help to tackle other issues such as depopulation.

We know that low supply is causing issues for certain groups more than others such as disabled households, older people, people with terminal illness, and households with children. According to Housing Options Scotland, disabled people are struggling more than ever to access homes that meet their needs. They note that disabled people often have to wait much longer than average to find a home that is suited to their needs, which can contribute to the worsening of existing health conditions, and negatively impact mental health.⁷ Disabled people are more likely to experience poverty compared to non-disabled people. Ensuring that sufficient numbers of accessible homes are built as part of the provision of social housing is therefore critical to ensure that disabled people are provided with affordable homes that meets their needs and protects them from poverty.

Implement a homelessness prevention duty on public bodies and ensure that public bodies are funded to meet that duty.

Homelessness is both a cause and consequence of poverty; it is an experience that is demoralising, frightening and traumatic. It is estimated that around 8 in 100 people in Scotland have experienced homelessness at one point in their lives⁸ with certain groups such as BME people⁹, more at risk than others. Crisis Scotland note that homelessness is complex and can be the result of a multitude of reasons. Someone may become homeless due to social factors like unemployment and poverty, factors like leaving prison, care, or the armed services without having a home to go to, or because they have been forced to leave their home due to escaping a violent or abusive relationship.

It is the moral responsibility of the government to ensure that all levers are utilised to protect people from the danger and trauma of being homeless. We are calling on the Scottish Government to introduce homelessness prevention duties on public bodies. Echoing on calls from Crisis Scotland, Shelter

⁷ Housing Options Scotland (2022) *Disabled people are struggling more than*

⁸ Scottish Government (2018) *Health and Homelessness in Scotland*. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/health-homelessness-scotland/documents/>

⁹ Scottish Government (2021) *Housing needs of minority ethnic groups: evidence review*. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-needs-minority-ethnic-groups-evidence-review/documents/>

Scotland and the Homelessness Network Scotland, there should be a shared public responsibility to ensure no one ends up without a roof over their head. People facing housing difficulties may be involved with various services before they make contact with housing or homelessness service, highlighting the need for public services to be required to act to prevent someone from losing their home. Services such as health and social care services, children's services, police and prisons may all work with people who are at risk of homelessness, as well as social and private landlords, providing opportunities to identify issues early and intervene.¹⁰

As recommended by the organisations above, public bodies should have a statutory duty to:

- Ask about people's housing situations to identify any issues at an early stage.
- Act where a problem is identified, so that people get the right support to prevent homelessness. This might be by acting within their own powers, or referring on to more appropriate help.
- Work together so that no one leaves an institution such as prison or hospital without somewhere to sleep that night.

Establishing statutory duties on these public services can help to identify risk of homelessness early, and prevent someone from falling through the cracks and ending up without a safe place to live. However, the introduction of a duty alone will be insufficient to improve policy and practice. Statutory duties must be accompanied by adequate funding; support; and capacity building to ensure that they have the transformational impact that is intended.

Adequately fund, and advertise, support to improve energy efficiency in the home, including offering grants for energy efficiency measures for those on the lowest incomes, disabled people and those living with long-term or terminal illnesses.

Improvement of Scotland's housing stock is a necessary action that will help us to meet our climate targets and fight poverty. Upgrading homes would support lowering carbon emissions, reduce rates of fuel poverty, improve health and wellbeing outcomes, and reduce demand on existing energy networks helping us reach our climate targets. The on-going cost of living crisis has re-highlighted the importance of energy efficiency and the efficacy of good insulation for reducing bills and tackling fuel poverty. Despite this, there

¹⁰ Prevention Review Group (2021) *Preventing Homelessness in Scotland*.

is still a significant lack of support for actions that people on low incomes can take to improve the energy efficiency of their homes. This has been particularly true for disabled people who have often faced spiralling costs due to increased energy usage, leading to some disabled people rationing usage of essential media equipment.¹¹

Affordability remains a key barrier to low income households being able to invest in energy efficiency measures. Existing financial support often still requires up-front household investment or taking on loans which is impossible for some households in Scotland. With poor energy efficiency being one of the four key drivers of fuel poverty, as designated by the Scottish Government, it is clear that improving access to energy efficiency upgrades for low income households is critical to addressing fuel poverty and our net zero ambitions.

Upgrading the energy efficiency of Scottish homes is particularly important for tackling poverty in rural communities yet there is a significant lack of detail to available support. Even prior to the cost of living crisis, over 40% of people in Na h-Eileanan Siar were in fuel poverty¹² with poor energy efficiency of housing identified as a key cause. This has been estimated to have risen to as much as 57% this winter.¹³ Recent research from IPSOS has also shown that while there is some support for households to change fuel type or make a property more energy efficient, households in the Highlands and Islands face barriers with cost, accessing tradespeople, and infrastructure.¹⁴

More widely, members of our short life working group such as Marie Curie and Age Scotland have stressed the need to better link housing supply to health outcomes and quality of life. For people with terminal illness, good quality homes are key in allowing people to realise the right to live and die at home. Research from Age Scotland¹⁵ also found that the increase in energy costs were having a hugely negative impact on older people in Scotland:

¹¹ The Alliance (2022) *Disabled people, unpaid carers and the cost of living crisis* available at <https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/ALLIANCE-Cost-of-Living-Report.pdf>

¹² Energy Action Scotland (2021) *Fuel Poverty by Local Authority*. Available at: <https://new.theclaymoreproject.com/uploads/entities/1230/files/News%20Releases/fuelpovertyLAmav V3.pdf>

¹³ BBC News (2022) *How the rising cost of living is hitting islanders*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-60555120>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Age Scotland & ScotInform (2022) *Taking the Temperature* available at <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland/our-impact/policy-research-influencing/reports-research/taking-the-temperature/>

"The increase [in energy costs] means I had to cut back on food often go for weeks with no food. It's making me unwell."

Research from Independent Age also found that older people are very conscious and nervous about the poor energy efficiency in their homes and how this is impacting on their energy bills. One participant stated:

"The thing is that you open the doors to go somewhere, and you lose all the heat. It's forever on your mind... It's a flat roof so the insulation isn't going to be that great... It's a lovely flat [but] they've got these huge storage heaters that cost a fortune to run so that's a problem."¹⁶

Despite this, the majority of older people surveyed by Age Scotland in their *Taking the Temperature* research had not heard of the various schemes available to help them with heating costs.¹⁷ This again evidences the need to provide more support mechanisms and to radically boost awareness to ensure more people are able to benefit. This action is central to helping us eradicate poverty in Scotland and fight the climate emergency.

¹⁶Independent Age (2023) *"Not Enough to Live on" Pensioner Poverty in Scotland*. Available at: <https://www.independentage.org/pensioner-poverty-scotland-report>

¹⁷Age Scotland & Inform Scot (2022) *Taking the Temperature*

Developing our policy asks

This year, the policy asks for Challenge Poverty Week were developed in collaboration with a short life working group with representation from public bodies, the private sector and a variety of third sector organisations. We would like to thank these organisations for their participation in this process.

What we heard from our Short Life Working Group:

- Housing was centrally important to reducing household costs and providing a solid bedrock for good health, security and stability. The on-going chronic shortage of social housing is having detrimental impacts on the population as a whole but is causing particular difficulties for certain groups such as disabled people, people with terminal illnesses and people on low incomes.
- Access to and quality of housing is crucially important for good health. It was important for organisations that actions on housing have analysis on health, including social determinants of health and experience of a terminal illness embedded into policy.
- Disabled people face acute housing access difficulties and organisations felt it was important that was highlighted. There is express need to build more accessible houses and ensure that these homes are energy efficient to protect disabled people from high energy bills to tackle disabled people's poverty.
- The Scottish Government is rightfully giving attention to actions needed to tackle the climate emergency. It is important to recognize areas where actions to tackle the climate emergency can also reduce poverty. We do not have to choose between fighting either climate change or poverty, we can do both. Energy efficiency measures can promote both of our shared national priorities on poverty and climate.
- There was recognition that the housing sector is influenced by private developers and private landlords. The Scottish Government must consider more ways to incentivise these groups to improve housing stock, keep rents down and protect tenants from eviction and subsequent homelessness.

How will this help Scotland to meet our child poverty targets?

- Child poverty rates after housing costs are generally lower in Scotland compared to other parts of the UK due to greater availability of social housing. However, stagnation in the number of new social homes being built is pulling more families into expensive and unsuitable housing.
- The *Bright Start, Bright Futures* delivery plan rightly identified a home as the foundation of family life and is the biggest cost for most households. Provision of more affordable, energy efficient homes reduces overall household expenditure, freeing up income which reduces poverty.

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