

Scotland's Housing Emergency

Summary and Recommendations

This report provides Leaders with an update on Scotland's Housing Emergency with, at this time of writing, twelve housing emergencies declared locally by councils and the recent publication of record homelessness figures. In addition, this paper advises of COSLA's work with the Housing to 2040 Strategic Advisory Board (SAB), Housing Special Interest Group (SIG), Housing Investment Taskforce and on the Housing Bill.

Leaders are invited to:

- i. Note Scotland's Housing Emergency and the various activities so far in response;
- ii. Agree that COSLA writes to the Scottish Government on the reporting arrangements for £2m acquisitions funding, and on the sharing of homelessness data with COSLA;
- iii. Agree COSLA works to ensure the role of governance of the SAB is maintained;
- iv. Note the work of the COSLA Housing Special Interest Group;
- v. Agree financial models for housing be explored further with ALACHO and Directors of Finance;
- vi. Note COSLA's activities on the Housing Bill; and
- vii. Agree COSLA's next steps.

References

Previous reports on Strategic Housing Challenges:

- LD24/070 Scotland's Housing Emergency
- LD230128 Scotland's Housing Emergency
- LD230426 Strategic Housing and Humanitarian Challenges

Mike Callaghan
Policy Manager
Communities Team
mike@cosla.gov.uk

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Scotland's Housing Emergency

Purpose

1. This report provides Leaders with an update on Scotland's Housing Emergency and the recent publication of record homelessness figures. In addition, this paper advises of COSLA's work with the Housing to 2040 Strategic Advisory Board, Housing Investment Taskforce, Housing Special Interest Group (SIG) and on the Housing Bill.

Current Position

Scotland's Housing Emergency and the Housing to 2040 Strategic Advisory Board

2. Leaders will be aware that 12 local housing emergencies have now been declared with Argyll and Bute Council being first in June, 2023 followed by Edinburgh, Glasgow, Fife and West Dunbartonshire Councils. The Scottish Government formally declared a Housing Emergency nationally on 15 May 2024 in the Scottish Parliament.
3. Since 15 May 2024 a further seven local housing emergencies have been declared by Aberdeen City, West Lothian, Scottish Borders, South Lanarkshire, Angus, and Dumfries & Galloway Councils, with East Renfrewshire the most recent. Approximately 53% of the Scottish population are covered by these combined council areas.
4. Statistics, published by the Scottish Government on 24 September, indicated the homelessness situation is worrying with the number of people in Scotland living in temporary homeless accommodation at a record high. Pressures have also increased on social housing due to humanitarian and asylum seeker programmes, particularly in Glasgow and Edinburgh.
5. The annual statistics for homelessness showed that, as of March this year, 16,300 households were in the system. This is the highest since Scottish Government records began in 2002. There were also a record number of children in homelessness accommodation, with more than 10,000 youngsters waiting for a permanent home. Unfortunately, COSLA experienced a delay in obtaining the data from the Scottish Government in advance of them being published. Apparently the Central Statistics Office rules do not currently allow pre-release access to COSLA, despite some member councils obtaining figures the day before.
6. Leaders will be aware that the key drivers for the declaration of local housing emergencies have been challenges to housing supply and in the delivery of homelessness services. Currently, those councils that have declared housing emergencies are developing local action plans, providing practical responses to their local circumstances. Not all have published new action plans, as some of their work to respond is being aligned with their existing local strategic housing investment plans.
7. From the action plans that are available, there are some common themes that include reducing voids and re-let times, increasing/maximising lets to homeless households including RSL lets, purchasing properties on the second hand market for use as either temporary accommodation or mainstream lets, and increasing activity to help prevent homelessness.

8. Positively, the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers (ALACHO) can show that voids are generally on a downward trend across the country. Particular efforts are being made in those councils under high pressure. We still await the Scottish Government to significantly progress their commitment to establish engagement with utility companies to reconnect meters to voids or empty properties. The lack of power supplies to empty homes makes them unlettable and is a key contribution to the problem.
9. Further, the Scottish Government issued a letter on 7 October to councils. This sets out £2m funding for councils on acquisitions, along with reporting requirements. COSLA were not sighted on this beforehand and indeed there was no reporting agreed when Leaders considered the distribution of this funding in September. The reporting arrangements are unnecessary and disproportionate. It is proposed we express our dissatisfaction with this, both in terms of this reporting, and their unwillingness to share key information on homelessness timeously with COSLA, as mentioned above.

Housing to 2040 Strategic Advisory Board

10. A special meeting of the Housing to 2040 Strategic Advisory Board (H2040 SAB) attended by the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice Shirley Anne Somerville and the Housing Minister Paul McLennan, and Community Wellbeing Spokesperson, Cllr Chalmers took place on 22 August. This was to consider the major housing challenges across the country and the various calls for action that have come from the housing sector.
11. Since the meeting the Scottish Government has faced a Parliamentary debate on the housing emergency in early October. A response by the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice indicates a greater intensity of activity over the forthcoming 6 months with meetings of the Housing to 2040 Strategic Advisory Board to take place every 6 weeks.
12. The next meeting on 30 October will address the Government's proposed new approach and action plan, along with a tracker and performance indicators. Unfortunately, it is not yet clear if this and subsequent meetings will continue with Cllr Chalmers as co-chair.
13. We will press that joint political leadership should continue, ensuring that the Housing to 2040 SAB is aligned with work being progressed by COSLA, and, particularly, the Housing SIG. A verbal update on this will be provided at the Leaders meeting on this.

Housing Special Interest Group and Housing Investment Taskforce

14. The Housing Special Interest Group (SIG) held a meeting on 25 September that principally covered: the Housing Emergency and local authority responses; a presentation from ALACHO outlining the drivers for the emergency, and the development of short and long-term responses that included a review of the Affordable Housing Supply Programme to consider further devolution to councils as well as greater flexibility.
15. The SIG also had a presentation on alternative models of financing social housing using insights from Europe. This was by Professor Kenneth Gibb, of Glasgow University and a development of an earlier version delivered to the Housing Investment Taskforce (11 September). The latter is chaired by the Housing Minister and is intended to shift the balance of investment and attract capital investment into affordable housing. Local Government presence on the Taskforce includes COSLA, ALACHO and Directors of Finance, alongside investors and Scottish Government officials. It will conclude its work in March 2025.
16. The financing proposals from Professor Gibb, ALACHO and other sources will need to be fully explored by Local Government professional practitioners to examine their potential

viability to the Scottish context, evaluating also the potential risks. This will inform the recommendations of the Housing Investment Taskforce and the COSLA Housing SIG.

17. It will also be important for there to be coherence between the policy and political positions eventually adopted by the workstreams of the HIT, Housing to 2040 SAB and the COSLA Housing SIG. Ideally, the Scottish Government should support the recommendations and actions proposed by the SIG likely to be made early next year. These should also inform COSLA's manifesto prospectus processes in the lead up to the next Parliamentary elections.

Housing Bill (Scotland)

18. The Scottish Government's Housing Bill¹ was published earlier this year. Its scope includes protections for tenants, preventing homelessness, rent controls, evictions and residential tenants' rights. COSLA's written response was submitted in June. It was informed by ALACHO, the Housing SIG, Community Wellbeing Board and the Housing Conveners Forum.

19. COSLA also provided oral evidence to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee on 3 September to articulate our agreed political position and to underline COSLA's position on the financial memorandum for the Bill. The Bill's costing assumptions have understated the real costs.

20. Cllr Chalmers, as Co-Chair of the Homelessness Prevention Strategy Group, also participated with the Housing Minister at a Homelessness Prevention Duties event on 1 October. The need for adequate resources for councils to meet their prevention duties was again reinforced.

Proposed COSLA Position and Next Steps

21. Assuming Leaders agreement today, it is proposed that the following be undertaken, led by Cllr Chalmers.

Reporting Arrangements and Sharing Homelessness Information

22. COSLA will write to the Housing Minister and Cabinet Secretary to state our dissatisfaction with the reporting arrangements attached to £2m funding for councils on acquisitions. The letter will also address the need to share homelessness figures with COSLA in advance of the information being shared with media outlets.

Housing to 2040 SAB, Housing Investment Taskforce and Housing SIG

23. COSLA will continue to work with the Scottish Government and other housing partners to respond to Scotland's housing emergency. This will principally be through the Housing to 2040 SAB, assuming the governance arrangements can be satisfactorily clarified. Additionally, work to explore options on housing investment for local authorities will be progressed through both the HIT and COSLA's Housing SIG. Reports will be submitted to Leaders when required and will include a financial assessment and risk analysis.
24. The next meeting of the Housing SIG will be on 13 November. It will engage with the CIH and the Scottish Cities Alliance. COSLA will also work with ALACHO and Directors of Finance on issues relating to the Affordable Housing Supply Programme and future funding of housing. Lastly, a meeting of the Housing Conveners Forum will be held on 5 November.

¹ [Introduced | Scottish Parliament Website](#)

Housing Bill


25. COSLA officials will continue to monitor the Housing Bill as it continues to progress over the months ahead in the Scottish Parliament with Stage 2 of the Bill.

Next Steps

26. Leaders will be updated on further developments in these key areas, as appropriate.

October 2024

Contribution to agreed COSLA Plan and Verity House Agreement:

COSLA Plan 22-27	Priority Areas	
	Strengthen Local Democracy	X
	Secure Sustainable Funding	X
	Improve the Wellbeing of Individuals, Families and Communities	X
	Enhance Education and Support for our Children and Young People	X
	Deliver a Just Transition to a Net Zero Economy	X
	Support the Most Vulnerable in our Communities	X
Verity House Agreement	Shared Priorities	
	Tackling Poverty	X
	Just transition to net zero	X
	Sustainable Public Services	X