

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition PE2147: Create more women-only homeless accommodation that protects and meets the specific needs of women, lodged by Laura Jones on behalf of the Scottish Tenants Organisation

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

The petitioner is concerned that women accessing temporary accommodation when they are homeless are at an increased risk of sexual assault and exploitation. The petition calls for more women-only homeless accommodation to be provided in Scotland to ensure the safety of women who find themselves in need of housing support.

Background information

Homelessness legislation (largely contained in the [Housing \(Scotland\) Act 1987](#) as amended) provides the legislative framework for homelessness.

Local authorities have a duty to assess anyone applying as homeless in their area. They must provide temporary accommodation to homeless households in certain circumstances.

The [Scottish Government has a policy to reduce the use of temporary accommodation](#) and is supporting local authorities to implement a rapid rehousing approach for homelessness people meaning that reliance on temporary accommodation is reduced.

[Scottish Government homelessness statistics](#) show that there is a continued increase in homelessness applications in Scotland. There were 20,823 homelessness applications recorded in the period April to September 2024, compared to 20,528 in the same period in 2023. This was a 1% increase. The average time spent in temporary accommodation increased from 222 days in 2023 to 234 days in 2024.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the statistics also show that, in the period April to September 2024, 40% of temporary homelessness accommodation was in local authority housing. Only 8% was in hostels. The 'Other' category includes 'newer' types of temporary accommodation such as rapid access accommodation, community housing and shared tenancies, which can be deemed suitable.

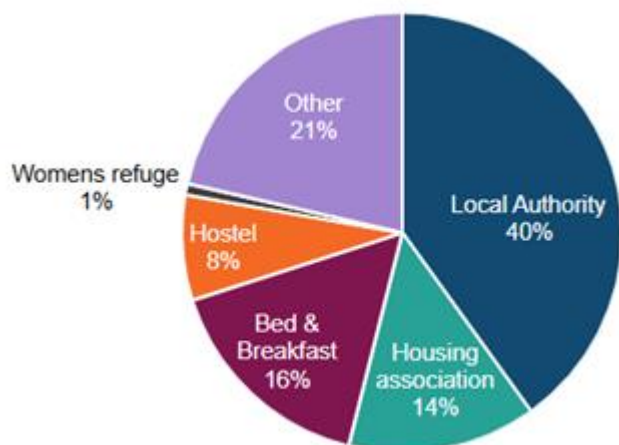


Figure 1 Scottish Government [Homelessness in Scotland: update to 30 September 2024](#)

Legislation does not make any provision for any maximum length of time that households should spend in temporary accommodation, although, in line with the rapid rehousing approach, the expectation is that households should spend as little time there as possible.

For some local authorities, there may be difficulties in moving households living in temporary accommodation to permanent accommodation due to the availability of suitable accommodation.

Local authorities have discretion to organise their own accommodation and how they do this varies. Legislation ([the Homeless Persons \(Unsuitable Accommodation\) \(Scotland\) Order 2014](#)) provides that no one should be placed in 'unsuitable accommodation'. [Effectively this should prevent the use of bed and breakfast type accommodation](#), except in an emergency situation. If households are placed in such accommodation this should not be for more than seven days.

In addition, the Scottish Government has a list of advisory standards that should be considered for temporary accommodation. The standards cover four main areas that should be considered by local authorities: physical, location, service and management. More detail of what is contained under each area is available at [Annex A in the Code of Guidance on Homelessness](#).

Joint report: Gender and the Housing Emergency

In October 2024, [Shelter Scotland and Engender jointly published Gender and the Housing Emergency](#), a report which aimed to "shine a light on the disproportionate impact of the housing emergency on women, and the additional barriers they face in accessing safe, secure, affordable, housing."

One of the key recommendations of the report was that action to address the housing emergency should include:

"Adopting a gendered approach to the allocation and supply of temporary accommodation (TA), taking particular account of women's needs with regards to gender-based violence and childcare responsibilities."

The report states that:

“There is very little appropriate TA available for women in Scotland... Women who have children and/or have experienced domestic abuse are particularly unwilling to be accommodated in hostels, hotels and B&Bs due to concerns about their safety in these types of accommodation. Such concerns around safety in these types of TA are not unfounded - through our services Shelter Scotland has heard very worrying allegations concerning sexual assault in hostels.”

It concludes that:

“The Scottish Government must recognise the urgent need for gendered TA in Scotland, in particular for women with children, and work with local authorities to ensure that availability of this type of TA is increased.”

Parliamentary question

The petition links to [Parliamentary Question S6O-03608 on the topic of hostel safety](#) which was asked by Ash Regan MSP on 20 June 2024. She stated that:

“We urgently need to provide safe and secure same-sex emergency housing to stop more women dying. That would be a simple first step in ensuring that these vulnerable women in crisis are not put at further risk of rape, sexual assault and trauma.”

The PQ was answered by the Minister for Equalities, Kaukab Stewart MSP, who said that:

“The Scottish Government is committed to dignity and respect for all. The Equality Act 2010 provides protection for women. The Scottish Government strongly supports the separate and single-sex exceptions that are in the 2010 act, which allow for women to have single-sex spaces...

The Scottish Government’s delivering equally safe fund is providing more than £7 million this year to local women’s aid groups for support for services for women and children.

We have introduced provisions in the Housing (Scotland) Bill that, if passed, will put a duty on social landlords to develop and implement a domestic abuse policy that outlines how they will support their tenants who are at risk of homelessness, including protecting the right of women to stay safely in their own homes. We will continue to work closely with the housing and violence against women and girls sectors to develop statutory guidance to accompany that duty.”

Key Organisations and relevant links

- [Scottish Government: Homelessness policy](#)
- [Scottish Tenants Organisation](#)

- [Shelter Scotland](#)
- [Engender](#)
- [ALACHO \(Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers\)](#)

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31/03/25

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

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