Dear Bob

ENDING HOMELESSNESS: STATEMENT TO SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT ON FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING ACTION GROUP

I am writing to make you, and the Local Government and Communities Committee, aware of the publication of the fourth report from the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group. It is being published today and I shall also be making a statement in Parliament at 2.40pm this afternoon setting out the work of the group over the course of the last year, as well as our plans for ending homelessness in Scotland.

This latest report from the Action Group sets out the steps required to end homelessness in Scotland and includes the Group’s final set of 29 recommendations, building on those already made, which the Scottish Government has accepted in principle. I attach a copy of the recommendations from the Action Group’s report. The report will be available at: https://beta.gov.scot/publications/homelessness-and-rough-sleeping-action-group-final-report/

This morning there was also an announcement of a significant allocation of £21m from the £50 million Ending Homelessness Together Fund to support the system in the transition to rapid rehousing and Housing First. This includes a £1.5m contribution over two years from the £20m funding made available this year for addiction services, demonstrating our commitment both to joint working at strategic level and taking these recommendations and actions forward.

The Scottish Government will now work with partners to develop the implementation plan to take forward the Action Group’s recommendations alongside those identified by the Local Government and Communities Committee report on your inquiry into Homelessness. The re-established Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group, co-chaired by myself and the Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

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COSLA spokesperson for Community Wellbeing, will also play a key role in taking forward those actions as we look to improve the circumstances of anyone experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and to prevent it altogether. Further information on the work of the HPSG is being made available at: https://beta.gov.scot/groups/homelessness-prevention-and-strategy-group/

I hope you and the Committee find this information helpful in advance of my statement later today in Parliament. Finally, I would be happy to attend a future session of the Committee to discuss further, if that would be useful.

Kind regards

KEVIN STEWART
HARSAG recommendations on ending rough sleeping

**Recommendation 1:** The Rapid Re-housing Transition Plans which are recommended by the HRSAG in relation to both ending rough sleeping and transforming the use of temporary accommodation must include an Equalities Impact Assessment which will cover all protected characteristics, and additionally assess impact according to ‘socio-economic status’.

**Recommendation 2:** The Personal Housing Plans which are at the heart of the response to individuals at risk of homelessness will need to be sensitive to all forms of inequality, but especially need to consider ‘financial hardship’ as an additional aspect, so we are not inadvertently trying to resolve a housing and/or support need and at the same time pushing someone further into poverty or destitution.

**Recommendation 3:** to ensure the social security offer supports households to avoid homelessness and to exit homelessness as quickly as possible when it does occur. As key elements of this, we recommend Scottish Government examine the case and pursue changes for the following:

- The way Local Housing Allowance is calculated needs to be reformed, raised to the 30th percentile everywhere, as well as being uprated on a regular basis.
- The overall Benefit Cap needs to be raised and the benefit freeze ended so that households are not forced into destitution – this is especially true for single people in younger age groups who are particularly vulnerable to homelessness and destitution as a group
- With the introduction of Universal Credit, deduction rates for advances, arrears, overpayments and all other third party deductions should be reduced; exemptions for the Shared Accommodation Rate need to be extended; and the 5-week waiting time needs to be removed as this creates arrears right from the start.
- There should be independent Housing/Homelessness specialists in Job Centre Plus with funding available to be made available to existing advice providers rather than directed by the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP).
- Work Capability Assessment to include homelessness as a ‘supplementary descriptor’.
- DWP to assess the likely impact of a benefit or social security sanction before issuing and sanctions should *not* be issued unless the DWP can satisfy itself that it will not cause homelessness

**Recommendation 4:** *Strengthened previous recommendation* Scottish Government, local authorities and Registered Social Landlords should continue to ensure an adequate affordable and social housing supply to tackle immediate needs, including a commitment to continue investing at comparable levels in affordable social housing beyond the current programme to safeguard supply in the longer term. This would be assisted by an agreed definition of affordable housing in the Scottish economic context and a long term view over the next 20 years, with cross party support for the commitment.
**Recommendation 5:** We recommend that other priorities on preventing migrant homelessness will need to include:

- Ensure that an assertive outreach model is available to provide personalised support, including the need for access to immigration and legal advice services and the need for employment support – recognising the need to operate within current rules on providing immigration and legal advice
- Reinstate entitlement to Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit for EEA nationals with ‘jobseeker’ status
- EEA nationals who are eligible for statutory homelessness assistance should have entitlement to benefits for six months
- Extend the move on period for newly recognised refugees to 56 days
- Funding for short term emergency accommodation for destitute migrants who are not entitled to statutory homelessness assistance, and are currently rough sleeping or at a high and imminent risk of rough sleeping, provided alongside access to advocacy and immigration and legal advice.

**Recommendation 6:** *Strengthened previous recommendation* Ensure plans are always agreed – or agreed as quickly as possible – to prevent homelessness for the groups who are predictably at highest risk of rough sleeping and homelessness.

Scottish Government and all public bodies should respond to evidence of which groups constitute the highest proportion of people resorting to rough sleeping – and the highest proportion of people who become homeless - to clearly articulate the pathways and interventions needed to prevent this outcome for particular groups. Evidence suggests this would include:

- People leaving public institutions such as prison, mental health services, armed forces;
- People with previous experience of public institutions such as prison, mental health services, armed forces;
- Groups with particular needs such as women who have experienced domestic violence, migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, people experiencing relationship breakdown, LGBT groups and people with experience of the care system or on leaving the care system;
- People who have experienced or are experiencing poverty and/or adverse childhood experiences; and
- Those facing potential eviction from the private rented sector, or the social rented sector including particular approaches on rent arrears.

Where this exists (e.g. SHORE standards for prisoners) SG and others should ensure that the pathways are implemented; and where this does not yet exist for key groups as above, SG and others should ensure pathways are developed and implemented.

**Recommendation 7:** Scottish Government and Local Government to ensure the consistent application of the Staying Put provision for care leavers and effective implementation of the Scottish Government Missing Persons' Framework as key interventions in preventing youth homelessness.

**Recommendation 8:** At a local level, there is helpfully a duty on local authorities and health boards to demonstrate action to tackle child poverty. Local authorities, health
boards and their Community Planning Partners should recognise child poverty as a primary driver of homelessness and demonstrate action to tackle child poverty in Local Child Poverty Action Reports as required through the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, as well as in Local Outcome Improvement Plans and Children’s Services Planning. This would be expected to include:

- Education and health as key public services are well placed to identify and offer help when there are early warning signs of homelessness
- Introducing homelessness and housing as a component of GIRFEC training
- Ensuring that all aspects of the housing system, from planning and building supply to nominations and allocations policies place GIRFEC at the heart of decision-making
- The provision of whole-family asset-based supportive interventions to help struggling families

**Recommendation 9:** Where children are homeless, a wellbeing assessment should be undertaken in relation to each child in the household to ensure any additional learning or social support is put in place through schools (subject to addressing how consent can be given for this in a way that doesn’t stigmatisé or impact negatively on the child). This assessment should also be considered when making allocations of temporary and permanent accommodation.

**Recommendation 10:** Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans, as recommended by HRSAG in their report on ending rough sleeping\(^1\) and Local Housing Strategies should include the planning and development of pathways and a range of affordable housing options and associated supports for young people, including enabling sharing and community hosting options (e.g. supported lodgings).

**Recommendation 11:** In considering the protected characteristic of age, Equality Impact Assessments of Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans must ensure that the needs of young people are adequately addressed.

**Recommendation 12:** Across their full range of delegated responsibilities Health & Social Care Partnerships should work in an collaborative way with Local Authorities, Housing Associations and the Voluntary Sector to prevent and tackle homelessness. Local Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans as part of the Local Housing Strategies to be fully integrated into Health & Social Care Partnership strategic plans. These should be included in the Housing Contribution statement to ensure they are part of the planning framework.

**Recommendation 13:** The Code of Guidance to specify expectations in relation to tenancy sustainment, including early intervention, to be addressed by landlords in all sectors, and how this is to be regulated. Social housing providers to ensure services in place to support early intervention and sustainment, health & wellbeing, good quality housing management and specialist support providers for people with more complex needs.

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### Recommendation 14:
Housing stock transfer local authority areas should have a dedicated local structure that liaises independently between local authorities (with the statutory duty to accommodate) and Registered Social Landlords (as housing providers).

### Recommendation 15:
There be a consultation on the inclusion of a new Code of Practice addendum, giving the Code of Practice a clear legal basis, alongside the current status of the Code of Guidance. This will enable staff to understand exactly what is required from them and therefore empower them to challenge if they are being asked in ways that cut across the legal position.

### Recommendation 16:
In the current review of HNDA guidance it would be helpful to also consider:
- The analysis of time spent in temporary accommodation and lets to different types and sizes of households.
- People with whom contact is lost or are otherwise not calculated in Temporary Accommodation estimates, but are part of the existing need.
- Including more detail in the guidance to improve the analysis provided to capture the local evidence for homelessness, those in temporary accommodation and those with complex needs.

### Recommendation 17:
Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans should be seen as an integral part of the SHIP, and should be annually reviewed as part of the SHIP process.

### Recommendation 18:
The Scottish Government and Scottish Housing Regulator should review current approaches to data collection from local authorities on housing association’s completions and lettings relative to housing need.

### Recommendation 19:
Use the upcoming review of the Local Housing Strategy guidance and the Scottish Government Practice Guidance on Allocations and Suspensions, due to be published in the Autumn, to support and reinforce the Rapid Rehousing agenda.

### Recommendation 20:
Local Authorities should review their nomination/referral policies, set rehousing targets and closely monitor performance against those targets.

### Recommendation 21:
The Scottish Housing Regulator should increase its focus on the Access to Housing Standard of the Scottish Social Housing Standard to assess how all landlords are performing on these standards in relation to enabling access to homeless households.

### Recommendation 22:
Scottish Government should work with partners to determine the actions needed to support frontline staff as they carry out their work, including in the design of systems, procedures and policies.

### Recommendation 23:
Social Landlords, both housing associations and local authorities, to use all opportunities to support housing sustainment:
- Ensuring there is ongoing support for all tenants re-housed after homelessness, to ensure that appropriate preventative action is taken at the earliest signs of difficulties, such as anti-social behaviour or rent arrears, to deliver a focussed approach on prevention through tenancy sustainment.
- Initiatives to address the issues of loneliness and social isolation.
- All social landlords to have clear policies on domestic abuse, and ensuring that experience of abuse or violence does not lead to someone losing their tenancy – for example, arrangements should be put in place so that tenancies can transfer seamlessly to the person who has experienced abuse, and reciprocal arrangements should be put in place to ensure people who experience domestic abuse can move to a safer place and have continuity of tenancy.
- Preventing evictions through more effective management of rent arrears, including early intervention such as financial health-check for new and other vulnerable tenants.
- Reviewing the Regulatory Framework around rent arrears in relation to social landlords, and reviewing pre-action protocols so that evicting into homelessness is avoided.

**Recommendation 24**: At the Local Authority level, Local Housing Strategies to address how employability, equalities and digital and financial inclusion support will be provided for people who are at risk of homelessness as part of the Housing Options service. At the individual level, ensure these issues are addressed as part of Personal Housing Plans developed with Housing Options. These elements should be included in the recommended Code of Practice.

**Recommendation 25**: Housing Options teams (including Housing staff from RSLs and Local Authority staff) and Job Centre Plus teams to work in partnership to ensure that employability, employment and housing support is provided in a joined-up way. Specific interventions such as mentoring or coaching to be provided for young people at risk of homelessness.

**Recommendation 26**: Scottish Government should launch, commission or be a partner in a public awareness campaign designed to tackle negative attitudes / stigma about homelessness and homeless people.

**Recommendation 27**: The Fairer Scotland Duty places a legal responsibility on particular public bodies in Scotland to actively consider (‘pay due regard to’) how they can reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socioeconomic disadvantage when making strategic decisions. Guidance already makes specific reference to homelessness, and prevention of homelessness should be considered as a key part of the implementation phase.

**Recommendation 28**: Homelessness must be seen as a public health priority, with all areas of Government prioritising it as such. In particular this must be considered by the wider public sector, the third sector and community partners to support work to improve the health of the population, in line with the Public Health Priorities.

**Recommendation 29**: We recommend a full analysis of the costs and economic benefits is included in the Scottish Government’s implementation plan for the recommendations made by HRSAG.