

Staying the course in a perfect storm

Report from the
Homeless Network Scotland
Members Forum | 27 February 2025



**Homeless
Network
Scotland**
we are all in

Introduction

The housing emergency is a direct driver of rising homelessness. But instead of settling for old, failed solutions – ‘shared air’ shelters, making people jump through hoops to get a home – we want a system focused on the best outcomes for everyone, including people facing multiple challenges or who have come to Scotland to seek safety or build a life.

That means defending the rights-based, values-led homelessness system we have. Directing resources in the right way – to prioritise a system built on rapid rehousing with effective prevention at its core, scaling up Housing First, using supported accommodation more effectively, joining up health and social care and homelessness funding, bringing empty homes and commercial properties into the mix.

Diverting from current models of raising and spending public resources – by using wealth and land taxation to build better services, with excellent social housing a priority.

But what is just as important is the sequencing of this work, so we don’t self-sabotage our efforts. We built up strong housing rights without the corresponding supply of homes to make them real. That’s why we’re in a crisis. We need to learn from that lesson.

How do we influence together to ensure the right things happen in right order? That was the overarching question colleagues tackled during our 2 hours together. As a jumping off point, we used the ‘Defend, Direct, Divert’ route-map created collaboratively by 250 attendees at last year’s annual homelessness conference.



Defend



Direct



Divert

A route-map starts here:

Defend

The modernisation of services and the legal and intellectual progress that we want to defend.



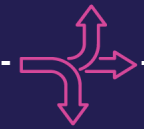
Direct

Where more clarity and direction is needed to sequence the actions that need taken.



Divert

Where we need to grasp the nettle. Stop doing what doesn't work and release resources trapped there.



Policy and Structures

- Defend rights and the ability to have a choice.
- Defend the progress made to dismantle the old legal hurdles to getting homelessness help.
- Defend the Ending Homelessness Together Plan and Rapid Rehousing Policy.
- Defend the suspension of local connection and ensure it is not brought back.
- Defend the ability for refugees to move to an area that suits them – where they will be able to access community and support services.
- Defend the Housing Bill prevention duties.

People and Services

- Defend choice and people's right to define what home means for them.
- Defend vulnerable adults and those most exposed to harm.
- Defend small caseloads and longer-term support.
- Defend trauma informed environments and space for reflective practice.
- Defend people with no recourse to public funds.

Resources

- Defend rapid rehousing funding.
- Defend a well-resourced Housing First model and the principle of Housing First.

Policy and Structures

- Create a long-term Affordable Housing Supply Programme over multiple years.
- Provide a clear method to transition to a rapid rehousing policy at local level.
- We need 'home' centred in all sectors and especially the relevant bodies.
- Increase support and guidance for place-based approaches to homelessness prevention.

People and Services

- Direction for frontline staff on how new prevention duties will work across all relevant bodies.
- Direction on how to provide a gendered approach in homelessness services.
- Direction on how to scale up Housing First more rapidly.
- Direction and clarity on the role of supported housing as a response to homelessness.

Resources

- Provide direction to increase joint planning and commissioning by housing, health and social care.
- This is needed for key pillars of the homelessness plan, including prevention, Housing First and transforming supported housing.

Policy and Structures

- Create wealth and land taxes for more homes.
- Means test universal benefits that mostly benefit wealthier people.
- More assertive use of empty commercial and office premises for general population housing (but not specifically 'homeless' accommodation)

People and Services

- There is an oversupply of supported housing in some areas.
- Don't reinvent the wheel on prevention – scale up what's working locally.
- No Wrong Door – commit to join up sectors and services to improve people's experience.
- Bring outdoor food provision indoors to prioritise people's comfort and dignity.

Resources

- Focus on investment in social housing and continue to set the standard for private renting.
- Release the resources trapped in unsuitable temporary accommodation, often for commercial profit.
- Invest to bring voids and empty homes up to required standards; this is a quick win.
- Stop short-term funding for frontline services, it is counterproductive for people and services.
- Don't invest in communal night shelter approaches.

Key points we heard at the event

- Frontline workers are the backbone of the system. They change people's lives and need better support.
- Getting the finances right is the key to creating the social housing we need.
- Maximising welfare levels prevents homelessness.
- People need urgent action now, radical action for the long-term.
- Rapid rehousing, including scaled up Housing First, is the right plan.

Contributors

- **Maggie Brünjes**, chief executive of Homeless Network Scotland
- **John Mills**, co-chair of the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers (ALACHO)
- **Rhiannon Sims**, research associate at the Institute for Social Policy, Housing and Equalities Research (I-SPHERE)
- Homeless Network Scotland Associate **James Stampfer**
- Home Group head of service delivery **Karen Wolstencroft**
- **Laura van der Hoeven**, senior relationships manager with Cyrenians.

John set the scene by pointing out that the underlying cause of the emergency has been long in the making – namely, the loss of around 500,000 council homes caused by the Right to Buy policy before it was scrapped in Scotland in 2016.

In this context we need dramatic interventions to change the housing system – a “seismic shift”. John believes rapid rehousing is to be defended as the right system and welcomed action from the Housing Emergency Unit in the Scottish Government, as well as more certainty on the Affordable Housing Supply budget. But he warned that we need to direct efforts to influence scaling up supply of social homes to 200,000 built over next 10 years.

Fundamentally, John said, we need to divert from the current system of housing finance, where tenants fund most of the cost of new build housing.

Rhiannon homed in on the need to defend the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP), pointing to its effectiveness as a homelessness prevention measure, alongside other Scottish social security policies which boost income. DHP now exceeds spending on other homelessness prevention measures. Could it be used more effectively to support other groups at risk of homelessness, such as private tenants and young people?

On direction, Scottish Government and COSLA have a clear ambition that no one should be destitute or homeless in Scotland, regardless of immigration status. But people with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) or restricted eligibility are being driven to destitution by UK immigration policy – as detailed in I-SPHERE’s [Destitution by Design](#) report, an evaluation of [Fair Way Scotland](#), which works to mitigate that impact.

A new legal briefing that sets out practical actions within devolved competence that can ensure these groups have access to essential support. [The briefing](#) by Lawmanity focuses on 7 areas including housing, social security and work.

Other key points are the importance of clearly defining Ask and Act duties in the Housing Bill and using learning from £4million pilots to ensure those duties work well in practice, and the need for the Scottish Government to deliver on existing commitments – in particular the as yet unimplemented Domestic Abuse Protection Act 2021.

James, a support worker with Blue Triangle who also has experience of homelessness, shared his reflections from recent peer research work. A common thread was ‘that one support worker’ who went the extra mile. Great staff need defending – and the best are often promoted out of frontline roles as that’s the only way to progress their career. The research showed how we must divert people from temporary accommodation that often causes harm, such as B&Bs and hotels. And we need to use more creative tools to engage people who need support – think outside the box on opportunities and experiences they might like.

Breakout: The problem from your perspective

Karen shared how her sector is experiencing and dealing with the housing emergency. Housing associations have long waiting lists and face multiple demands on resources and support. But one successful tactic to provide more homes is reconfiguring unloved bedsit accommodation into good quality 1-bed flats with a kitchen/living room arrangement. Keeping people in their homes is equally important, so Home Group focuses on consistent contact with tenants from the start, to build relationships and person-led support.

Laura gave her breakout the view from service provision, emphasising the need to retain a focus on multiple support needs, given the complexity that often sits behind homelessness – it’s not always a housing issue. Services could be missing out on supporting more people by not logging the people they have to turn away when they reach capacity. And as we grapple with how to get past this moment, we need to look at ‘8 calls from the frontline of the housing emergency’ in the All in for Change [Taking the Temperature](#) report.

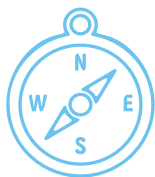
Breakout: Does the route-map contain the right priorities? And what is the sequence of action that can have a positive impact?

DEFEND



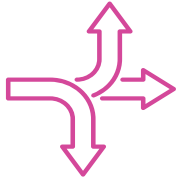
- Frontline workers – they need to be treated with respect and paid properly.
- Put in place multi-year funding to give staff job security.
- Make sure caseloads are manageable.
- Ensure everyone has access to housing rights advocacy and advice.
- Work to make the private rental sector strong and stable.
- This could be complemented by additional funding for empty homes or buy-back initiatives to bring existing homes back into social housing supply.

DIRECT



- Immediate responses including emergency housing provision and rapid support, plus encourage buy-in from other services in areas including Housing First.
- Make sure we tackle housing and homelessness emergencies at the same time.
- Resource, protect and scale up Housing First as rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) funding nears an end. Raise awareness of mainstream funding successes.
- Broaden understanding of how prevention savings benefit other services.
- Reduce use of temporary accommodation.
- Keep monitoring the situation and use the route-map to influence policy.

DIVERT



- Get new funding models for social housing right first.
- Use existing tax systems to fund housing as vital infrastructure.
- Lobby to increase DHP level – it doesn't align with soaring rent.
- Target housing better to fit people's needs against a backdrop of low turnover.
- Work on bringing multi-service funding together to target homelessness.
- Make sure government funding for homes matches rising cost of building.
- Refocus on influencing UK Government to push for welfare system reform.
- Investigate why men are so dominant in homelessness statistics.