

Local Government and Communities Committee

Homelessness

Submission from the Glasgow Homelessness Network

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Glasgow Homelessness Network is an umbrella organisation with a unique role to evidence and advance solutions to homelessness and connect the insights of people who both work and live with the issue. Our home is Glasgow, with national and European programmes.
- 1.2 We were pleased to provide verbal evidence at the committee session on 22 March and to provide this written response to the Call for Evidence on Homelessness made by the Scottish Parliament's Local Government & Communities Committee.
- 1.3 This response is informed by the learning from our relevant programmes of work in Glasgow and across Scotland. We also facilitated workshops to directly consult with frontline homelessness organisations and people with lived experience of homelessness.

2. Housing Options and Prevention

- 2.1 Every single case of homelessness in Scotland is an emergency. The more complex and layered the homelessness system, the more inadequate it's ability to respond to each emergency with speed or flexibility. Homelessness is not only a housing issue, but it is *always* a housing issue: housing-led responses more effectively reduce homelessness because they start from that fundamental point.
- 2.2 For 40 years, Scotland has been delivering statutory homelessness services predicated on a legal set of prescribed processes and tests designed to determine rights and duties. Along with a range of graduating support and accommodation services with an array of referral criteria, this creates an overly complex 'homelessness system' that can be fragmented, extend people's experience of homelessness or is unable to respond to it effectively.
- 2.3 By contrast, a preventative approach delivered through Housing Options has only been developing since around 2010 and is still evolving and embedding in a locally sensitive way across all parts of Scotland. While the core intention was to prevent households becoming homeless, it was understood that key to achieving this would be changing a long established culture. That is, changing the focus from the application of a linear process – *assessments, rights, duties, support, treatment, temporary housing* – to a more person-centred approach of solving problems and supporting aspirations.

- 2.4 By protecting Scotland's strong housing rights, but encouraging local flexibility and problem solving, Housing Options can go 'that extra mile' for and with people. It is evident this has already created a more equal, honest and beneficial environment for people's housing needs to be supported.
- 2.5 Our view is that Housing Options also provides the ideal foundation for building further change; specifically recognising that it has not been the answer we hoped for people who are rough sleeping, more deeply excluded and facing multiple disadvantage – many of whom are cynical about our ability to provide what they actually need because our offer has often been inadequate. For example, the rapid rehousing model 'Housing First' could very effectively be integrated within the overall Housing Options approach at local level.
- 2.5 But it is important that all of our discussions start from the understanding that if Scotland finds itself with a prescriptive process for Housing Options - rather than local responses that are flexible enough to seek and find individual solutions to individual situations - then we will have taken a turn that could undo some of the change in culture that has been transformational for many people. We would therefore urge caution against over formalising Housing Options; instead the focus of energy should be on folding in the very best evidence based responses, including Housing First.

A Shared Approach to Housing Options

- 2.6 Housing Options in Glasgow is an example of partnership working that has brought together Registered Social Landlords, the local authority, the NHS and third sector providers to find shared solutions to housing need.
- 2.7 While this is in part due to the driver of Glasgow being a stock-transfer city with social housing delivered by Registered Social Landlords and not the local authority, it is also reflective of an approach to Housing Options that recognises that homelessness prevention often relies upon access to services that are not part of the homelessness sector. As such, central to the Glasgow model is the building of strong working links with named contacts in health and social care, as well as the commissioning of services such as mediation and housing support from the third sector.

The Role of the Private Rented Sector

- 2.8 While there has been national and local consideration of the role of the PRS in relation to homelessness, there remains mixed views about its suitability. However, when debating the PRS at the GHN Annual Conference in October 2016 the majority of the 200+ delegates present were in favour of considering how we can make more use of the PRS as a housing option. This was particularly in relation to:

- Offering more flexibility of location that may better meet people's needs and aspirations;
- An expansion of the focus on rent deposit schemes to prevent and/or provide a route out of homelessness as, while the PRS is more expensive than the social rented sector it can be less expensive than long stays in temporary or emergency accommodation;
- An increased focus on the development of Social Lettings Agencies^{1 2} which can help ensure that the needs of vulnerable people are met in the PRS.

3. Multiple and Complex Needs

Hard Edges: Severe and Multiple Disadvantage

- 3.1 The policy agenda across the UK has been changing to reflect the multiplicity of people's experiences – particularly in relation to homelessness, substance misuse and offending, as well as the further complicating factors of poverty and mental ill-health. This is instead of the prioritisation of individual components which trigger the prescription of different (and not always complementary) solutions.
- 3.2 This is best captured in the Hard Edges³ research (originally completed in England and currently being undertaken in Scotland) which was directly interested in the question of whether single issue responses are any longer the most appropriate means of tackling severe and multiple disadvantage; whether 'joining up' distinctly different services (and the theoretical approaches that underpin them) can be enough to sustainably address the compounded impact of these experiences.
- 3.3 The findings of the research clearly show the scale of overlapping experiences routinely faced each year with approximately 250,000 people using 2 out of 3 service types (homelessness, addictions, criminal justice), with a further 58,000 having contact with all 3. Hard Edges Scotland is now aiming to provide comparable local data which will be an invaluable tool to inform local commissioning strategies as well as wider policy agendas.
- 3.4 Ultimately, the 'Hard Edges' are not between the individual components of people's lived experience, but a description of the single issue service responses

¹ <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/housing-centre/for-local-authorities/how-to-set-up-shared-social-housing/>

² <http://homesforgood.org.uk/who-we-are/>

³ Hard Edges Report - <http://lankellychase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Hard-Edges-Mapping-SMD-2015.pdf>

that have been commissioned and delivered across all parts of Scotland (and the rest of the UK) for many years.

Housing First

- 3.5 Momentum has been building in Scotland behind the Housing First approach which recently saw almost 250 people from all sectors and all parts of the country attend the first national seminar⁴ to tackle the question of how ready Scotland is to scale up Housing First for those facing the deepest challenges.
- 3.6 Professor Sarah Johnsen from Heriot-Watt University outlined the growing body of international evidence supporting the provision of sustainable housing solutions as the first rather than last step in our service response to the most vulnerable people, circumnavigating the complex system of accommodation and support that currently exists.
- 3.7 The evidence base shows that implementing the Housing First approach of offering a safe, secure home and ongoing flexible support has achieved:
- 80-90% housing retention rates after 2 years (with some of the early projects showing similar retention rates after 5 years);
 - Improving health outcomes;
 - Decreasing involvement in criminal activity and anti-social behaviour;
 - Improving financial wellbeing and social support; *and*
 - Improved cost-effectiveness of service delivery and cost savings.
- 3.8 The integration of health and social care in Scotland has the potential to provide a strong basis for designing a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary approach to tackling severe and multiple disadvantage; both in relation to a joint commissioning agenda which can support a move away from the single issue approach to the funding and commissioning of services, and also in making full use of the range of skills and experiences of frontline health and social care staff already working across the country. This includes linking people to the counselling and related services that can sustainably address the complex trauma that people have commonly experienced throughout their lives.
- 3.9 Fundamentally, the response to tackling this issue is not a homelessness one, but a fully integrated housing, social care and health response with responsibilities and duties equally shared. Continuing to view it through the homelessness lens will only continue to reinforce the single issue service responses of the past which have poorly served people experiencing severe and multiple disadvantage.

⁴ Housing First Seminar Slides - <http://bit.ly/2qnYEUq>

3.10 With the consensus across the country that Housing First is the ‘right answer’, a programme of work led by GHN and funded by the Scottish Government/ESF Social Innovation Fund will now see key partners come together throughout 2017 to ensure that Scotland moves towards Housing First becoming core, rather than peripheral, to our crisis response. This includes a funding mechanism through an innovative partnership between GHN, Social Investment Scotland, Big Society Capital and Heriot Watt University. *If the Committee were to support this development, our view is that this single policy change will create a significant breakthrough in reducing homelessness at a local level.*

4. Rough Sleeping

4.1 Our comments on rough sleeping are in relation to Glasgow. GHN has worked with a range of frontline partners⁵ in the city over a number of years to supplement the statutory data on rough sleeping captured through HL1 and build a more accurate evidence base on the scale of street homelessness in Glasgow to support the development of effective solutions.

4.2 GHN also had this role historically across Scotland as part of the Rough Sleeping Initiative up to 2005, when a 50% reduction in rough sleeping over a 5 year period was measured in Glasgow as a result of combined efforts and focused services. An encouraging period followed the closure of the hostels in Glasgow, when both homelessness and rough sleeping in Glasgow continued to reduce.

4.3 But the deep recession and impact of welfare cuts has brought new challenges, and our recent measurement of rough sleeping has shown an upward trend over the last 4 years at a similar rate as it reduced during the rough sleeping initiative. This undoing of previous achievements is deeply frustrating for the homelessness sector in Glasgow; rough sleeping is the most extreme form of homelessness and the devastating impact it has on people’s lives is well known. An absolute minimum of 1,408 individual people were recorded as having slept rough in Glasgow at least once in 2016-17; the majority of whom are white, Scottish men in their mid-20s to mid-40s.

4.4 A number of local factors contribute to rough sleeping in Glasgow, most notably:

- That the local authority is regularly not discharging its statutory duty to accommodate; albeit a significant programme of work with housing partners is seeking an urgent solution;
- Within the range of accommodation options available people sometimes choose not to take up offers of congregate accommodation for reasons of personal safety and/or to create peace of mind by separating themselves

⁵ Including the Marie Trust, Glasgow City Mission, Simon Community Scotland, Lodging House Mission, Turning Point Scotland, Glasgow Winter Night Shelter – with academic support from Heriot-Watt University and University of Glasgow.

from often challenging environments. The prevailing view that ‘something’, however unsuitable, is better than ‘nothing’ is regularly challenged by people preferring to opt out of the system of accommodation, not because they want to sleep rough but because they believe it to be the best option available to them;

- The broader influencing factors of poverty and inequality that affect Glasgow more acutely than other areas.

4.5 Like with the work to tackle severe and multiple disadvantage, a rapid rehousing response based on Housing First principles is proven internationally to be the most effective way of sustainably tackling rough sleeping⁶ and should be at the core of our approach in Scotland.

5. What Works

5.1 With much of our evidence base on homelessness focused on defining and describing the same problems, it is increasingly important to shift our focus towards finding the best *solutions* to tackling the well-known problems.

5.2 The robust evidence base behind the Housing First approach has already been outlined, but it is worth noting it as an example of the disparity between what the evidence tell us and the services commissioned. Despite the significant success rates there have remained minimal examples of Housing First being delivered in Scotland, with the majority of funding still aligned with the ‘staircase’ or ‘treatment first’ approach to tackling homelessness. This is about balance of efforts, not necessarily about replacing one approach with another.

5.3 Alongside a commitment to building and acting on a strong evidence base on what works, an equally strong commitment is required to prioritise the channeling of funding and resources towards the most effective solutions so we can stop wasting time, efforts and money on what doesn’t work. This may be about aligning resources with newly tested innovations, or in scaling up existing ones.

5.4 To support this transition GHN and Crisis UK collaborated on the development of a *Centre for Homelessness Impact* which will be launched in Scotland to ensure that evidence is at the heart of the solutions we develop to prevent or tackle homelessness; challenging us all to end homelessness faster by focusing on what works.

5.5 Based on a significant consultation across Scotland, our feasibility report can be found [here: http://www.ghn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/160119CHI_Final_double_page.pdf](http://www.ghn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/160119CHI_Final_double_page.pdf)

⁶ European End Street Homelessness Campaign - <https://www.bshf.org/publications/the-european-end-street-homelessness-campaign/>

7. Coproduction

- 7.1 A guiding principle of GHN's work is that people with lived experience of homelessness have a unique insight and that successful responses will not overlook people's assets or the social economy of family, friends and communities. Connecting this insight with those of people working across the country to tackle homelessness is central to finding the right solutions.
- 7.2 In practice we have worked towards achieving this by:
- Developing and delivering a citizen advocacy approach with local people working alongside each other to solve problems in relation to welfare benefits and homelessness;
 - Training and supporting a group of local people to play an active role in Glasgow's Poverty Leadership Panel;
 - Training and actively supporting past participants of Keys to Learn courses to become peer supporters and work alongside new course participants across the West of Scotland;
 - Working with academic partners to ensure people with lived experience actively shape the design and delivery of research projects;
 - Facilitating the Scottish Government funded Scottish Homelessness Involvement and Empowerment Network (SHIEN) to collectively advance our understanding and implementation of coproduction across the country; and
 - Training people across the country to build practical skills around coproduction through our social enterprise 'All In'.
- 7.3 Embedding a coproduction approach across the sector is supporting the move away from seeing vulnerable people as 'the sum of their problems' and from continually offering a professionally led intervention to situations that, with the right kinds of support, people are able to resolve for themselves. This asset-based approach helps us move away from creating a level of dependency that stimulates service demand, costs money and ultimately sustains people in poverty and exclusion.
- 7.4 While notable progress is being made to embed people's lived experience into the work that we do it has, to date, happened organically in different localities across the country. To build on these achievements and to ensure we continue to make real progress, *GHN would support an audit – potentially at regional Housing Options Hub level – of the range of coproduction activity currently being undertaken and considering how it is supporting real change at both a policy and practice level.*

8. And what do we need? Action!

8.1 GHN believes the most important thing we need right now is action. People experiencing homelessness, and the organisations and individuals supporting them, shouldn't be expected to wait any longer when there is so much we could be doing more and differently right now. We need to:

- Put the principles of Housing First into practice and scale up quickly;
- Build consensus and momentum. Do we all agree that most people, with the right support, are able to sustain their own tenancies? Can we start assuming that people can live independently, rather than that people can't? And if not, whose interests are we pushing against – and what common ground can we find?
- Harness the Leaders & Champions. Who can be found everywhere - in housing associations, local authorities, universities, health services, mainstream services, the third sector – and those with direct experience of homelessness. And bring forward the housing activists and online commentators, who shouldn't ever stop asking difficult questions;
- Provide reassurance. For communities, housing providers and the homelessness sector itself – that systems change will create anxiety in places so we need to better articulate that accommodating people quickly within communities is better for everyone.

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