



# Social Housing and HARSAG 2020

What now? A short guide for social housing providers

**sfha**  
Scottish Federation of  
Housing Associations  
We are housing Scotland

**Homeless  
Network  
Scotland**  
we are all in

# Introduction

## About this guide

Housing ends homelessness. The change programme brought about by the new Rapid Rehousing policy in Scotland is based on overwhelming evidence that ordinary housing in ordinary communities is what most people want and can successfully sustain. This means reducing the reliance and time spent in temporary accommodation, and the scale of congregate style 'homeless' accommodation that has traditionally been used across some parts of Scotland.

Social housing providers have a central contribution to achieving this ambition. And they need effective local systems, supported by national leadership and investment in the supply of housing and the sustained reduction of poverty. The prevention of homelessness, and people's successful resettlement from it, is enabled by strong community supports and resources. Almost all homelessness starts in a community, and this is also where social housing provider's role is key.

This guide streamlines the policy and practice recommendations from the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG), highlighting those most directly relevant to social housing providers. This is intended to assist housing colleagues responsible for local policy and delivery.



## About HARSAG

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG) is a Minister-appointed expert group on housing and homelessness which in 2018 made 70 recommendations including the cornerstone Rapid Rehousing policy objective. Housing Associations are represented on the group.

HARSAG was reconvened in June 2020 in response to the coronavirus crisis and, consulting widely, the group published over 100 recommendations for local authorities, Scottish and UK Governments and other key partners including housing associations, health and the third sector.

The work of the group reflected the focus and pace already set by national and local government; that the nature of the global pandemic meant a rapid response to homelessness and rough sleeping was quickly prioritised. The Rapid Rehousing framework, just one-year old at the start of the pandemic, has since been described by a number of local authorities as the right framework for recovery.

## About the recommendations

The 104 recommendations take an immediate and longer-term view and their purpose is to:

- lockdown policy and practice achievements *during* the pandemic, especially to prevent a return to previous levels of rough sleeping relevant to a small number of local authority areas.
- Protect and build on all that was achieved by all local authorities and their partners in the year *before* the pandemic, the first year of the transition toward a rapid rehousing approach.
- Strengthen recommendations on prevention, housing supply, Housing First, competence on equalities and preventing destitution among people with no recourse to public funds.

## Themes

The general picture across Scotland since the start of the pandemic is that rough sleeping has been largely absent, homelessness applications dropped, temporary accommodation placements risen significantly while social letting stalled. A spike in homelessness also has the potential to lag behind lockdown as the full health, social and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic emerges.

While each part of this general picture is not true in every area<sup>1</sup>, most local authorities are facing an unprecedented challenge now and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has forced a record number of households into temporary accommodation, ultimately reversing the direction of RRTPs, but bringing a broader focus on the links between home and good health.

The HARSAG recommendations to mitigate against the worst impacts of the pandemic can be categorised into 3 themes that are relevant to social housing providers:

### 1. Housing Supply and Lettings

Prioritising rapid rehousing and settled housing options

### 2. Prioritise Prevention

Collective focus on tenancy sustainment and preventing homelessness.

### 3. People in Communities

Improving the social and economic circumstances of local places

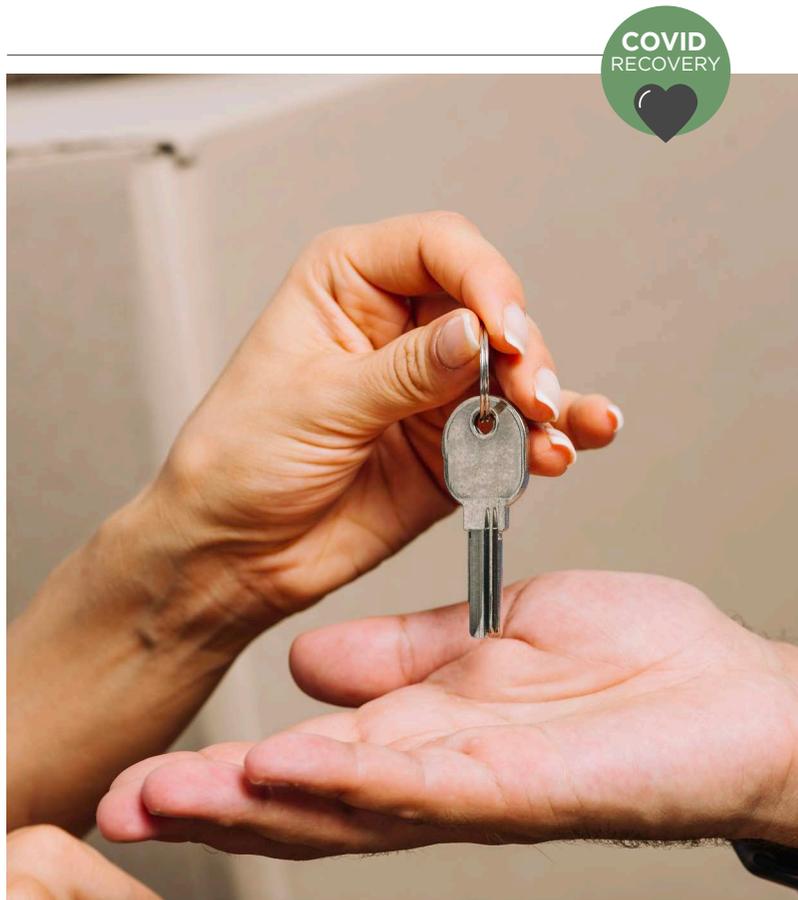
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1. Statistics from [Scottish Housing Regulator](#), compared with [Scottish Government annual homelessness statistics](#), show Scotland as a whole registered 83% of 2019's equivalent figure for homelessness applications, ranging widely between 41%-120%, with only four authorities above 100%. 164% of 2019's level for temporary accommodation placements were made in the same period this year, showing an even wider range (304%-60%), with nine authorities below 100%. Households in temporary accommodation at end June 2020 was at 125% of 2019's figure, ranging from 94%-164%, with five authorities below 100%.

Themes

# 1| Housing Supply & Lettings

Prioritising rapid rehousing and settled housing options

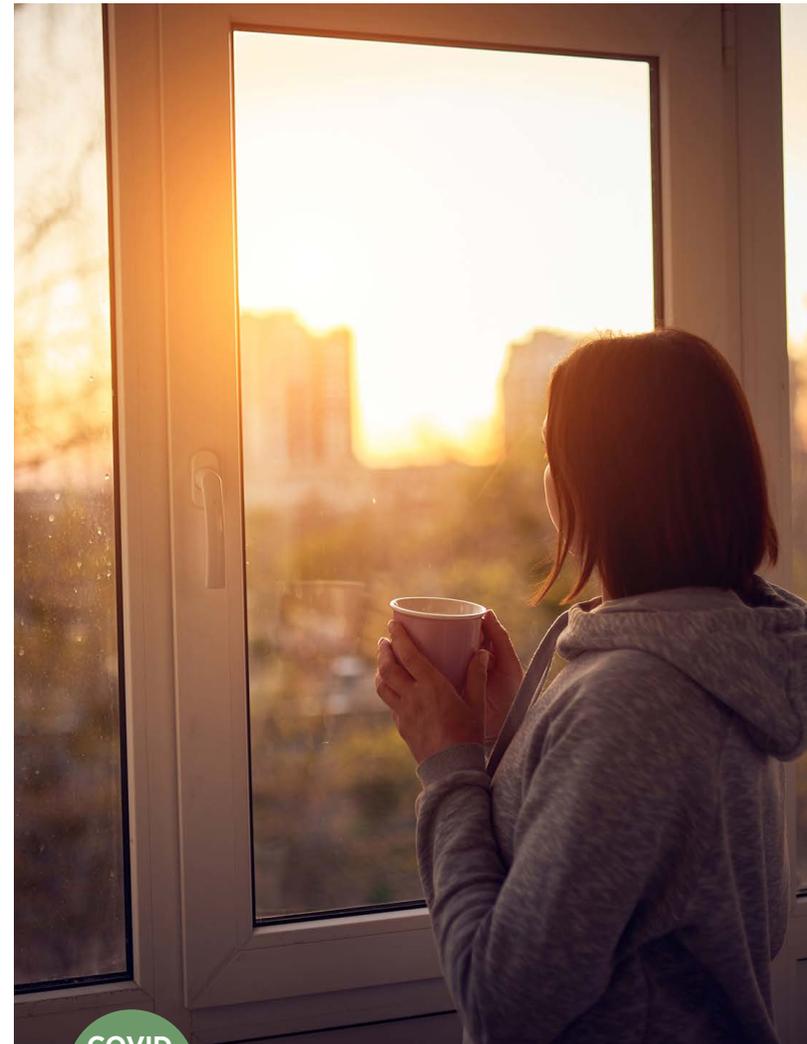


The combination of the pause in most social housing allocations during the coronavirus lockdown period, and the work undertaken by local authorities and their partners across the country provide emergency accommodation for rough sleepers, means that as lockdown restrictions are lifted we face a significant backlog of people in emergency and temporary accommodation who require rapid access to their own tenancies.

HARSAG set out the importance of ensuring an immediate, flexible supply of affordable housing and maximising housing options for everyone to ensure the progress made during the pandemic is not lost. There are specific recommendations to mitigate a post-Covid spike in homelessness that directly relate to housing associations, including:

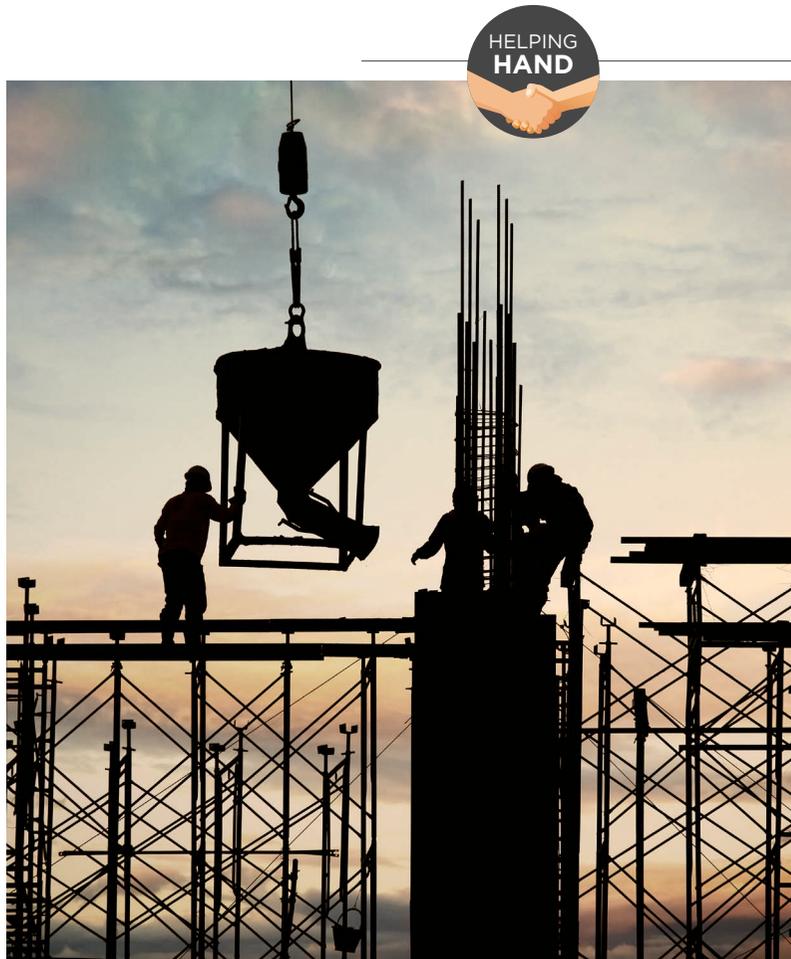
- agree an adequate **proportion of social lets** to homeless households for an emergency period to address backlogs created during the pandemic. This should be at a level that supports rapid rehousing and reduces the numbers of people in temporary accommodation. Local housing associations are key to enabling this.

- Adopt a local policy of pre-lettings against the social housing stock that has continued to become available but not yet ready to let. Prioritise these as **Housing First tenancies** where needed – this will be especially important in Glasgow and Edinburgh during the 2020-21 winter, as high volume night shelter provision will not be available.
- Contributing to the **national Housing First roll-out**, building on the experience of RSL's as part of the Scotland's Housing First Pathfinder to provide secure tenancies in greater numbers alongside local authorities and private landlords.
- Restarting voids processing to speed up lettings, aiming for **at least 75% of voids processing** back up and running by the end of phase 3 of the Scottish Government's route-map.
- HARSAG endorsed [this route-map from the Everyone Home Collective](#) to ensure that people with **no recourse to public funds** have a safe place to stay. Housing Associations will be invited to partner in this approach from 2021.



# Helping Hand

Who and what will help housing associations achieve this?

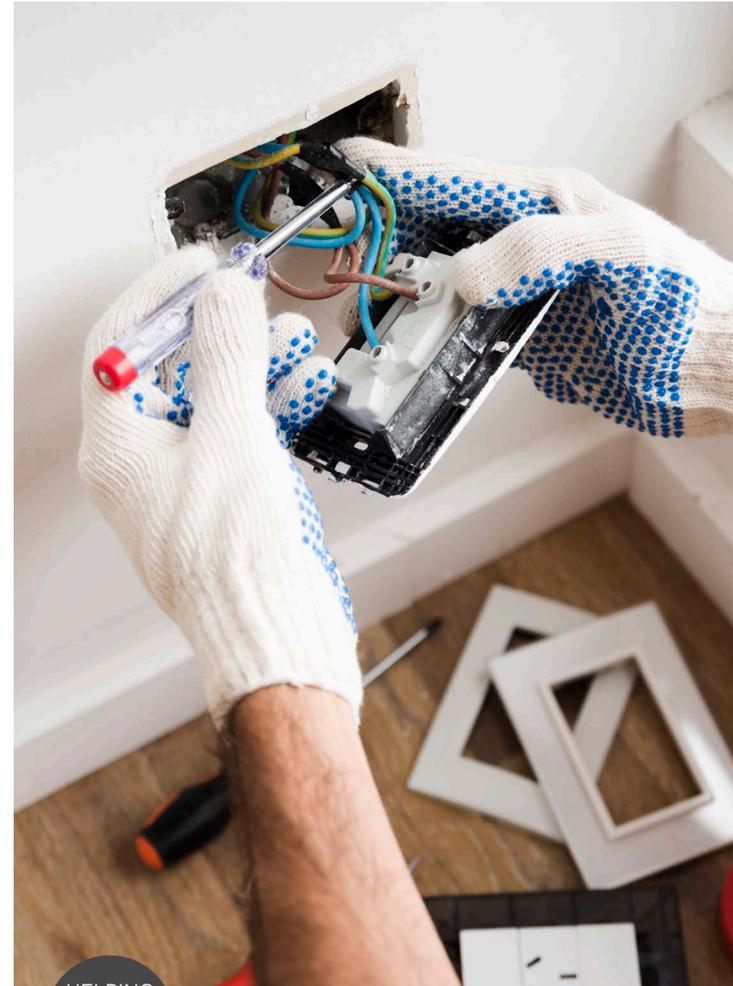


HARSAG also made a range of recommendations for Scottish Government, local authorities and other key partners to **ensure settled housing options** for all that will be of importance to RSL's going forward, providing opportunities for consultation and involvement. These include:

- **Government commitment** to invest in **affordable housing supply** from 2021-26, using an agreed definition of affordability linked to household income. Supply should meet figures [set out in recent research from SFHA](#), CIH Scotland and Shelter Scotland (53,000 affordable homes, of which 37,100 socially rented), targeted to areas of greatest need.
- a range of **national measures** to secure funding and support to **increase affordable supply**:
  - inviting ideas from partners across all sectors to increase housing supply, in the immediate term (2020-21).
  - work with social investors to secure low cost capital to increase housing supply in the medium to longer-term, targeted to areas with greatest shortages.
  - explore alternative funding and investment models, including role of Scottish National Investment Bank.

## Helping Hand

- **national effort** to prioritise existing social housing supply programme as construction restarts.
- **national procurement approach** to support repair and **furnishing** of socially rented voids.
- **Local authorities** to review their Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans, including making any necessary adjustments to baseline data as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic.
- Implementing local options to **convert** self-contained **temporary accommodation** to **settled tenancies** if households choose to stay. ‘Flipping’ has generally been used in social rented accommodation and may involve housing associations who contribute to the local supply of temporary accommodation (e.g. temporary furnished flats).
- **Local Authorities** to develop and implement **tailored housing options** for groups with specific housing needs and circumstances: young people, those experiencing domestic abuse, gypsy/travellers and people with no Housing Benefit entitlement.
- **national framework** to support **rapid scaling of Housing First** in all areas; stabilising funding for Pathfinder providers with considerations of national commissioning/procurement options.
- for **Scottish Government** to pursue a right to adequate housing through a **Human Rights Bill**.



## 2 | Prioritise Prevention

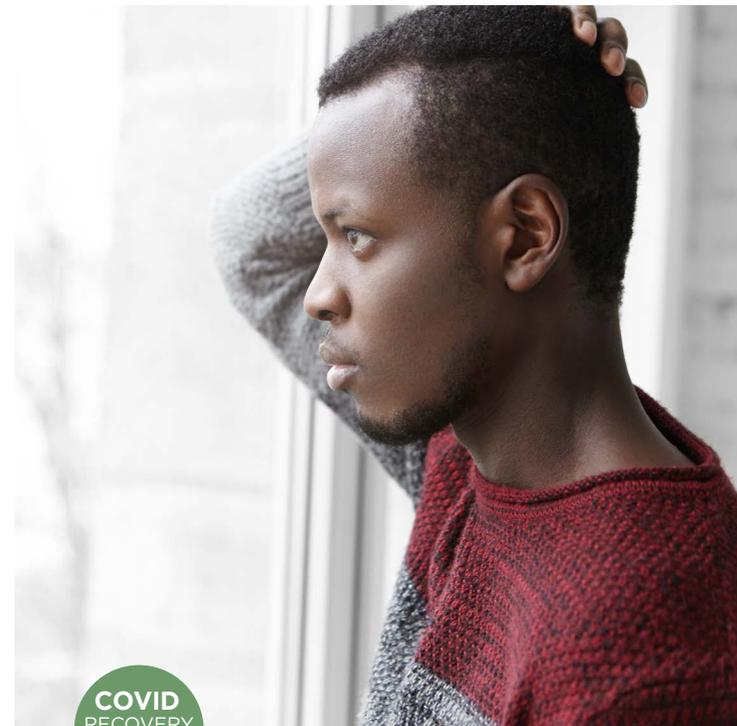
### Collective focus on tenancy sustainment and preventing homelessness

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG) recommended a renewed, sharper focus on the work needed to promote tenancy sustainment and prevent homelessness, prioritising interventions for those evidenced to be at a greater risk of homelessness. As with the previous set of recommendations, HARSAG renewed its belief that where homelessness is predictable, it is preventable.

Achieving this requires social housing providers from all over Scotland, with a number of specific recommendations to promote tenancy sustainment and prevent homelessness that directly relate to housing associations, including:

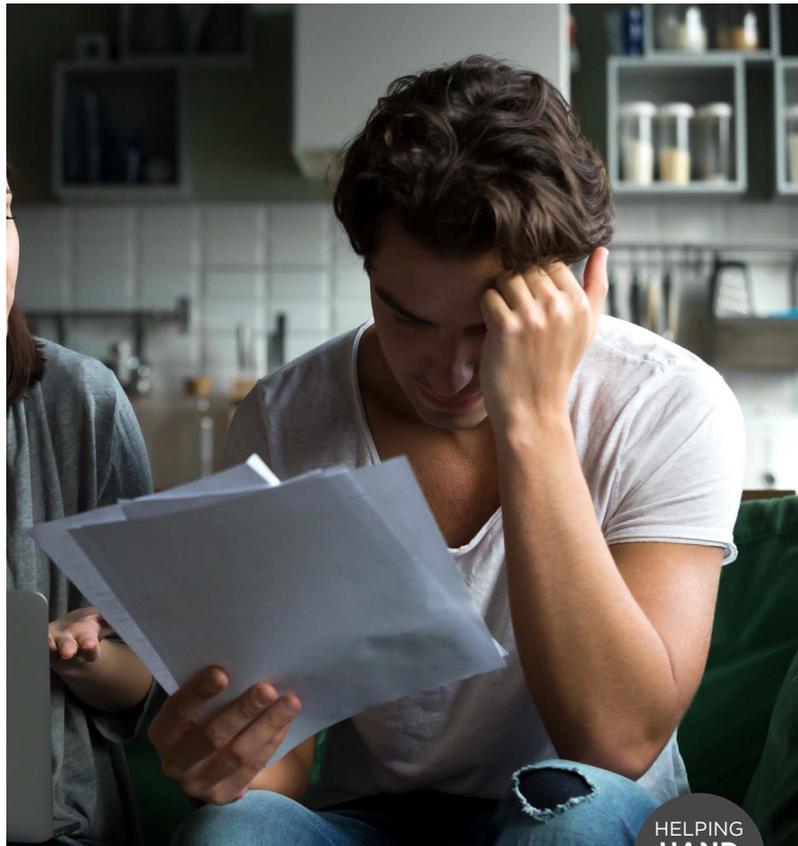
- target, strengthen and test new approaches to **prevent homelessness of tenants** from both social and private sectors who are at risk due to arrears, developing **early warning systems** at a local level.
- strengthen **Section 11** processes with RSLs, PRS landlords and creditors, reviewing the timing and the quality of your response to these.
- focus **housing management approaches** within the social rented sector on early warning and intervention, which facilitate tenants' access to independent advice, advocacy and housing support.

- extend the protections for renters from eviction proceedings into 2021, working towards a position of '**no evictions into homelessness**' from social or private rented sector.



# Helping Hand

Who and what will help housing associations achieve this?



HARSAG also made a range of recommendations for Scottish Government, local authorities and other key partners to **promote tenancy sustainment and prioritise homelessness prevention** that will be of importance to RSL's going forward, providing opportunities for consultation and involvement.

These include:

- local processes to **obtain** and **analyse evidence** on which groups are at heightened risk of homelessness locally, making use of in-house data, data from RSLs and the third sector, and national trends. This includes collecting information on the number of households at risk of eviction due to arrears.
- develop a strategy to raise and target **awareness of the financial help** available to those in housing difficulty from Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) and Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF).
- design **protocols with public bodies** to ensure **people exiting institutions** have housing to go to and a plan in place, focused on idea of *asking about* then *acting* on housing situation.

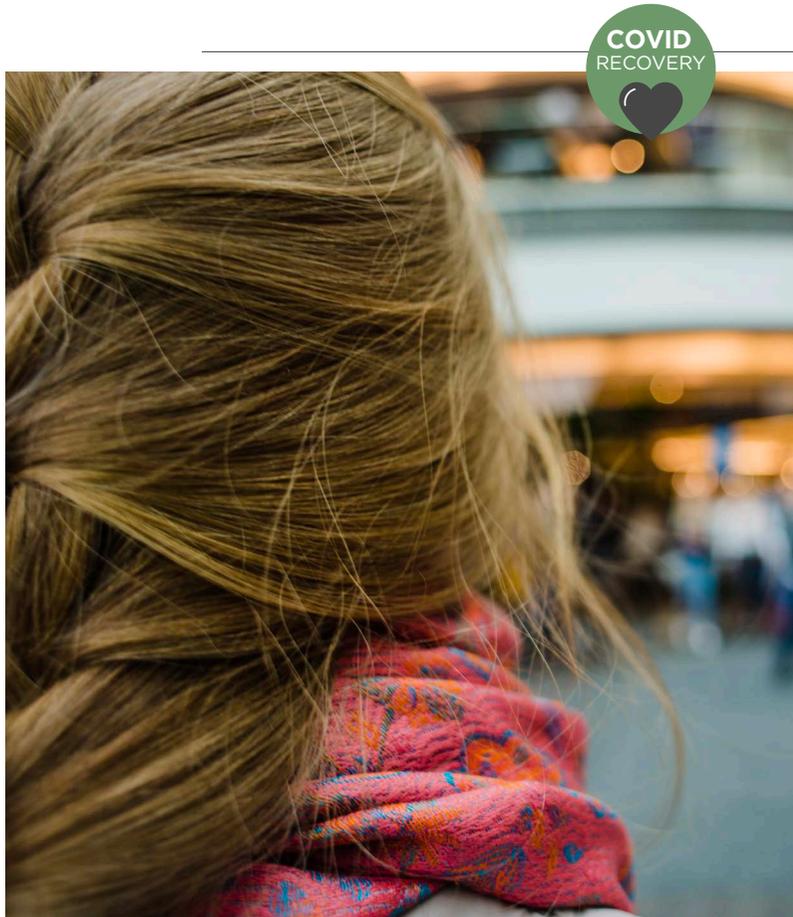
## Helping Hand

- step up access to **mediation** for households at risk from relationship breakdown. This is particularly relevant for young people but can be successful with all age groups.
- a **national advice and information strategy** on what people should do if they find themselves at risk of homelessness. To be supported by the launch of a national public awareness campaign to reduce stigma and prompt early action.
- **national learning and sharing programme of what's worked** to prevent homelessness and obtain settled housing in year one of RRTPs, including evaluation of Housing First Pathfinders, with practical resources for local authorities.
- **continued investment** in Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP), Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) and **funding** for dedicated money advice, welfare advice and housing rights support.
- **legislation and supporting work on preventing eviction** from rented housing, including extending the current period of forbearance for notices from 30 September to 31 March (*now expected*).



# 3| People In Communities

Improving the social and economic circumstances of local places



The wider role played by Registered Social Landlords has been pivotal in improving the social and economic circumstances of local communities across Scotland, many with a focus on equalities. There are a number of recommendations that will benefit from being designed and delivered in partnership with social housing providers, including:

- the development of a **local domestic abuse strategy** which sets out tenure-specific protocols for supporting households, has housing representation at Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences, provides domestic abuse training for staff and, during COVID-19, enables access to immediate advice and accommodation (including for those with no access to public funds).
- adopt a **prevention approach** centred on enabling survivors of **domestic abuse** to remain at home in all cases where this is their preferred option.
- ensure **pathways** into services are **gender-sensitive** and offer access to specialist support for people experiencing **domestic abuse** or engaged in **commercial sexual exploitation**.

- **exploration of social security changes in Scotland**, to enable people with NRPF to be supported. This might be through creating new benefits within devolved powers or changing eligibility criteria of devolved benefits so entitlement to reserved benefits is not sole qualifying criteria.
- a clear, accessible **communications strategy** on where all households can get advice, support and accommodation, including specific focus on people not entitled to public funds and those experiencing domestic abuse.
- offer **bespoke prevention, support and housing pathways** for young people, households experiencing domestic abuse, migrant homeless households, people leaving state institutions, LGBTQ+ households and gypsy/travellers.
- put in place a **prevention, access, support and advice** pathway specific to **young people** which considers their particular service access, communication, affordability and employability needs.
- a strategy and procedure for meeting housing needs of **homeless households** with entitlement to public funds, but **who do not** (or no longer) **have statutory duty** (i.e. duty discharged).
- ability to facilitate **access to immigration advice, repatriation support and social work assessment** for households with no access to public funds.
- link **EEA nationals** in with support, where needed, to apply to the **EU settlement scheme**.
- link **EEA nationals** with no Right to Reside and those with **leave to remain** and an NRPF condition into employability services and support to access onward housing.
- **national guidance on No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)**, supported by COSLA and the collective, with resources and training to be provided through Housing Options Hubs.
- **programme to support EEA nationals to apply to EU settlement scheme**, including access to independent specialist, including OISC accredited, advice, housing and benefits advice, and information and technology required to apply.
- **national recognition and accelerated workforce development** for front-line housing and homelessness staff as key workers who play a critical role in social care provision.

