



THE CHANGE TEAM'S RESPONSE TO THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT'S CONSULTATION ON NEW DUTIES TO PREVENT HOMELESSNESS

MARCH 2022

Launched in 2019 the All in for Change programme is led by a group of people dedicated to helping make the changes needed to end homelessness in Scotland, and influence others to do the same. With either personal or frontline experience of homelessness, and some with both, the Change Team share invaluable insights into how Scottish policy and legislation is being translated into practice, and how this is impacting people experiencing homelessness and those working to support them.

Prevention has been a main priority for the Change Team since the programme launched. Members of the Change Team formed the Prevention Commission, a lived experience advisory group to the Prevention Review Group. They led on the recommendations to enforce a duty to 'ask and act' on homelessness.

The Change Team supports the focus Scottish Government are putting on prevention and reduce the risk of people getting to a point of crisis.

We think, however, there needs to be more consideration around how the duties will be implemented in practice, when services are already under a lot of pressure. More awareness is needed, and the right staff, training and resources put in place. Care needs to be taken around language used as we think that some public services may not recognise that 'homelessness prevention' is their responsibility.

It will be important that trust is built between those seeking support and those delivering it, avoiding these duties becoming a tick box exercise, and allowing people to feel in control of the decisions being made.

SHARED PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY

We feel strongly that homelessness should be a shared public responsibility as it is too complex an issue to only sit within one sector. Joined up working between health, social care and housing must be improved, as we believe that without secure tenancies becoming a considered and shared responsibility, change won't happen.

We think that more awareness and understanding is needed around the importance of a shared public duty. Joint working across all sectors is a key part of the necessary culture change that will enable organisations to shift their resources to preventing homelessness.

DUTY TO ASK AND ACT

We strongly support the duty to ask and act. However, there are a number of things that need to be fully considered for this to work as intended:

- These duties will impact on a wide range of public bodies who are all under pressure. Therefore awareness of the importance of the new duty, and support to implement it, will be crucial to help frontline workers embed it in their practice. Public services need to acknowledge and understand their responsibilities, and supported to deliver.
- To support people to engage in services there needs to be a focus on building up relationships, with public services encouraged to better connect with the communities they serve. This can take time and will require a change in culture for many public services.
- Mental health training and awareness around neurodiversity and disability will be needed, as well as the implementation of trauma informed practice. Processes will need to be put in place to ensure that care is taken when asking people about their housing situation and home life, and advice available on how to spot signs of potential crises and bring sensitive issues into conversation.
- We believe that the duties can provide an opportunity for building local capacity and knowledge about services and improving signposting and referrals, but more funding will be needed to ensure that good practice is adopted.
- There is a risk that people will become overwhelmed, being repeatedly asked by different services about their home situation. A one-stop shop would allow people to address all of their support needs in one place without repeating their story. These would need to be accessible with good communication and flexible opening hours.

CHOICE AND CONTROL

VS. SECURE TENANCIES

We strongly believe that meaningful choice and control is vital in tackling and preventing homelessness but we hold varying opinions on how this should be done.

We think choice and flexibility is important to allow people to build links within a chosen area and community, and people also need secure tenancies to flourish in these communities.

If having flexibility in terms of location means less secure tenancies, then this doesn't seem like a choice, instead a decision people will need to take based on what would cause them the least harm. It becomes a question of whether people risk losing their current right to secure tenancies, often in areas that cut them off from family and friends, in order to gain a few more (potentially less secure) housing options, none of which are necessarily ideal and with no guarantee for support if things don't work out.

We therefore believe there needs to be an alternative, where people don't have to choose between flexibility and security.

When considering how this will be implemented in practice, we question whether there will always be a choice, or whether this choice will ever feel forced? Especially for those who have been waiting to be housed for a long time who feel pressured to take what is on offer and avoid being deemed intentionally homeless.

We know that there are other ways of renting that haven't been covered by the proposals. For example, we see a gap in the current proposal where two friends are not able to put forward a joint application to share a tenancy and support each other. Options like this are needed, with the right safeguards in place to support people if relationships break down.

There needs to be more support to give people real choice and control, respecting that we all have different needs and empowering people to take ownership of their own situation. People will base these decisions on their experiences, values and where they are on their homelessness journey. What matters most is that people feel safe and secure.

THE CHANGE TEAM | KEEP IN TOUCH

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