



Homeless in Winter:

Experiences of using overnight services in Glasgow



Glasgow Homelessness Involvement and Feedback Team (GHIFT) is a team of Associates of Homeless Network Scotland with first-hand experience of homelessness in Glasgow and at the forefront of work to improve services in the city.

The team has been involved in evaluating services and talking to people affected by homelessness to gather evidence of what is happening on the ground right now.

With changes to the services provided in Glasgow during winter 2024-25, GHIFT interviewed people to hear about their experiences of using the communal night shelter and overnight welcome centre – and what they want to see prioritised next winter.

Our Approach

GHIFT coproduced a short survey to capture people's experiences of night shelter accommodation in Glasgow last winter (2024-25), and to understand what people need in the coming winter (2025/26).

GHIFT conducted 1:1 interviews based on this survey with people in three day centres across Glasgow, one being a women's service.

Each person who completed an interview received a £20 voucher to thank them for their time and contribution.

Who did we speak to?

- We spoke to **16 people** across three services, **11 men** and **5 women**, all of whom were currently experiencing homelessness. All but one person we interviewed had used emergency accommodation in the past.
- Respondents were aged **16 to 64 years** old, with most people (6) aged 35-44.
- Nine respondents shared their ethnicity, with a **majority being White Scottish** and one minority ethnic person who was African.

1. Experiences of night shelters in Glasgow

Some positive experiences of night services

We asked people a general question around their experience of using the communal night shelter. Some people spoke positively about it being **clean and the valued impact of well-trained staff who spoke to them with respect**. Two people said that night shelters were “better than being outside”, especially in the cold.

Look after me but very tight space, but we're out of the cold

Good experience, went from City Mission to Ibis Hotel

Most respondents spoke about negative experiences of the communal night shelter

Most people spoke about negative experiences of night shelters – **70% of responses were negative**. Some people emphasised how the night shelter felt, talking about feeling overwhelmed when walking into a shared shelter.

Safety was a big concern, with some people saying that they felt unsafe using shared facilities, and unsafe that people knew where they would be spending the night.

There were **concerns about health** given the tight space and close proximity to other people, while others raised serious concerns about the behaviour of staff.

Several people spoke about how **difficult it is to have to leave the service at 6-7am** with nowhere to go. One woman told us that, as she relies on day centres and night shelters, there are hours where she cannot access somewhere safe and warm.

Absolutely horrible, had to ask to leave but they don't open the doors. I had to get angry about the way I was treated

People being left vulnerable, had to leave at 6am. Prone to catching illnesses from other service users

Hated it, got thrown out too early and people knew where I was

Being chucked out the shelter first thing you don't feel settled, I prefer to have more control

Decisions when a night shelter is not available

We asked people where they would have spent the night if a shelter was not available. Most men responded that they would sleep rough or stay with a friend, whereas the women we spoke to would have gone to a friend's, a train station or shared their private places of safety e.g. garages. One woman said that she would have committed a crime to spend a night in jail to feel safe.

Half of those that we spoke to have chosen to not use communal night shelters in the past, stating that they didn't think they would get in due to demand or didn't feel the service was what they needed.

A friend was barred so I chose to stay in his tent and keep him company

It's not been good enough. I've chosen to be in vulnerable situations to avoid shelters

2. The overnight welcome centre

We asked people how the absence of an overnight welcome centre with access to individual (rather than communal) rooms has affected Glasgow during the winter of 2024-25. Most people told us there was a negative impact on them or the people they know:

It's affected me personally because I'm barred from [the communal night shelter]

Teary nights, affected my mental health dramatically, broken many times. Affected my overall wellbeing

A wee guy I knew before I went to jail needed to go to the night shelter. A couple of days later I found out he had passed away due to exposure to the elements

3. What do people want from overnight services this winter?

We asked people to imagine they were designing the ideal service for next winter and how important each of the following would be to them (1 not important, 10 being crucial). The average rating for each aspect is shown below:

8.6/10 Provides food



7.7/10 Dignity – being treated with dignity, not having to queue outside



7.7/10 Safety – psychologically and physically safe



7.5/10 Privacy – for example, a private room to get changed, no shared air



6.7/10 Links to casework and other services



6.7/10 24 hour access – not having to leave in the morning



6.1/10 Provides essentials – clean clothes, showers



We also asked what else should be considered when planning for winter 2025-26 in Glasgow. Being able to access showers and clean clothes, or facilities to clean clothes was mentioned many times, as was the importance of having staff who know how to recognise frustration and not mistake it for aggression. One woman would like to see immediate accommodation available with links to support for people to navigate the system.

It was overwhelming, walking in with all different people. It's dodgy, but at the time I felt okay

Nothing works, queuing to get in sit in a chair downstairs – there's four processes before you get in a room. You need to change your bed or you don't get back in. 7am boom box playing to wake you up, kicking beds to wake you up



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