The Salvation Army has over 120 years of experience working with people who are homeless. In our 15 centres across Scotland we provide support to people living on the streets, emergency accommodation in our Lifehouses, semi-independent supported living and assistance with moving into permanent independent accommodation. We work closely with other agencies to provide assistance with benefits, acquisition of life skills, access to employment and other services of benefit to our service users. We value each person for who they are and aim to find the best solution for their personal situation.

We welcome an opportunity to share our knowledge and experience with the Local Government and Communities Committee. We have chosen to respond directly to some of the questions raised in the call for evidence.

**Housing Options and Homelessness Prevention**

- **What needs to happen to improve the delivery of housing options and homelessness prevention services and the outcomes achieved for service users?**

There is an urgent need for an increased housing stock to provide a pathway out of homelessness for a greater number of people. Whilst we are able to provide services from street to independent living with minimal support, we are unable to assist people to take the final step to full independence without sufficient affordable accommodation for them to move into.

It would be very helpful if available support packages could be expanded both in capacity and flexibility. For example: to extend availability beyond Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm. Greater security around funding arrangements is a necessary part of increasing capacity and flexibility.

- **What role should private sector housing providers play in preventing and responding to homelessness?**

Evictions are the greatest cause of homelessness from private sector housing. A review of eviction policies is needed to reduce the number of evictions. Building partnerships between landlords and support providers would enable referral of individuals at risk of eviction. This would benefit everyone involved: support services would be able to intervene earlier with greater chance of success; the tenant would receive support to address the factors leading to the threat of eviction; landlords would have reduced turnover of tenants leading to more stable income.

On the other side, landlords could be encouraged to build working relationships with support providers in order to offer support in the transition from temporary or supported accommodation back in to the community and to make properties
available specifically for that purpose. In this way they would become part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

Of course, while there is a shortage of housing in Scotland, landlords will always be able to find another tenant, and so may feel no incentive to engage with support services.

Temporary Accommodation

- What evidence is there of pressure on temporary accommodation in your area? Has this increased in recent years?

Our emergency homelessness services constantly operate a full capacity with vacancies filled on the same day. Equally there are individuals who have to stay longer than otherwise would be required due to a lack of appropriate move-on accommodation.

- How can homeless people’s experiences of temporary accommodation be improved? For example, how can the use of unsuitable accommodation be reduced or the length of time spent in temporary accommodation reduced?

We would highlight the need for an increase in the number of move-on accommodation and support services e.g. resettlement, supported living, outreach/community support service. In addition to extra capacity, these services enhance the likelihood of individuals sustaining their tenancy in the longer term.

The most effective means of reducing time spent in temporary accommodation is an increase in the capacity of social housing. Alongside this measure, a review should be carried out into policies of allocations to ensure individuals are offered accommodation that is both liveable and in the appropriate area. Equally there should be an increase in the number of offers of permanent accommodation that can be made, reducing the situation where individuals are forced to accept an offer or risk the Local Authority terminating their statutory duty.

- Do you have concerns about the funding of temporary accommodation? If yes, how should temporary accommodation be funded?

We have previously highlighted to Scottish Government ministers (and to UK Government) the detrimental effect of the Local Housing Allowance cap, should it be introduced for supported housing. In some of our Lifehouses (hostels for homeless people) we would see a reduction of income per service user of around 75%. This would make it impossible for us to provide even basic accommodation, leaving aside any costs for additional support for benefits, health issues etc.

Since Local Authorities have a statutory duty, we believe that the funding for homelessness services should be ring fenced and protected from government cuts. Equally we believe such funding should not be linked to welfare reform such as LHA, universal credit etc., which creates uncertainty for providers when trying to plan ahead for service provision.
We understand the desire of UK Government that people receiving benefits should learn to manage their money in the same manner as people in employment. However, many people who experience homelessness have complex problems; managing money may be an additional burden for them which they cannot handle. In this situation the result is that rent may not be paid to the service provider, further jeopardising the service provision. We therefore believe that rent should be paid directly to the homelessness support services rather than to the individual.

**Multiple and Complex Needs**

- **What scope is there for improved joint working with all agencies and groups supporting those with multiple and complex needs, which would also include the health sector?**

In our experience, access to health services for our service users is often difficult. Developing a joined up multiagency approach to include primary health services would greatly improve the support provision for individuals. We would also ask for a review of out of hours provision in specialist health services, ideally to establish 24 hour availability.

- **How can access to general health services, including preventative health services, be improved for homeless people?**

Please see our response above.

In addition, we believe it would be beneficial to establish specific health services, available 24 hours a day, for the homeless services within local areas. Where there are specific homeless health teams working e.g. Dundee, Glasgow this has and does improve the situation. However these currently operate on limited resources and are not available out with traditional working hours.

- **What role could the “housing first” model play in improving outcomes for homeless people with multiple and complex needs?**

Research suggests this approach can have a significant impact in supporting individuals with multiple and complex needs. However the key is that it is implemented without any deviation from the concept and that the appropriate support services are allocated from the onset to provide the required support as and when required by the client.

It is worth noting though that recent information suggests that Housing First only works for 10-15% of the client group we would normally work with meaning that it is not suitable for 85% of our clients.

**Rough Sleeping**

- **How has the pattern of rough sleeping changed in your area? For example, is the number of rough sleepers increasing or have the characteristics of rough sleepers changed? What are the reasons for this?**
There are no up to date figures but there is a sense across the major cities across Scotland (Glasgow and Edinburgh in particular) that rough sleeping has increased in recent times. A recent meeting with appropriate colleagues noted that it was possible that the numbers were fairly static. However, rough sleeping appears to be more visible, which gives the impression that it has increased. This may be because it is currently deemed to be safer to sleep on the streets.

**What type of accommodation is offered to rough sleepers?**

Street teams will direct individuals to present to the local authority as homeless, where they would be advised of the homeless accommodation available in the city as per their statutory responsibility. If however individuals, for whatever reason, do not engage with services, then accommodation is limited. During the winter months a number of Local Authorities will open up night shelters in partnership with churches or other charities and providers (for example, the Winter Care Shelter run by churches in Edinburgh and The Lothians\(^1\)). However we are not aware of any permanent night shelters available at the moment.

- **What type of approaches can contribute to the reduction of rough sleeping and achievement of sustainable housing solutions for rough sleepers?**

Local Authorities and service providers should review the reasons for non-engagement and adapt services, so that more rough sleepers engage with and accept an offer of emergency accommodation.

As noted previously, an increase in the capacity of social housing stock is essential. We would also urge Scottish Government to increase the focus on prevention strategies, including the review of eviction policy mentioned earlier. Part of this review might include engagement with debt advice services, to assist the individual or family in managing their financial situation. This might relieve one of the pressures leading to eviction.

**Other**

- **What are the reasons behind why people become homeless?**

Relationship breakdown remains the main reason for homelessness (as noted in our *Seeds of Exclusion*\(^2\) report). Other major factors are financial difficulties, for example through loss of employment or rent arrears, or eviction for anti-social behaviour or unmanageable addiction.

- **What data is used to measure homelessness numbers in a particular area?**

Local Authorities have a statutory duty to report homeless data to Scottish Government which is usually based on homeless presentations during the year. Local Authorities may also complete rough sleeping surveys.

\(^1\) [http://www.bethanychristiantrust.com/services/emergency-resettlement/](http://www.bethanychristiantrust.com/services/emergency-resettlement/)

• Are there any problems with people accessing their housing and homelessness rights? If yes, how can access be improved?

Digital exclusion is an increasing issue for people experiencing homelessness. More and more individuals are required to search for and bid for housing online. Similarly, as Universal Credit is rolled out across the UK, this exclusion could increase as individuals must have access to a mobile phone and or internet connection to apply for and manage a live claim. Difficulty in accessing the internet may discourage people from making a claim or result in sanctions being imposed if claim conditions are not met. This can lead to people choosing to disengage from statutory provision and services or even avoid engagement in the first place.

• What are the barriers to providing homeless people with sustainable housing solutions and how can these barriers be addressed?

Lack of affordable housing is the main barrier to sustainable housing solutions. Whilst we welcome the Scottish Government’s commitment to providing 50,000 affordable homes during this parliament, this must be seen as the first step in an ongoing programme of building, until every person in Scotland has a home of their own, with some spare capacity for the crises that can lead to unexpected homelessness.

The second barrier is the provision of unfurnished flats or houses to people leaving homeless accommodation, and the lack of assistance available to furnish such properties. People are expected to move quickly into this new accommodation with the benefit system allowing no time arrange furnishing, leaving people to move into an empty shell. Where The Salvation Army has furniture projects, we aim to assist people in such circumstances, either by donating furniture or white goods, or by offering a discount on purchases from our shops. In addition, various groups offer starter packs. However, many people do not have access to such services, and there is little or no support to individuals transitioning from homeless accommodation back into the community. This may result in people abandoning their tenancy or going without food to furnish their homes.

This situation would be improved by increasing affordable housing stock which is provided either fully or partially furnished, making it feels like home rather than just four walls.

We would also urge Scottish Government and local authorities to extend funding to enable person centred support to continue when individuals are moving out of homeless accommodation back into the community. This is something that The Salvation Army works hard to provide, but finds increasingly difficult in the face of ongoing cuts to services.

• Are there any other issues relating to homelessness which you wish to bring to the attention of the Committee?

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has a right to housing “adequate for the health and wellbeing of himself and his family.” It is on this basis that services for people who are homeless should be provided. Many people comment that the welfare system seems designed to provide barriers to access. Unless homelessness provision includes integrated access to all services required by claimants, and leads to accommodation that is suitable and affordable, it is doomed to fail and create a cycle of homelessness.

Rather than treating homelessness as a problem to be solved, The Salvation Army seeks to treat each person presenting as homelessness as a person full of potential. Providing a place to live is only part of the process of lifting this person from the pavement and raising them to the level of achievement that is satisfying to them. This approach will require resources of finance, personnel and time. We urge the Scottish Government to take a person-centred approach to welfare in general and homelessness provision in particular. We believe this will ultimately lead to a better society in Scotland and reduce (though never eliminate) the need for such services in the future.

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