

Supported Housing Task and Finish Group

Summary Report

July 2024

This is a summary report. The full version of this report is [available here](#).

1. About this report

- 1.1 Rapid Rehousing became core homelessness policy in Scotland in 2018. This focus on faster access to mainstream housing also created the need for a review of the role of supported forms of shared accommodation for two reasons:
- To bring supported housing more confidently, and proportionately, into the mix of housing options locally.
 - To intersect homelessness policy with health and social care policy, which is to support people to live independently at home or in a “homely setting”.
- 1.2 The group met seven times over fourteen months between November 2022 and January 2024. The cross-sector membership of professional and lived experience helped achieve a rounded perspective and evidence-based approach.
- 1.3 The group’s recommendations draw from:
- Evidence and research on supported housing and on choice and control, including from the perspective of people who’ve stayed in supported housing.
 - A survey with local authorities to achieve shared understanding of the current extent, nature, function and cost of supported housing locally.
 - Expert contributions on specialist shared accommodation models, methods for assessing housing support needs, and gaps in current housing support provision.

2. The backdrop

- 2.1 This report enters an exceptionally challenging environment. The relative optimism of the period that set in motion this work has been displaced by post-covid social and economic impact, a national housing emergency, cost-of-living crisis and major pressure on public finances. This has impacted in profound ways, including rising homelessness and the largest number of households in temporary accommodation on record in Scotland.
- 2.2 Control over where we live is a key factor in our personal wellbeing and living our life the way we want to. This basic tenet to a decent life is compromised by housing shortages and especially so in temporary or shared forms of accommodation.

- 2.3 Consequently, it is important that housing emergency planning at national and local level prioritises work that focuses on reducing temporary accommodation and on the better targeting of shared and supported forms of housing.

3. Learning by doing

- 3.1 Since devolution, Scotland has increased rights to housing and support and moved away from large scale hostel accommodation. Many smaller scale supported housing projects emerged, while more recently Housing First has started to scale up for people affected by multiple forms of disadvantage and adversity.
- 3.2 As Housing First branches out, more has been learnt about the circumstances where it does not work (less than 10% of tenancies), or where people do not want a mainstream housing option at this point in their lives.
- 3.3 Small scale supported housing is intended to provide a specialist housing and support service equipped to meet specific equalities and/or health and social care considerations. However, due to wider housing pressures people are staying longer than they need it, or a temporary placement to supported housing is made when a mainstream housing option would be more appropriate for the person.
- 3.4 Further, the complexity of the funding arrangements, the variable quality of buildings used, the different approaches to support, and the use of shared-unit temporary accommodation (commonly called rapid access or emergency accommodation) have cluttered the landscape and blurred the edges between suitable and unsuitable temporary accommodation and shared and supported accommodation.
- 3.5 The evidence that informed the work of the group concluded that most people do not want to share a bedroom, bathroom or kitchen. But that some people do want on-site support, defined by self-contained homes with own bathrooms and cooking facilities, with an element of common or office space either on-site or nearby. It is the *option*, rather than requirement, to tap into any shared areas that is key here.

4. Current picture of supported housing

- 4.1 A survey of local authorities gathered current information on supported housing provided as a response to homelessness in their area. The survey asked who owns the buildings, who provides the on-site support and for whom, and how much it costs (*please see full report for data breakdown and estimate future demand*).
- 4.2 28 of 32 local authorities responded. 19 local authorities confirmed they commissioned a total of 115 supported housing projects. And while most local authorities plan to continue to provide supported housing, short-term contracts and frequent recommissioning processes are routine.

- 4.3 The vast majority of buildings supported housing is provided from are owned by the local authority or an RSL; over 80% (19 areas) according to the survey undertaken for this report. Most on-site support is provided by third sector organisations.
- 4.4 The local authority is usually the planner and commissioner of supported housing. It is common for RSLs and the third sector to jointly provide it, either through (i) leasing arrangements, with the third sector responsible for management of housing and support; or (ii) shared management, where the RSL retains responsibility for property management and the third sector provides on-site support.
- 4.5 Over half of supported housing would need some or a full refurbishment to meet optimal physical standards described in this report. Only one third do not currently require residents to share a bedroom, bathroom, kitchen or living space.

5. How it is currently funded

- 5.1 Funding for supported housing is a complex package spanning housing and support costs, alongside capital costs where relevant to build, purchase or develop housing. The main sources of funding for supported housing are:
- DWP Housing Benefit and service charges which pay for the cost of providing, managing and maintaining housing and include enhanced housing benefit.
 - Housing support services, largely funded by the local authority (96% in our survey), to provide on-site support for residents.
 - Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) funding in some cases where additional care is required, and specific eligibility requirements are met.
 - Capital funding for supported housing provided by RSLs has been available from the Scottish Government through the Affordable Housing Supply Programme. However, this is only available where a Scottish tenancy is being used, which most supported housing does not. RSLs report challenges with the system of recycling capital grant attached to a property which is no longer fit for purpose.
- 5.2 This complexity of funding arrangements is poorly understood and detrimental to everyone involved:
- For residents of supported housing: complex DWP funding rules create high rents, an acute ‘benefit trap’ and a major barrier to employment or learning.
 - For housing and support providers: short term contracts and budget pressures create a precarious funding situation and represent a high level of risk.
 - For national and local government: unintended consequences of complex funding and a tightening of rules expected following a recent DWP investigation.

6. Future role of supported housing

6.1 Having a housing option that is 'settled for as long as you want it' is a vital part of providing the safety and ontological security that people need, but with the choice and autonomy to later move onto mainstream housing if things change.

6.2 The following features are important if supported housing is to offer a secure and appropriate home of choice for people:

(i) Physical environment

- Self-contained home in a homely setting – no shared bedrooms, kitchens, toilets and washing facilities.
- Integrated into a community.
- Smaller the better, with maximum 12-14 self-contained homes.

For example, a core and cluster housing model with care and support (the 'core') on-site. Individual homes may have the 'core' in the same building or individual homes may be scattered in the neighbourhood near the core.

(ii) Service design

- Promotes independence, choice and control.
- A progressive approach to safeguarding which protects people from harm and from discrimination.
- Support is delivered by a skilled and valued workforce and meets or exceeds Care Inspectorate quality frameworks.
- Has inclusive visitor policies and in line with Anne's Law.
- Routes to service from across all parts of housing, health and social care, no longer a 'homeless' service.

(iii) Legal and financial

- Maximises security of tenure – a private residential tenancy or Scottish Secure Tenancy.
- Progressive commissioning partnership between strategic housing authorities and HSCPs.
- Combined funding model of affordable rent with support costs met through the general local authority fund, housing support and HSCPs.

6.3 The key challenge is to deliver a model of funding that enables housing and support to be separated and for providers to find a stable core support model that is also sufficiently flexible to be person centered and meet the changing needs of tenants.

7. The circumstances in which it should be used

7.1 There are two main circumstances in which supported housing offers an option for people who have connected with homelessness services:

- (i) As a **health and social care centred response** for:
 - a. Some people who lack capacity to comprehend a standard tenancy agreement and/or the consequences of not meeting its conditions (such as an acquired brain injury resulting in severe cognitive impairment).
 - b. Some people whose health or social care needs exceed what can realistically be catered for in mainstream housing.

A person should be able to choose to opt out of a supported housing option, even if they meet one or both of these descriptions.

Or:

- (ii) As a **housing and homelessness centred** response for people who do *not* fit the description at point (i) above, but who:
 - a. Expressly *do not* want (or have not sustained) mainstream housing, including Housing First.
 - b. Expressly *do* want shared and supported housing.
 - c. Are a young person under 25 who wants to stay in supported housing (which can be considered transitional, not temporary).

7.2 While the routes to supported housing and reasons for choosing it will be unique within and across both categories, we intend no differentiation between the type of supported housing service. This overarching approach is what will enable consistency in quality of environment, care and support.

8. How much is needed?

8.1 Around 50% of people who are assessed as homeless each year do not have support needs beyond their need for housing. Of those that do need support, most can be met in mainstream housing with general housing support, while a smaller 10-15% would benefit from further support enabled by the Housing First approach.

8.2 Approximately 2-5% might be considered best fit for supported housing, which is between 796 and 1,964 people each year, based on the most recent homelessness data published by the Scottish Government.

9. Conclusions

9.1 The overall goal is to provide high-quality supported housing as a settled housing option for the small number of people who don't want or can't sustain mainstream housing. The future role of supported housing as a response to homelessness in Scotland can be further summarised as:

- Being jointly planned and commissioned by strategic housing authorities and health and social care partnerships, with the local authority retaining overall responsibility for people who enter the homelessness system.
- Maximising security of tenure, toward models that use Scottish Secure Tenancies or, in some models, Private Residential Tenancies.
- Having adequate capital and revenue funding to mitigate the 'benefit trap' created by high rents that prevent people's access to employment or learning opportunities and create unintended consequences for local authorities.
- Located in the community with routes to services from all parts of housing, health and social care – breaking the legacy of 'homeless' supported housing and breaking down 'care group' silos and stigma at a local level.
- Be self-contained homes with own bedrooms, bathrooms and cooking facilities and with easy access to great support on-site or nearby.

9.2 This represents a new direction of travel that will need changes to the way that supported housing is commissioned, and a transformative programme that enables social landlords to remodel or re-provision existing models of supported housing.

10. Recommendations

10.1 For Scottish Government:

- Adopt a policy that consolidates the role and aspirations for supported housing as defined in this report.
- Review where the AHSP can create opportunities for capital funding to be reinvested in the re-provisioning or refurbishment of existing supported housing and supplement this scope with a grant programme.
- Create a discretionary fund to ensure that people who want to 'earn or learn' are not prevented by the funding mechanisms from doing so anymore.
- Launch and support a joint leadership network for the heads of HSCPs, councils and housing associations. We need collective leadership for integrated planning and commissioning around core elements of housing, health and social care, including supported housing, prevention duties, Housing First and complex care.

- Reclassify supported housing as a settled housing option into which a local authority can discharge their homeless duty in specific circumstances and providing it meets specific standards.
- Underpin the local strategic assessment of housing support needs introduced in the Housing (Scotland) Bill with a standardised tool to identifying support needs at the person-level and at the local area level.
- The new guidance for local authorities and partners to undertake a strategic assessment of housing support needs in their area should include the 2-5% guide range for supported housing recommended in this report.
- Use the fuller framework of the proposals for a National Care Service to examine and to remove the limitations that current funding arrangements for supported housing place on people's lives and aspirations.

10.2 For local authorities and health and social care partnerships:

- Develop a joint strategic plan that bridges RRTP and HSCP strategic and delivery plans, is based on a local strategic assessment of supports needs and involves delivery partners in housing associations and third and independent sectors. Plans should embrace innovation in joint planning, commissioning and delivery and include the 2-5% guide range for supported housing described in this report.
- Adopt a progressive funding model of affordable rent to cover housing related costs alongside adequate funding through the general local authority fund, housing support and HSCP funding to cover care and support costs.
- Adopt ethical commissioning and procurement practices and longer-term contracts with delivery partners in housing associations and across the third and independent sectors.

10.3 For housing and support providers:

- Consider the extent to which what is currently provided meets the future role of supported housing described in this report and what could be remodelled or reprovioned to be structured around a human rights approach.
- Work with the local authority and HSCP on an integrated plan for supported housing in your area, contributing to a strategic assessment of housing support needs and assessment of supported housing provision.
- Safeguarding is a significant factor for all forms of shared or congregate housing; balancing safety with autonomy and choice is inherently challenging in communal settings, but aspiring to do this well must be a core component.