

24 October 2024

For the attention of:

Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice
Councillor Maureen Chalmers
COSLA Community Wellbeing Spokesperson

Dear Ms Somerville and Ms Chalmers

We are writing as representatives of organisations from across Scotland who work with people affected by homelessness to express our serious concern that people's lives will be put at serious risk this winter unless the Scottish Government, COSLA and council leaders work together to ensure that everyone who needs it has, as a minimum, safe accommodation.

The homelessness statistics that were published on 24 September show that rough sleeping is rising steeply in Scotland. During the last year, there was an increase in the number of people who had slept rough to 2,931, now 7% of all households making a homeless application. Notably this is a higher number than pre-pandemic.

Every person who is forced to sleep rough is one too many. Being left with no choice but to sleep in doorways and tunnels and parks severely damages people's health and wellbeing, risks their safety and their lives, strips them of dignity and affects our wider communities too. In Scotland in 2024, no one should be left with no choice but to sleep on the street, **and we emphasise that forcing people to do so at any time of year and particularly during winter puts their life at risk.**

The primary reason for the increase in rough sleeping is the housing emergency and the ongoing use of unsuitable temporary accommodation in Scotland. But what is especially concerning this year is the snowballing effect caused by other factors - the cost-of-living crisis, austerity policies, and inadequate social security, amongst others.

In particular, we recognise that the Home Office bear a responsibility to ensure that people granted Leave to Remain have adequate housing. The Home Office should work more closely with local authorities to prevent the homelessness of those affected, including providing resource to local authorities to help ensure a smooth transition from asylum accommodation to settled housing. **We have today written to the Home Secretary to ask for her urgent attention to this matter.**

Homeless Network Scotland

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We emphasise that we are extremely concerned that the lack of emergency accommodation is putting people's fundamental right to life at risk. Article 2 of the Human Rights Act 1998 protects everyone's right to life. This includes a duty on Government to take appropriate measures to safeguard life and take steps to protect you if they know or should have known that your life is at risk. Public authorities should also consider the right to life when making decisions that affect life expectancy. **We have therefore also today written to the Scottish Human Rights Commission to ask them to urgently investigate the human rights of people forced to sleep rough and to make recommendations to government at all levels about steps required in this area to fulfil their human rights obligations.**

It is vital that the Scottish Government and local authorities do all that they can to protect lives this winter. Some council areas are more exposed than others, and agreement is urgently needed on the allocation of resources and approach that will ensure that there is sufficient emergency accommodation of the right sort and in the right place. It is not acceptable for individuals to bear the brunt of government decision makers failure to create the breakthrough that is urgently needed. **We are clear that both the Scottish Government and local authorities have the responsibility and the means to fix this accelerating and avoidable rough sleeping crisis, and we insist that you urgently work together to ensure that everyone who needs it has, as a minimum, safe accommodation.**

In turn the Everyone Home collective, made up of nearly 40 third and academic sector organisations focused on housing and homelessness, are ready to support and enable this in every way we can and will continue to provide information, advice and support to people affected.

We look forward to receiving your assurance that you will both urgently meet to address this preventable crisis - those sleeping outside tonight on Scotland's streets in the cold and damp and with their safety and wellbeing at serious risk, deserve no less.

Yours sincerely

The Everyone Home Collective

cc. Minister for Housing Paul McLennan MSP

Leader of all Scottish councils

Scottish Human Rights Commission

Secretary of State for the Home Department, The Rt Hon. Yvette Cooper MP



Prof Suzanne Fitzpatrick
 Director I-SPHERE
 at Heriot Watt University



Chris Birt
 Associate Director
 for Scotland
 Joseph Rowntree Foundation



Sabir Zazai
 Chief Executive
 Scottish Refugee Council



Ekta Marwaha
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Prof Sarah Johnsen
 Chair in Homelessness and
 Inclusion Health
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Patrick McKay
 Director of Operations
 Turning Point Scotland



Leona McDermid
 Chief Executive
 Aberdeen Foyer



All in For Change
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 frontline experience



Alasdair Bennett
 Chief Executive Bethany
 Christian Trust



Gary Meek
 Chief Executive
 Blue Triangle



Richard Howat
 Chief Executive
 Churches Action for
 the Homeless



Matt Downie
 Chief Executive
 Crisis



Vic Walker
 Adult Care Director
 Crossreach



Ewan Aitken
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 Cyrenians



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Angela Devine
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Move On



Aaliya Seyal
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Janet Haugh
Chief Executive
Right There



Kate Polson
Chief Executive
Rock Trust



Karen Barr
Chief Executive
Rowan Alba



Pam Hunter
Chief Executive
Say Women



Sylvia Hinton
Colonel
Secretary for Scotland



Girijamba Polubothu
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Shakti Women's Aid



Alison Watson
Director
Shelter Scotland



Lorraine McGrath
Chief Executive
Simon Community Scotland



Josh Littlejohn
Chief Executive
Social Bite



Ricky McAddock
Chief Executive
Street Connect



David Duke
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Street Soccer Scotland



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