



HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING OPTIONS IN WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE

LHS Appendix Report

Summer 2021

Policy Context

Tackling homelessness has been a key focus of Scottish Government policy over recent years and this can be seen from the evolving legislative framework referred to above. Whilst Scotland has some of the strongest rights in the world for anyone experiencing homelessness, there is an ambition to do more to make sure that homeless people can access the accommodation and support they need.

[Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group](#)

Policy has been heavily influenced by the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG) which was set up by the Scottish Government in October 2017 to produce short and long-term solutions to alleviate homelessness and rough sleeping across Scotland.

The group was tasked with developing solutions to the following 4 questions:

- How to reduce rough sleeping (Winter 17/18);
- How to end rough sleeping;
- How to transform temporary accommodation; and
- How to end homelessness in Scotland.

HARSAG initially produced 4 sets of recommendations, all of which the Scottish Government accepted in principle and which informed the joint COSLA/Scottish Government publication the [Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan](#) in November 2018.

This plan sets out the shared direction towards ending homelessness and sets out a vision for transformational change and comprises a wide range of policy actions focusing on tackling homelessness. The action plan's delivery is overseen by the [Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group](#).

[Extension of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order](#)

The Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2014 (UAO) ensured that families with children and pregnant women did not have to stay in unsuitable accommodation such as B&Bs for more than 7 days.

In September 2019 the Scottish Government announced in the Programme for Government that they would extend this order to all homeless households. Initially planned to apply from May 2021, a Scottish Statutory Instrument was laid in parliament which brought forward this date to May 2020.

Comprehensive guidance relating to the provisions within the updated UAO has been developed by a joint Scottish Government and COSLA working group clarity around the requirements of the new Order, including definitions of three models of shared accommodation which can be deemed suitable in certain circumstances.

Modifying local connection referrals

Local Authorities currently have the power to refer homeless households who do not have a local connection with them to another local authority where they do have such a connection. In 2019, the Scottish Government issued a consultation paper inviting views on a recommendation from HARSAG to give Scottish Ministers the power to suspend referrals between local authorities in Scotland.

The policy intention of suspending local connection referrals between Scottish local authorities is to remove barriers to support for people who are homeless or rough sleeping so they can resettle successfully, and avoid repeat homelessness. If people are living in an area of their choosing, they are more likely to integrate successfully into a local community and access the services and support they require.

It was expected that changes will be introduced around May 2021, however as a consequence of the coronavirus pandemic, the legislation to modify local connection will be laid in the next session of parliament. The Scottish Government will monitor the impact of these changes and respond to any local authorities that report undue pressure on service provision.

HARSAG reconvened

Due to impact of Covid-19 the Scottish Government assessed that the national plan to end homelessness needed to be looked at again and in June 2020 the Housing Minister asked HARSAG to reconvene and look at what more should be done to tackle homelessness right now and into the future.

The group subsequently developed and published a detailed set of 105 recommendations in response to the following four questions:

1. What needs to be in place right now for the ongoing emergency?
2. What do we need to do so that people don't get back to sleeping on the streets or staying in homeless shelters?
3. How can we accelerate the pace of work to prevent homelessness?
4. What needs to change in the national Action Plan to end homelessness to recognise the changing circumstances caused by coronavirus?

The Scottish Government have agreed in principle to all the recommendations within the HARSAG report and an updated [Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan](#) was published in October 2020.

Whilst some of the key recommendations are directed towards the Scottish Government future policy, some recommendations, such as those around benefits and support for people regardless of their immigration status, are urgent requests of the UK Government.

In addition, many of the recommendations will require to be delivered by each individual local authority and within West Dunbartonshire the Housing Solutions Partnership will ensure the delivery of these recommendations, highlighting our collaborative approach to tackling homelessness.

Progress in terms of the on-going development and implementation of this comprehensive response being reported regularly to the Housing and Communities Committee to ensure the full delivery of the relevant recommendations.

A cornerstone of the HARSAG recommendations is a transition to a Rapid Re-housing approach which is about taking a housing led approach for re-housing people that have experienced homelessness and making sure they reach a settled housing solution as quickly as possible rather than being forced to stay in unsuitable temporary accommodation for longer than is necessary.

Scottish Social Housing Charter

Our approach to tackling homelessness is linked to the Scottish Social Housing Charter, which sets out the outcomes and standards that all social landlords should be delivering for their tenants and other customers.

The first Charter came into effect on 1 April 2012 and following a review in 2016, a revised Charter was approved by the Scottish Parliament and came into effect from on April 2017.

Scottish Ministers consulted the Scottish Housing Regulator; tenants in social housing and their representative bodies; social landlords; homeless people; and other stakeholders about the Charter's contents to ensure that the outcomes in the Charter:

- describe the results that tenants and other customers expect social landlords to achieve
- cover social landlords' housing activities only
- can be monitored, assessed and reported upon by the Scottish Housing Regulator.

The Charter does not replace any of the legal duties that apply to social landlords, but in several cases the outcomes describe the results social landlords should achieve in meeting their legal duties.

The Council has to report on these outcomes annually to the Scottish Housing Regulator and makes this information available to the public each year in October.

The following Charter Outcomes are of direct relevance to our approach to tackling homelessness:

Outcome 12: Homeless people

Local councils perform their duties on homelessness so that:

- *Homeless people get prompt and easy access to help and advice; are provided with suitable, good-quality temporary or emergency accommodation when this is needed; and are offered continuing support to help them get and keep the home they are entitled to.*

This outcome describes what councils should achieve by meeting their statutory duties to homeless people.

Outcomes 7, 8 & 9: Housing Options

Social landlords work together to ensure that:

- *people looking for housing get information that helps them make informed choices and decisions about the range of housing options available to them*
- *Tenants and people on housing lists can review their housing options.*

Social landlords ensure that:

- *People at risk of losing their homes get advice on preventing homelessness.*

These outcomes cover landlords' duties to provide information to people looking for housing and advice for those at risk of becoming homeless. This could include providing housing 'health checks' for tenants and people on housing lists to help them review their options to move within the social housing sector or to another sector.

Outcome 10: Access to social housing

Social landlords ensure that:

- *people looking for housing find it easy to apply for the widest choice of social housing available and get the information they need on how the landlord allocates homes and on their prospects of being housed.*

This outcome covers what social landlords can do to make it easy for people to apply for the widest choice of social housing that is available and suitable and that meets their needs. It includes actions that social landlords can take on their own and in partnership with others, for example through Common Housing Registers or mutual exchange schemes, or through local information and advice schemes.

Outcome 11: Tenancy sustainment

Social landlords ensure that:

- *Tenants get the information they need on how to obtain support to remain in their home; and ensure suitable support is available, including services provided directly by the landlord and by other organisations.*

This outcome covers how landlords on their own, or in partnership with others, can help tenants who may need support to maintain their tenancy. This includes tenants who may be at risk of falling into arrears with their rent, and tenants who may need their home adapted to cope with age, disability, or caring responsibilities.

Extent and nature of homelessness in West Dunbartonshire

Incidences of homelessness in West Dunbartonshire have reduced significantly in recent years, with a 36% reduction over the period 2008/13 and a further 18% over the period 2013/16.

During the course of our previous Homelessness Strategy “More than a Roof”, which covered the period 2017/20 when there was a further reduction in homeless applications of 2.6% over the 3 year period:

Homelessness in West Dunbartonshire				
Homelessness Strategy 2017/20	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	Reduction
Homeless applications	1048	1037	1021	2.6%

Source: Scottish Government - West Dunbartonshire HL1 figures

The percentage of assessments made where the Council had a duty to rehouse has remained high as shown in in the table below:

Homeless applications and assessments in West Dunbartonshire			
Homelessness Strategy 2017/20	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Homeless applications	1048	1037	1021
Total assessments	1053	1040	1020
Assessed with a duty to house	841	865	854
% with duty to house	79.9%	83.2%	83.7%

Source: Scottish Government - West Dunbartonshire HL1 figures

Who is homeless in West Dunbartonshire?

The age profile of those presenting as homeless in West Dunbartonshire has remained relatively stable in recent years, although in the last year of “More than a Roof” there was an increase in applications from those over 60 years old.

Homeless applications by age						
Age	2017/18		2018/19		2019/20	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
16-17	31	3%	22	2%	38	4%
18-25	259	25%	258	25%	267	26%
26-59	722	69%	715	69%	659	64%
60+	36	3%	42	4%	57	6%
All	1048	100%	1037	100%	1021	100%

Source: Scottish Government - West Dunbartonshire HL1 figures

The rate of youth homelessness continues to be high and a key area of concern and focus. The most recent figures published by the Scottish Government for 2019/20 highlighted West Dunbartonshire as a youth homeless hotspot.

Cases where the main applicant was aged 24 or under at the time of application in 2019-2020.	Assessed as homeless	Mid-2019 population	Youth Homeless per 1000 population
Scotland	7,303	573,722	12.7
Aberdeen City	365	26,964	13.5
Aberdeenshire	300	22,752	13.2
Angus	147	10,717	13.7
Argyll & Bute	90	8,181	11.0
Clackmannanshire	121	5,097	23.7
Dumfries & Galloway	165	13,169	12.5
Dundee City	265	20,881	12.7
East Ayrshire	163	11,779	13.8
East Dunbartonshire	75	10,263	7.3
East Lothian	180	9,729	18.5
East Renfrewshire	59	9,562	6.2
Edinburgh	682	64,964	10.5
Eilean Siar	29	2,083	13.9
Falkirk	218	15,575	14.0
Fife	581	40,061	14.5
Glasgow City	836	79,760	10.5
Highland	276	21,239	13.0
Inverclyde	26	7,607	3.4
Midlothian	113	8,547	13.2
Moray	102	9,272	11.0
North Ayrshire	219	13,456	16.3
North Lanarkshire	444	35,916	12.4
Orkney	24	1,847	13.0
Perth & Kinross	153	13,744	11.1
Renfrewshire	176	18,058	9.7
Scottish Borders	175	10,111	17.3
Shetland	21	2,082	10.1
South Ayrshire	177	10,302	17.2
South Lanarkshire	409	30,800	13.3
Stirling	130	12,313	10.6
West Dunbartonshire	233	8,712	26.7
West Lothian	349	18,179	19.2

There are more applications made from households where the main applicant is male, however this gap reduced over the 3 year period of “More than a Roof” and in 2019/20 a male was recorded as being the main applicant in 52% of applications, compared to 48% of applications where a female was the main applicant.

Homeless applications by sex						
Sex (main applicant)	2017/18		2018/19		2019/20	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Male	599	57%	563	54%	528	52%
Female	449	43%	474	46%	493	48%
All	1048	100%	1037	100%	1021	100%

Source: Scottish Government - West Dunbartonshire HL1 figures

In terms of household type, during the 3 year period of “More than a Roof” over 70% of applications were received from single people and around a quarter were from households with children, the vast majority of these being single parent households.

Homeless applications by household type						
Household type	2017/18		2018/19		2019/20	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Single Person	759	72.4%	754	72.7%	716	70.1%
Single Parent	189	18.0%	190	18.3%	199	19.5%
Couple	48	4.6%	42	4.1%	51	5.0%
Couple with Children	42	4.0%	48	4.6%	50	4.9%
Other	5	0.5%	2	0.2%	4	0.4%
Other with Children	5	0.5%	1	0.1%	1	0.1%
All	1048	100%	1037	100%	1021	100%

The table below details the reasons for homeless applications within West Dunbartonshire over the 3 years of our “More than a Roof” strategy. It can be seen from this table that consistently the core reasons for homelessness in West Dunbartonshire are households being asked to leave their current accommodation and disputes within a household (both violent and non-violent).

Reason for homeless application	2017/18		2018/19		2019/20	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Termination of tenancy/mortgage due to rent arrears/ default on payments	47	4.5	54	5.2	38	3.7
Other action by landlord resulting in the termination of the tenancy	91	8.7	83	8.0	74	7.2
Applicant terminated secure accommodation	19	1.8	21	2.0	36	3.5
Loss of service/tied accommodation	3	0.3	1	0.1	1	0.1
Discharge from prison/hospital/care/other institution	41	3.9	45	4.3	49	4.8

Emergency (fire, flood, storm, closing order from Environmental Health etc.)	9	0.9	15	1.4	8	0.8
Forced division and sale of matrimonial home	7	0.7	7	0.7	3	0.3
Other reason for loss of accommodation	18	1.7	22	2.1	31	3.0
Dispute within household: violent or abusive	186	17.7	168	16.2	214	21.0
Dispute within household / relationship breakdown: non-violent	188	17.9	185	17.8	154	15.1
Fleeing non-domestic violence	43	4.1	27	2.6	38	3.7
Harassment	4	0.4	6	0.6	14	1.4
Overcrowding	2	0.2	3	0.3	18	1.8
Asked to leave	262	25.0	265	25.6	262	25.7
Other reason for leaving accommodation / household	128	12.2	135	13.0	81	7.9
All	1048	100	1037	100%	1021	100%