

Ending Rough Sleeping by 2026

Scottish Conservative & Unionist Party

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Foreword

Homelessness is a blight on modern Scotland. Whatever our politics, the fact that people are forced out into the cold on our streets should shame us all, especially at this time of year.

All parties should be able to commit to making ending homelessness a goal in the next five years. The Scottish Conservatives would end rough sleeping by 2026 by expanding Housing First, supporting people to access private sector tenancies, updating the law surrounding the prevention of homelessness and setting ambitious housebuilding targets.

These measures would come together to tackle the most complex cases of homelessness, help get people off and stay off the street and give them the support and security they need to get their life back on track.

Background

- **The SNP are overseeing a homelessness crisis.** The number of people assessed as homeless is at the highest level since 2012-13, and the number of people in temporary accommodation is the highest since records began in 2002 (Scottish Government, Homelessness in Scotland: 2019 to 2020 (Charts), Table 30, 27 August 2020, [link](#)).
- **Someone was made homeless every 17 minutes last year.** Scottish Government figures show that the number of people assessed as homeless rose by 4 per cent in 2019-20 to 31,333, equating to a household every 17 minutes and the highest in six years (Scottish Government, Homelessness in Scotland: 2019 to 2020, 27 August 2020, [link](#); Shelter Scotland, Twitter, 28 August 2020, [link](#)).
- **Around 5,300 adults sleep rough at least once in a year in Scotland.** This equates to an estimate of over 700 people on a typical night (The Scottish Public Health Observatory, Homelessness: demographics, accessed 11 November 2020, [link](#)).
- **2,885 people reported sleeping rough in the three months before making a homelessness application.** 1,643 slept rough the night before making a homelessness application. That means just under 10 per cent of all people assessed as homeless sleep rough in the three months leading up to their application (Scottish Government, Homelessness in Scotland: 2019 to 2020, 27 August 2020, [link](#)).
- **The number of children in temporary accommodation has reached the highest on record.** At the end of March there were 7,280 children living in temporary accommodation due to homelessness. This is the highest since records began in 2002 and represents a 7 per cent increase on the previous year (Scottish Housing News, 28 August 2020, [link](#)).
- **In the latest figures, the number of homelessness deaths in Scotland rose to double the level of England and Wales.** The number of homeless people who died in Scotland rose by 19 per cent in 2018, according to a new report. The figures published by National Records of Scotland estimated that there had been 195 deaths during the year - up from 164 in 2017 (National Records of Scotland, 5 February 2020, [link](#); BBC News, 6 February 2020, [link](#)).
- **The SNP have dropped their target of delivering 50,000 affordable homes over the course of this Parliament.** In light of the coronavirus crisis the SNP said it was impossible for them to meet this target by next year (Scottish Housing News, 6 April 2020, [link](#)).

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- But they weren't going to hit this target anyway. Audit Scotland knew the SNP were not going to deliver this target. In their report, published two days after the SNP officially dropped the target, they said: 'This leads us to conclude that the target, and particularly the social rent element, is at serious risk of not being met' (Audit Scotland, Affordable Homes, 9 April 2020, [link](#)).
 - **The SNP will miss their target to support 800 people into Housing First tenancies by 2021.** In 2018, the SNP said they would support more than 800 individuals with their transition to Housing First. However, the Pathfinder total for people moving into their own homes through Housing First stated only 381 people had entered tenancies by the end of November 2020 (Scottish Government, News, 9 October 2018, [link](#); Homelessness Network Scotland, Housing First Tracker, accessed 16 December 2020, [link](#)).
 - **Steps were taken to protect people from homelessness at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.** Emergency coronavirus legislation prevented tenants from facing the threat of eviction for up to six months and local councils put in place resilience plans, extra accommodation and care packages (Scottish Government, Coronavirus (Scotland) Bill: Explanatory Notes, 31 March 2020, [link](#); Daily Record, 25 March 2020, [link](#)).
 - **But concerns are now being raised about people returning to the streets.** Social Bite have warned of a surge in rough sleeping, as people living in temporary accommodation prepare to return to the streets (The Times, 13 December 2020, [link](#)).

Our Solution

Overview

Despite the action taken at the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, rough sleeping numbers are now rising again. In addition, the economic impact of the pandemic is expected to increase homelessness.¹

Even before COVID hit, the SNP had failed to tackle homelessness in Scotland. The number of households assessed as homeless has been increasing, and the number of children in temporary accommodation is at a record high.² Action must be taken to reverse this trend and to eradicate rough sleeping completely.

To deliver real change, Scotland needs a deadline. That's why the Scottish Conservatives are setting a target of ending rough sleeping by the next Scottish election in 2026.

A range of measures are required to deliver this and reduce homelessness - from tackling the most complex cases via Housing First to increasing the supply of affordable housing.

Short term - Embed Housing First

The Housing First approach prioritises providing safe and settled accommodation alongside tailored support to meet the person's needs. Alternatives tend to provide support in advance of accommodation to ensure people are 'tenancy ready' and meet various criteria, which can result in extended time spent in temporary accommodation. Housing First emphasises that having a settled home will ensure people have the security they need to fully engage with other forms of support and begin to turn their lives around.

Housing First is designed for people with complex needs and/or chaotic lifestyles as it can provide an intensive level of support. Subsequently, Housing First should not be viewed as a one-off intervention as some tenants will need a level of support for life.

The approach was pioneered in New York in the 1990s and has been used across the USA since. It has also been adopted in European cities like Amsterdam and has contributed to the effective eradication of rough sleeping in Finland.³ Housing First was adopted in Finland in 2007, and by 2019 the number of homelessness

1 *The Times*, 13 December 2020, [link](#).

2 *Scottish Government, Homelessness in Scotland: 2019 to 2020*, 27 August 2020, [link](#).

3 *Shelter, Housing First in Scotland*, April 2019, [link](#).

people had reduced by at least 3,000. In 2019, only 4,600 people were classified as without a home and most of these people were living with family and friends rather than on the street. This was the seventh consecutive year of decline.⁴

Housing First pilots have been carried out in Scotland since 2010, with a 'Pathfinder' launched in some areas of Scotland in April 2019.

However, the Pathfinder has so far failed to meet its targets⁵ and concerns have been raised about variation in eligibility and targeting.⁶

There are multiple different ways of delivering services under the 'Housing First' banner and, while there should be local flexibility, the Scottish Government should set clear national aims and provide evidence-based guidance.

In 2019, Shelter identified that, both in Scotland and internationally, there are differences between whether Housing First services focus specifically on rough sleeping or all those experiencing homelessness, while some programmes target those with addictions while others do not.⁷ The various pilots and Pathfinders which have been run in Scotland should be used to inform clear parameters for the scaling up of the programme, focusing on those whose homelessness is compounded by

complex needs associated with trauma, abuse, addictions and mental ill-health.

However, rather than continuing to drive the programme from the centre, the SNP are withdrawing support in 2022 and leaving it up to local authorities to take forward.⁸ Effectively embedding a programme like Housing First will require ongoing national direction.

Therefore, the Scottish Conservatives propose adopting the recommendations of the ongoing consultation on a national Housing First framework rolling the approach out in full across Scotland by the end of 2021, while maintaining the current level of Scottish Government support for Housing First until the end of this Parliament instead of withdrawing it in March 2022. This would be worth a £10.8 million over the course of the next Parliament⁹ and enable the approach to be fully embedded, particularly in areas which have not yet or only recently adopted the approach. The Scottish Conservatives also support setting clear national objectives for the programme to ensure that local provision meets local demand. National objectives would include agreeing capacity targets, providing those participating in the programme with a say on the location, tenure and type of their new home and embedding multidisciplinary working to provide the type of intensive support required.

4 *The Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland, Homelessness in Finland 2019*, 17 February 2020, [link](#) ; *BBC News*, 31 January 2019, [link](#).

5 *Social Bite, News*, 4 April 2019, [link](#); *Homelessness Network Scotland, Housing First Pathfinder*, accessed 14 December 2020, [link](#).

6 *Shelter, Housing First in Scotland*, April 2019, [link](#).

7 *Shelter, Housing First in Scotland*, April 2019, [link](#).

8 *Scottish Government, Ending homelessness together: updated action plan*, October 2020, [link](#).

9 *Scottish Government, Ending homelessness together: high level action plan*, November 2018, [link](#).

This final point is crucial, as Shelter notes that Housing First has been successful in Finland because it is part of a ‘whole-systems’ cross-sector approach.¹⁰ Other structural changes are required in Scotland to tackle homelessness and end rough sleeping.

Medium term – Introduce ‘Help to Rent’

While Housing First should be rolled out fully to address the most complex cases of homelessness, action needs to be taken to prevent and support other instances of homelessness too. This is particularly urgent given the economic challenges Scotland is facing due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

Utilising the private rented sector is vital, and the Scottish Conservatives are proposing establishing a national ‘Help to Rent’ scheme to support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to access and sustain a tenancy in the private rented sector. Such a scheme would have two main elements – a support service and rent deposit scheme.

Local authority-led support services would be encouraged to work with private landlords in the area to set up tenancies and ensure they are sustainable by providing ongoing support. Support would be provided for the tenant and for the landlord, to mitigate any risks associated with tenants who have experienced homelessness.

A national rent deposit scheme would further improve access to the private rented sector for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and provide security for landlords. Some individual schemes are

already in place across Scotland, but a national guarantee would enable them to reach more people.

We would deliver an extra £7.5 million to local authorities over the course of the next Parliament to help deliver this scheme.

Long term - Build more affordable and social homes

The most essential element of Housing First is a house, and rolling out the programme effectively requires an adequate supply of affordable and suitable accommodation. If this is not in place, participants in the programme may continue to be placed in temporary accommodation while awaiting a permanent tenancy. This defeats the point of the programme and highlights the importance of making affordable housing available where it is needed most. Adequate supply is also essential to deliver rapid rehousing for anyone who becomes homeless, not just the most complex cases.

To address this, the Scottish Conservatives will set targets for affordable and social housebuilding targets over the course of the next parliament. The creation of mid-market rented (MMR) housing should be embedded in housebuilding targets.

In addition to this, the Scottish Conservatives also propose speeding up work to clarify the legal duty which local authorities have to prevent homelessness. The Scotland Prevention Review Group are developing recommendations for the Scottish Government, but their work has been delayed by COVID-19. The Scottish Conservatives support this ambition and would ensure legislation is introduced within the first six months of the next parliament.

¹⁰ Shelter, *Housing First in Scotland*, April 2019, [link](#).

To further enshrine support for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, we would support Scotland's new human rights framework incorporating the right to adequate housing and work to ensure the Scottish legal system has the right remedies in place to tackle systemic problems and deliver tangible outcomes.

