

# **SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE**

Wednesday 13 November 2002  
(*Morning*)

Session 1

£5.00

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body 2002.

Applications for reproduction should be made in writing to the Copyright Unit,  
Her Majesty's Stationery Office, St Clements House, 2-16 Colegate, Norwich NR3 1BQ  
Fax 01603 723000, which is administering the copyright on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate  
Body.

Produced and published in Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body by The  
Stationery Office Ltd.

Her Majesty's Stationery Office is independent of and separate from the company now  
trading as The Stationery Office Ltd, which is responsible for printing and publishing  
Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body publications.

---

# CONTENTS

Wednesday 13 November 2002

Col.

<b>HOMELESSNESS ETC (SCOTLAND) BILL: STAGE 1 .....</b>	<b>3245</b>
--	-------------

---

## SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

### 20<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2002, Session 1

#### CONVENER

\*Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)

#### DEPUTY CONVENER

\*Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP)

#### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

\*Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD)

\*Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP)

\*Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con)

\*Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

#### COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP)

\*attended

#### WITNESSES

Robert Aldridge (Scottish Council for Single Homeless)

Kathleen Caskie (The Big Issue in Scotland Ltd)

Gavin Corbett (Shelter Scotland)

Isobel Grigor (Calman Trust)

Alice Ann Jackson (Scottish Council for Single Homeless)

Grainia Long (Shelter Scotland)

Ian Robertson (Hamish Allan Centre)

Des Ryan (Edinburgh Cyrenians)

Stephen Strang (The Big Issue in Scotland Ltd)

#### CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Jim Johnston

#### SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Mary Dinsdale

#### ASSISTANT CLERK

Craig Harper

#### LOCATION

Committee Room 1



# Scottish Parliament

## Social Justice Committee

*Wednesday 13 November 2002*

*(Morning)*

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:00*]

## Homelessness etc (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

**The Convener (Johann Lamont):** I welcome everyone to this meeting of the Social Justice Committee. We have apologies from Linda Fabiani.

I welcome our witnesses for the first panel on the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Bill. I advise them that, to maximise the benefit of their time with the committee, we will go straight to questions. Witnesses will not have the opportunity to make an opening statement. We have received written submissions, for which we are grateful and which will be taken into account in our consideration of the bill.

For panel session 1, I introduce from Shelter Scotland Gavin Corbett, who is the head of campaigns, and Grainia Long, who is the parliamentary and policy officer. From the Big Issue in Scotland Ltd, I introduce Kathleen Caskie, who is the director of public affairs, and Stephen Strang, who is a grand central union member. From the Scottish Council for Single Homeless, we have Robert Aldridge, who is the director, and Alice Ann Jackson, who is the convener. I welcome the witnesses and thank them for attending.

I will kick off the questioning. The bill must get the balance right between granting new rights to homeless people and implementing those rights. Has it hit the correct balance between the rights and responsibilities of homeless applicants? I ask you to expand on your view.

**Gavin Corbett (Shelter Scotland):** Like the Big Issue in Scotland and the Scottish Council for Single Homeless, Shelter was involved in developing the proposals that led to the bill. We would be expected to say that we as a group have a strong consensus about the bill.

The key issues relate to resources, which have been discussed. In the medium term, the bill will make fairly massive demands on resources for the supply of accommodation and for support that is provided in that accommodation. In the first phase of the main expansion of priority need, most of the

people who should be housed in that way should have been housed because they were identified as priorities in the code of guidance. We do not expect a massive new need for accommodation in the first phase.

In the second phase, which will follow the next spending review in 2004, we will want a fairly substantial commitment to funding the new priority that will be given to an expanded group of people. We will focus on that.

**Robert Aldridge (Scottish Council for Single Homeless):** I reinforce that. The SCSH feels that the balance is right. The bill contains several checks and balances. The 10-year phasing of the extension of priority need allows the investment of resources to permit local authorities to manage any additional demands.

As Gavin Corbett said, the initial extension of priority need simply asks local authorities to implement the code of guidance as it stands. Many are doing that—all of them should do that—so that should not require many additional resources immediately. The bill contains checks and balances on the suspension of local connection. There is a provision to enable local connection to be reinstated in any local authority that faces an unforeseen burden as a result of its suspension. The programme is quite ambitious, but it is practical and there are sufficient checks and balances in the bill to give comfort to those who have fears.

**Kathleen Caskie (The Big Issue in Scotland Ltd):** I have read the evidence that has been given to the committee, which has contained quite strong representations from some local authorities about the additional resources that they would need. The additional resource that I would identify is not a cash-intensive one. When homeless people are going through the system and using the legislation that will be brought into force, they will need more advice, explanation and support to enable them to know what is going on.

From our evidence, you will see that that has been an issue for us. We have found that, for example, when a homeless person links in with Shelter and receives legal advice and support, the chances of their achieving a positive outcome and not just leaking out of the system or being put in a hostel, to go back on the streets and re-present as homeless later, are much greater. That support makes a difference. Although the local authorities may have issues regarding resources and the supply of housing, there are also issues concerning the resources that are available to help homeless people through the process by representing them and enabling them to understand what is going on.

**The Convener:** In response to the Executive's consultation, Shelter stated:

"it is not clear, in detail what the legal barriers are to refugees being included"

in the bill,

"and we are currently exploring an option to bring in alternative legal opinion on this".

Has Shelter explored the issue further? If so, what conclusions has it reached?

**Gavin Corbett:** Counsel's time is expensive and we have not been able to act on that statement although we have received assurances from the Executive that there are significant legal barriers. It would be helpful to us—and, I imagine, to the committee—if those barriers could be explained to us in detail. We have not received that explanation yet. In considering alternative options, such as ensuring that refugees are given a high priority in the code of practice and that they are a high priority for the regulator when Communities Scotland assesses homelessness work in local authorities, we would feel more comfortable if we could be sure that the legal option was genuinely closed off.

**Grainia Long (Shelter Scotland):** When the Executive gave evidence to the committee, it stated that mechanisms existed under the Scotland Act 1998 that would allow the policy on including refugees to be delivered. The Executive is looking into the matter and working with colleagues in Whitehall. We urge the committee to keep pushing the issue and asking that the time frame for that work with colleagues down south be made to fit in with the time frame for the bill. If that cannot be guaranteed, the committee should ask what sort of time frame we would be working in.

**The Convener:** The survey that was conducted by the Big Issue in Scotland suggests that there is

"widespread ignorance about the role of the local council in dealing with homelessness presentations".

You have talked about supporting people who are going through the process, and we take that point. However, is there a need for greater awareness raising by local authorities in relation to their homelessness activities? Should the bill address the responsibility of the councils to be proactive in informing people of their rights?

**Kathleen Caskie:** Regarding the survey, when we speak about our experience, we are dealing with a subsection of the homeless population, not necessarily with homeless families or homeless women with children. The group tended to be single men in their 20s, the street homeless and the hostel homeless. What we found among that group has been reinforced in conversations that I have had with some of our street sellers over the past couple of days. They do not know what

happened. If I asked them whether the council considered them homeless, they said, "I don't know. I went into a hostel, then I left the hostel." They do not understand the process.

I do not know whether it is appropriate to outline the procedure in the bill. The bill is just part of the raft of recommendations that came from the homelessness task force. It is important that we view the bill in the context of the wider raft of recommendations and that progress on the bill is analysed alongside progress on the other recommendations. The homelessness task force highlighted the need for advice and support, and we re-emphasise that. The bill might be very positive towards homeless people and try to ensure that they get housed. However, if they do not understand the process and do not know what is going on because it has not been explained to them, there is a problem.

For example, someone living in a hostel in Glasgow—one of the older hostels, rather than a new reception centre—will often go three or four weeks or longer without seeing a resettlement worker or a council housing worker. They have no idea that they are in a homelessness process or that they are involved in any kind of decision-making process. Stephen Strang might want to say something about the support that people are given.

**Stephen Strang (The Big Issue in Scotland Ltd):** When someone goes to the Hamish Allan Centre to be put into a hostel, they are not asked whether they want a house or anything; they are just put into a hostel. There are no resettlement workers in the hostel—no one gives guidance about council housing and so on. Hostel workers simply open the doors in the morning and at night and the people living in hostels are just left there. Hostels should help people to resettle into council houses.

**The Convener:** In that case, the issue is not only about affordable housing. Even if the houses are available, people need to be supported to make the right choices about where they are going to go.

**Kathleen Caskie:** Yes—that is part of the problem.

**The Convener:** Last week, we picked up on the problem that there are two different kinds of homelessness. One aspect is that housing is not available and the other is that people are not being supported to take up available tenancies.

**Gavin Corbett:** Stephen Strang described a common problem. Although some housing workers are committed and genuinely talented, they are trapped in the current model of homelessness assessment, which is based on testing eligibility. It is crucial that the bill changes

that model so that the role of the housing officer is no longer about checking priority need, intentionality and so forth, but about sitting down with someone at an early stage to discuss their options and what the housing officer can do for them. If the bill did that, it would be a major change for staff as well as for service users.

**Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Lab)):** All the panel members support the expansion of the definition of priority need that is contained in the bill. We have talked about the impact that the bill could have on housing in general. The opening answers mentioned how that could be developed. Housing is not only about bricks and mortar—we started to get into that with Stephen Strang's contribution. Will you expand on the impact of priority need on housing in general?

**Kathleen Caskie:** Because the Scottish Parliament is making such progress with the legislative recommendations of the homelessness task force, there is a risk that other aspects of the task force's recommendations are getting left behind. Even if we had the best homelessness legislation in the world, there are homeless people in Scotland today who could present as homeless today, get a council house by 5 o'clock and be homeless again two days later.

We are talking about more than legislation. We are talking about support, options and getting people out of the homelessness trap. Anyone who has been around the Big Issue in Scotland has heard us whingeing on and on about the benefits trap, which traps people in hostels that have rents of £200 or £300 per week. Those people are unable to take employment, which in turn means that they are unable to go out and get themselves a private sector rented flat. For a young man in his 20s, that might be a very viable housing option. All those issues need to be discussed alongside the legislation.

The expansion of priority need is important, as is intentionality, although it is slightly more controversial and more difficult to implement. At the moment, very vulnerable, chaotic people with very challenging behaviour are presenting themselves. It is easy for them to get a finding of intentionality or a "do not accommodate" notice—it may not be called that any more, but in effect it means that the council is saying that that person is so challenging and chaotic that they are excluded from the system. Those are the people who have the greatest problems and who are the most vulnerable, but they are very difficult to work with. The legislation cannot address those issues alone; homelessness policy has to move alongside the legislation so that those issues can be addressed.

**Robert Aldridge:** Gavin Corbett and Kathleen Caskie talked about the changes of culture that the bill and the Housing Act (Scotland) 2001 are

trying to engender. The legislation sets a framework within which a whole lot of things can happen. The task force's other recommendations are equally important, in particular the recommendation about the prevention of homelessness. There is a whole lot of activity in local authority homelessness strategies that should aim to prevent people from ending up homeless in the first place. Solutions to homelessness need to be sustainable and that includes a need to ensure that people have the appropriate support to enable them to live in whatever accommodation they are offered and for that accommodation to be reasonable and liveable in.

**Cathie Craigie:** Are local authorities able to manage the impact of the bill?

**Robert Aldridge:** I think that they are. We will know more when we see their homelessness and local housing strategies, which will provide hard evidence of the requirements. As we said at the beginning, the first phase of the extension of priority need is not really an extension at all; it is just asking local authorities to do what they should be doing in the first place. I think that they will have the capacity to do that, certainly in the short term, and we can plan for the medium term.

10:15

**Alice Ann Jackson (Scottish Council for Single Homeless):** It is not just up to local authorities; it is about local authorities working in partnership with other agencies in their areas, be they accommodation providers or support providers, so that they harness those service providers to ensure that they can meet some of the extra duties. Because of the work on homelessness strategies, local authorities are developing much better partnership working. There is further to go on the resourcing of other sectors to ensure that they can properly meet some of the new demands—that is important—but as long as they work in partnership, they should be able to meet some of the needs.

**Robert Aldridge:** I have one more point. From the most recent Scottish Executive statistics on homelessness applications, it seems that local authorities are already responding to the new demands. During the first quarter of 2002, something like 51 per cent of single people who applied were assessed as being homeless and in priority need. That compares with only 34 per cent in 1999-2000. There is already a move to accommodate single homeless people better. Local authorities are beginning to implement measures even before the legislation is in force.

**Kathleen Caskie:** I agree with Alice Ann Jackson's point about responsibility not just falling

on local authorities. Legislatively, the Scottish Parliament can impose a duty on local authorities. That is relatively straightforward—there is a process for it—but the solution to homelessness does not lie with local authorities and they should not be blamed for it. The much wider community has a role to play—private sector companies, the churches and the whole community in Scotland. Although we cannot legislate for that, in our view it is important that we do not lose sight of that point. At the Big Issue in Scotland we have much experience of private sector companies taking an active role in helping homeless people. Although that cannot be legislated for, it needs to be considered in the overall policy and strategy.

**Gavin Corbett:** We agree that if the bill is to be successful, it will depend on what happens round about, rather than on what is on the pages of the statute book. I have just come back from Aberdeen, where I was taking part in a series of seminars that Shelter is running round the country to talk about the homelessness task force report with housing practitioners.

I have been encouraged by the fact that, for the first time that I can remember, people are starting to engage properly and are not saying that they have so many things to do that they simply cannot do them and therefore can do nothing. Instead, they are saying, “Yeah, we can do this. There are things that are doable here. We need a few more staff and more support services.” In some areas, such as the Highlands, as the committee heard last week, substantially more houses are needed. However, people are saying that things are doable within 10 years. That positive spirit is unusual. It may not last long, so let us capture it while we can.

**Cathie Craigie:** I have a couple of short points, convener. Does the panel think that the definition of priority need should be expanded in any way, or has the bill got it right?

**Robert Aldridge:** The initial phase of priority need is more or less correct, but we strongly support Gavin Corbett’s comments about examining whether it is possible to include refugees. That was a strong recommendation of the homelessness task force. There is no doubt that somebody who achieves refugee status from being an asylum seeker is particularly vulnerable, and should be considered to be in priority need. We need to investigate whether that is legally possible, but we strongly support it.

**Kathleen Caskie:** In the longer term—25 years or whatever is feasible—priority need should be abolished, as it is a rationing mechanism. A homeless person should be able to say that they are homeless and to describe their problems. The local authority should assess that person’s situation and help them to find solutions towards

which they can work. The legalistic tests of priority need and intentionality should be abolished and replaced by a system of helping homeless people that is based on the needs of the individual presenting. I do not think that that will happen in the short term, but we would like the Scottish Parliament to work towards it.

**Cathie Craigie:** In the short term, members of the committee have discussed privately how to prioritise people in priority need. It would be great if in 25 years’ time we could reach the position that you want to reach, but we have limited resources. How will the people who are working at housing department desks be able to meet all needs? We agree that additional staff resources and housing are required. However, in the short term we will need to prioritise need. How should we do that?

**Gavin Corbett:** In principle, it is no different from what happens at the moment. The existing priority groups include some families whom we would regard as more urgently in need of immediate housing than others. Judgments are already being made. The question is one of volume. What do we do if the volume of demand substantially exceeds the amount of support and accommodation that is available? I do not regard that problem as insuperable, because the code of guidance already states that certain groups should be given priority. We must have confidence that local authorities have become progressively better at following the code of guidance and have taken it on board.

I may be naive, but I do not see a major problem. There may be cases in which accommodation is not available, but that is not a reason for not proceeding with the bill as outlined.

**Alice Ann Jackson:** What is seen as the first lessening of rationing covers more vulnerable single people. Although the code of guidance states that local authorities should house those people, many authorities have not done so or have housed only some of them. Some more vulnerable single people have been missed out. It is difficult to prioritise one person’s situation over another’s. That is why people have always campaigned to do away with the concept of priority need. If someone is homeless, that fact alone should constitute priority need. However, we must take a pragmatic approach. Until the resources are available on the ground, some—although not all—local authorities will have difficulty meeting all needs in a oner. We need to identify the most vulnerable people, which is not an easy or pleasant task for workers on the ground.

**Grainia Long:** When homelessness strategies become available next year, we will be able to see the housing management policies that local authorities have. That will help us to see how people are being prioritised.



**Robert Aldridge:** It is important to remember that there will not simply be an expansion in the number of people who are homeless. We expect the preventive aspects of local authorities' homelessness strategies to kick in. We also expect a reduction in the level of repeat homelessness, which should keep numbers under control.

**The Convener:** If priority need is not defined, someone somewhere will set priorities. They will make a judgment based on whoever comes to their desk first. Consider the cases of a woman who is fleeing violence and of a man who has been violent in the home but has moved out. Would you not make a judgment on who had priority in that situation? Should we not find a way of making that judgment explicit and transparent? If we do not define priority need, the criteria for decisions will be hidden. People will make judgments in their heads. This takes us back to the issue of the deserving and the undeserving.

**Gavin Corbett:** Hopefully, the regulator will help us to make criteria explicit. The problem with the current distinction is that it is based on household types and has nothing to do with the urgency of circumstances. It is a completely arbitrary rationing device that was imposed in 1977. I cannot see why public policy should continue to use the distinction between single people and people with children as a mechanism for rationing. There might have been resources issues back in 1977, but I cannot see the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 as a long-term basis on which to decide such priorities.

**The Convener:** How do you answer the point that some people's homelessness problems are symptoms of wider problems? You alluded to that earlier. There is a danger that spending could be skewed towards housing difficulties and that money could be pulled away from supporting people in school when there should be strong links with families, from working with families who are having problems, or from supporting young people before they have to go into the care system. Is there a danger that in resourcing the homelessness problem and addressing some of the difficulties experienced by people who might find themselves homeless, other moneys might become vulnerable?

**Gavin Corbett:** That is something that we come across quite a lot in our families project. Much of the support work in that project concerns schooling and access to health services.

The intentionality provisions are crucial. For the first time, the bill states that there is a strong incentive for local authorities and partner organisations to get things right. If they do not get things right—and that includes all the issues that you have just mentioned—tenancies will fail and

people will become unsettled. There will then be an obligation to provide even more intensive support to those families or persons. That is a crucial part of the picture.

I hope that the bill will mean that instead of giving people the keys to a house and assuming that their problems are solved, local authorities will have an incentive to engage with families or individuals to ensure that problems do not re-emerge and that there will not be a breakdown later on.

**The Convener:** If you were in charge of deciding how to spend the budgets, you would say that some families are vulnerable and money must be put into education and support for those families before they present as a housing problem. That money should not be seen as part of the housing budget, even though it might be used to address housing needs at a later stage. Is there a danger that, by focusing on trying to work with those families that have homelessness problems, other people will be missed or money will not be directed to where it could be used most effectively?

**Alice Ann Jackson:** If we are considering the way in which local authorities are developing their homelessness strategies and the corporate and holistic approaches that they are supposed to be taking, we are talking about prevention. Prevention has been emphasised by the task force and the Scottish Executive.

The problem should not just be seen in narrow terms. We should be considering what other local authority departments and external organisations can do further up the line to contribute to prevention. Work might be done that might not be related to housing at that point, but it could be identified as being a prevention measure, even if it is not paid for out of a homelessness budget.

We all recognise that local authorities and their partners are doing very important work on that, which should mean that homelessness problems do not emerge further down the line. It is crucial to get everyone involved in prevention if homelessness is going to be tackled in the longer-term.

**Gavin Corbett:** The bill is about catching, or helping, the people for whom preventive measures do not work. It would be great if, at some time in the future, we could dispense with homelessness legislation altogether because the situation does not arise. It is agreed that prevention is the key but unfortunately prevention is never going to be 100 per cent and we need a safety net, which is what the bill is trying to provide.

**Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD):** I have two technical points, the first of which relates to support. We are all agreed that the big prize is the

reduction in the revolving-door syndrome and the unnecessary and wasteful bureaucracy that goes with it.

The submission from the Edinburgh Cyrenians states:

"there is no measure on the face of the Bill requiring local authorities, in carrying out a homelessness assessment, to look at anything other than the accommodation needs of the household."

As far as I can see, that statement is correct, with the possible exception that housing support services are mentioned under the heading of intentionality in the explanatory notes. Are there concerns about that? Clearly that is what happens on the ground. Nevertheless, the duty of the framework and the way in which assessments are done are set out in the bill. Are the panel members concerned about the point that the Cyrenians raised?

**Gavin Corbett:** It would be sensible to ensure that a support assessment is done at the same time as the accommodation assessment. One of the difficulties is that, although accommodation can be defined in law, support is difficult to define and people might have quite a range of support needs. This may sound like an echo, but the intentionality provisions would provide a strong incentive, which does not currently exist, for providers to ensure that support is available. If you put a family or an individual into accommodation without adequate support, that tenancy will fail and the tenant will come back to you intentionally homeless. That is more expensive, so there would be quite a strong financial incentive, quite apart from the social and moral argument, for ensuring that support is provided in a way that existing legislation does not specify. We think that that is a reasonable balance.

10:30

**Robert Brown:** Does the bill as drafted say that, or is there a deficiency in the wording so that it does not quite fulfil all our purposes? We do not want a bureaucratic assessment that does not get to the heart of the matter.

**Gavin Corbett:** The bill does not say that at the moment. I am arguing that it would not necessarily need to, but I would not have a problem if it did. The real problem lies in defining what needs to be done to discharge that duty.

**Robert Aldridge:** To an extent, whether such a provision is required will be seen from the results of the homelessness strategies. If they are working properly, as Alice Ann Jackson said, support issues will be assessed as part of the process of moving towards sustainable solutions for homeless people. The idea is that local authorities should be the drivers for change in that

process, but it may be worth ensuring the safety net of a legal requirement. That would be beneficial, but I have not completely assessed the position yet.

**Robert Brown:** I also want to ask about the point that is made in Shelter Scotland's paper about the short Scottish secure tenancy. The short SST under the proposed arrangement would be different from that under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, and you support that distinction. However, that is contrary to the evidence that we heard last week from the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. They argued, from a landlord's perspective, that there needs to be a carrot-and-stick approach and that landlords should have a greater ability to control what we might call probationary tenancy situations, for want of a better term. Is there any merit in what the landlord interests, if I can put it that way, have to say about that?

**Gavin Corbett:** No. I can see where they are coming from but, from the point of view of a service user, although there are differences in the right to buy and succession rights, the distinguishing feature of a short SST is the support that is attached to it. Because the regime is quite new and because the support needs of people going through it will vary, I can see a lot of scope for argument and dispute, certainly in the early years, about support being promised but not provided. The tenant might say, "You said you would provide support, but you haven't." The provider might then say, "We have provided support, but you haven't engaged with it."

If a landlord were able simply to terminate the tenancy with no grounds at the end of a 12-month period, that would put the balance of power unfairly on the side of the provider, especially if there were ambiguity as to whether support had been provided or engaged with. That would be different from problems with tenancy conditions, where it is reasonably easy to assess whether the rent is in arrears or a tenancy condition has been broken. That is one of the reasons why we support the way in which tenancies would be provided under the bill, which is different from the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

**Robert Brown:** Is there any scope for what we might call a middle way? Could there be a management transfer arrangement, so that if a particular set-up were not working there would be a bit more power to request people to move elsewhere? That would provide a degree of power, short of requiring the full sheriff court scene.

**Gavin Corbett:** In practice, that might well be what happens. We would have to think about that.

**Grainia Long:** We said in our evidence that the tenancy and the support links must be designed to work. Disapplying section 36 of the Housing Act would help that, as we would encourage people to engage with the support. If we were to put together a provision that did not do that, we would be acting in bad faith towards the families and individuals who engage with support for a year.

We also said in our written submission that people should be encouraged not to end up in so-called last-resort accommodation, provision for which is outlined in section 7 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. For example, local authorities should consider extending a tenancy beyond 12 months. I suppose that much of that encouragement would be included in guidance that would condense the ethos of ensuring that support, including support that is linked to tenancies, works. Disapplying section 36 of the 2001 act would achieve that.

**Alice Ann Jackson:** I agree with that.

**Robert Brown:** What I am getting at is whether the arrangement is flexible enough. The landlords obviously think that it is not and that they will end up in difficulties with people. Is the arrangement flexible enough? Should not speedy action, movement and response to situations be part of the arrangement?

**Kathleen Caskie:** I am sure that there will be problems. All new systems throw up problems that appear insurmountable and that people have to campaign on or talk to politicians about. However, the starting point is whether the proposed new system would take us slightly further forward from where we are and whether it would provide more protection for vulnerable people. That is the basic position. We should try the new system and keep reviewing it. The Scottish Executive is committed to continuing to review progress on its homelessness goals. Perhaps we should adopt a suck-it-and-see approach.

**Alice Ann Jackson:** We are not talking about a large number of people. Only a small number of people are found to be intentionally homeless, and not necessarily for reasons that relate to anti-social behaviour, for example. People are found to be intentionally homeless for many reasons.

**Grainia Long:** Flexibility would be increased because there would be three key players: the tenant, the support provider and the landlord. Checks, balances and reviews would be written into the guidance, and we would hope that they would apply throughout the 12-month period.

**Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab):** You have already touched on the issue of intentionality. As Shelter said in its written submission, that is probably the most complex aspect of the bill, so the committee has many

questions about it. Can the bill's provisions on an endless duty towards homeless individuals be implemented? Will housing providers be able to deliver on that?

**Gavin Corbett:** Let me start with the principle. Most of our evidence is that simply being able to walk away from people who are intentionally homeless—which the current legislation allows to be done after four weeks—does not work very well. People tend to come back, perhaps two years later, with even more difficulties and requiring more in-depth intervention or assistance than would have been required at an earlier stage. The principle that one should engage with people as early as possible is right—even if challenging issues are thrown up.

We must believe that virtually everyone will engage with support if the support package is right. The big challenge is to ensure that support packages are diverse enough. That will take some time to achieve. What do we mean when we talk about so-called last-resort accommodation? I know that that issue came up at last week's committee meeting. There is much hesitation and uncertainty about that issue.

We identified in our written submission the need to avoid reinventing the wheel 32 times when local authorities consider how to implement the duty to provide support and accommodation. We like to think that we could set up some sort of process of sketching out what such models of accommodation and—which is probably more important—support would look like. All the organisations present on the panel would probably be willing to be part of that process.

We are confident that creating an on-going duty of support is the right way to go and that there are ways in which that could be achieved. We are keen to work with other organisations and with all local authorities to ensure that we get something robust.

**Kathleen Caskie:** I understand local authorities' concerns about the issue of intentionality. However, intentionality is an outdated concept from the previous century. Very few people get up in the morning and decide that they will make themselves homeless; instead, they make mistakes, behave badly and do not pay their rent. Those matters result in its being decided that they have made themselves intentionally homeless. The solution comes back to something that I think Nick Fletcher from the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland said about rights and responsibilities at last week's committee meeting. Those rights and responsibilities must be explained to people. They must be helped to understand that if they want to exercise their rights, they must take hold of their responsibilities. That would be the way in which, in the longer

term, the legislation and our treatment of homeless people should go.

In many ways the bill could be described almost as an interim measure because it deals with old legal concepts. We have to start from where we are, and this is where we are at. If people were to take a more visionary look at the longer term, they would ask whether there will really be a role in 100 years' time for concepts such as intentionality and priority need. They would also ask how we can prevent our citizens from being socially excluded and ending up on the streets and in bed and breakfasts.

I have not given a detailed answer, but I am trying to raise the issues. We can discuss the nitty-gritty of the bill, but we are really talking about a journey, and we are only halfway there. We are certainly not at the final point of sorting out homelessness.

**Karen Whitefield:** We all agree with that principle and hope that, when people make mistakes, they will be given help and support to rectify them—after all, we all make mistakes. Do you envisage the possibility of the housing provider—the local authority or housing association—being able to say, “Well, you have made a series of mistakes and despite our best attempts to give you as much support as we can possibly give you”—

**Kathleen Caskie:** Yes. You can see why providers take that position.

**Karen Whitefield:** Will there come a point at which providing accommodation as a last resort is not done?

**Kathleen Caskie:** Yes. Given some people's behaviour, it is possible for them to get into that position. However, I always say to local authorities that they should not reach decisions in which they say, “No intentionality. No priority need. No one has any responsibility—do not accommodate.” If that happens, the result is a social problem that costs the taxpayer and the public purse far more in terms of police, social work and drug and alcohol counsellors' time. It also results in nuisance in the street.

When people are rejected by the system, they do not just go away and live in a different country. They still have the same problems, and the situation can become more expensive and involve more participants. People can end up in jail and so forth. It is not sensible to reject people from the system.

I understand the problems that local authorities face; I would not want to be a front-line housing officer who has to deal with some of those problems. However, the Parliament has to take the wider view that rejecting people from the system is not a sensible option.

**Alice Ann Jackson:** I agree. Many local authorities continue to house intentionally homeless households because of their responsibilities for children or vulnerable individuals. Those local authorities may not house intentionally homeless households in permanent accommodation, but it is important to remember that they have not walked away from them.

**Grainia Long:** I echo what was said by one of the witnesses last week, which is that we are nowhere near the level of housing supply and support where we can walk away from those people. We should get to that point first, before we talk about people leaving the system for whatever reason.

**Karen Whitefield:** The committee has received evidence about the type of accommodation that is needed as a last resort by those people who experience real difficulties and who, despite initial support, need further support or assistance. It would appear that there is no model of what we mean by accommodation of last resort.

Last week, a representative from COSLA talked about the Dundee families project, but the support that that project provides would not be right for single homeless people, certain families or couples. How do you envisage such support being provided? If that support is required, do we need to discuss the implementation of the relevant provisions further and do they need to be closely monitored?

**Gavin Corbett:** The issue of time scale was raised last week. We have a strong hope—if I can put it that way—that the first part of the intentionality provision, which is the short SST, and the provisions on accommodation of last resort would be implemented together. If they were decoupled, some of the incentive to make the short SST work would be reduced—in effect, it would still be possible to walk away from people.

We always expected that the commencement date for that part of the bill would be furthest away. As a result, we have proposed that a working group be set up fairly soon—indeed, one could argue that it could be set up tomorrow—to begin to sketch out what the accommodation and support would look like. In fact, the support regime, rather than the physical building, the form of tenancy and so on, will characterise the matter.

Although we are all struggling with uncertainty, we could consider other models apart from the Dundee families project. For example, we could draw on the experience of organisations—particularly those in the voluntary sector—that have worked with people from whom everyone else has turned away. I am confident that we could sketch out a credible response to this part of the bill within the next year or so.

10:45

**Robert Aldridge:** Gavin Corbett's comments are quite important. It is also important that we do not look at accommodation of last resort as a particular type of accommodation. The last thing we want is a massive building programme of old-style traditional hostels. That is not the bill's intention and we should be quite clear that bottom-line or last-resort accommodation is not accommodation in that sense. As different local authorities will have different types of accommodation in which the support regime will be implemented, it is more a matter of developing different models of support than developing different models of accommodation.

**Karen Whitefield:** I agree. We do not want to encourage the building of hostels in which people will simply be left. Many local authorities—including North Lanarkshire Council—have tried very hard to move away from hostel accommodation because it does not provide the housing solutions that are required by people who have complex needs.

**Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con):** I want to move the discussion on a wee bit to consider the issue of local connection. The task force was concerned that the suspension of local connection might result in an increased and unmanageable flow of homeless applicants. One can imagine that certain areas might be a magnet and attract people. Do you share those concerns?

**Kathleen Caskie:** No.

**Robert Aldridge:** In preparing for this meeting, we read the debates that took place when the original homeless persons legislation—the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977—was going through Parliament. Someone said:

"In committee every hon. Member claimed to come from a constituency which was magnetic to people in other parts of the country. When we received the actual statistics from some of the areas that claimed to have been inundated with homeless families because of their magnetism, we found that the numbers were minuscule".—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 8 July 1977; Vol 934, c 1660.]

Some arguments do not change.

We recognise that the bill contains checks and balances to ensure that local connection is suspended. At the moment, local connection is used in very few cases. Many local authorities accept homeless people from other areas because they apply for very good reasons. There is no evidence on the ground that certain people—the so-called "holiday homeless"—are trying simply to move around. The checks and balances in the bill mean that any particular problem with a local authority can be rectified. We need to suspend local connection and give comfort to people that anything that goes wrong can be fixed.

**Kathleen Caskie:** The issue is a red herring. I associate myself totally with what has already been said. During the homelessness task force's discussions, the founding director of the Big Issue in Scotland, Mel Young, said that local connection should be got rid of in Scotland: if people want to move around in search of employment or for whatever reason, it should be easy for them to do so. Someone might live in Clydebank but feel that he or she has a local connection with Drumchapel, but a boundary runs between the two areas. That kind of silly situation happens all the time.

I appreciate the point that people might just want to move to Edinburgh or to Highland, but we should first find out whether that happens and, if it does, take steps to provide more housing in those areas. After all, if people want to live in Edinburgh or in Highland, we should help them to fulfil their aspirations and let them live where they want instead of sticking them in one place and telling them to stay there because that is where their mammy was born or where they went to school.

**Gavin Corbett:** Local connection might have been more of an issue when local authorities were smaller, before the reorganisation in 1996. Given that local authorities are now mostly large and that the connection is established with the whole area, many concerns tend to centre on what will happen if, for example, all these people want to live in Portree. However, in terms of how authorities allocate houses through their waiting list or allocation policy, local connection is a connection with the whole area.

If a homeless person turns up in Portree and wants to be housed, but no houses are available and there are no reasons why the person should be housed in Portree—such as social or employment connections—it is legitimate for the authority to ask the person to consider the range of housing that is available. That power should not be misused: some people have legitimate reasons for living in an area and establishing a connection, for example if they are fleeing abuse and need to live with family members. However, some of the concerns are a wee bit overstated and are based on a commonsense understanding of local connection rather than on an understanding of the legislation.

**Robert Aldridge:** Our letter to MSPs raised the issue of refugees. We are in favour of the suspension of local connection, but if local connection is to be used, we believe that it should not apply to asylum seekers who become refugees. Such people are dispersed to an area with no choice in the matter, which should on no account establish a local connection with an area. Glasgow City Council is involved in a court case on that issue.

**Mrs McIntosh:** Would that mean that asylum seekers who are given leave to remain could go anywhere?

**Robert Aldridge:** Yes. They could go anywhere because they would not have a local connection. That applies, for example, to members of the armed forces.

**The Convener:** Is it realistic to say that if somebody wants to live in Edinburgh or Portree, we should facilitate that? There are problems with housing availability in some remoter island communities. Housing is under pressure because many properties are bought by people who have a long-term connection with the area or by people who want a holiday home. Simply saying that if people want to live in such places we should find a means of facilitating that does not answer the question. Your suggestion would mean that some people's needs would be prioritised over the needs of people who live in a community and want to stay there.

**Kathleen Caskie:** No: the suspension of local connection does not mean doing away with homelessness policy and the legislation under which housing is allocated according to need. Gavin Corbett made the point that if someone arrives in Portree and wants to live there and there are no houses available, that person will either have to find a home in the private sector or move into the owner-occupied sector. Local connection does not serve a useful purpose. I realise that there are concerns about people moving to rural areas, but if the council, which is responsible for providing accommodation for homeless people, does not have available houses or a building programme, it cannot house such people.

I return to Gavin Corbett's point: it is easy to argue about what might or might not happen, but there are rules for allocating houses and for creating homelessness policies and protocols with housing agencies. Local connection is a red herring.

**Mr Kenneth Gibson (Glasgow) (SNP):** The Big Issue in Scotland submission states:

"extending the scope of the homelessness legislation is of lesser importance than reform of the various systems and regulations which effectively debar homeless people from entering the workforce and earning an income".

We have already heard that

"there are a raft of further recommendations in the Homelessness Task Force, many of which are equally or more important than the recommendations concerning the homelessness legislation."

We have heard about the prevention of homelessness and the need for support and advice on the benefits trap. Are there any other issues that arise from the homelessness task force's work that you would like us to progress,

perhaps through the bill? What measures could the Parliament take outwith legislation?

**Kathleen Caskie:** I would like advice to be given to people about their rights, but the Parliament cannot do anything about benefits because that is a reserved issue. We are working with the Scottish Executive on that. The point is philosophical rather than political. We believe that for many homeless people, if they are given a way back into society from social exclusion and have a chance to earn an income, they can begin to sort out their homelessness problems.

Homeless people are not two-headed. That is not relevant to the bill; it is a philosophical point. Homeless people are not that different from the other people who are sitting round the table at this meeting. If we give them a few breaks and a few chances, they can get on, sort themselves out and take control of their own lives. That also helps to prevent repeat homelessness.

If people can take control of their own lives and make their own choices, it helps to prevent the pressure on housing stock. That is of equal importance to legislation that will help the vulnerable, give people rights and ensure that they do not have to sleep rough. That is not the end point. We would like homeless people to be included again, instead of excluded.

**Mr Gibson:** Do you believe that no further legislative measures could be added to the bill?

**Kathleen Caskie:** The Department for Work and Pensions could usefully do some things, but they are not within the Parliament's competence.

**Mr Gibson:** You mentioned practical measures. You said that homelessness is an issue for the entire community. I took that on board. What practical measures can communities—or the Parliament—take to address the wider issues other than through the legislative process and some of the matters on which you have already touched, such as advice and support?

**Kathleen Caskie:** I do not actually know the answer to that. The solution to homelessness does not end with the Parliament. The Parliament makes a contribution, but the solution lies in wider society. One practical measure might be to encourage those sections of the business community, such as the Bank of Scotland and Standard Life, that are going out and finding ways to employ homeless people and give them training programmes. You could also encourage City of Edinburgh Council, which has been working on that.

The Parliament could ensure that the framework and moral support for such work exist rather than making a legislative response. Some things that we can do to improve the world cannot be done

through legislation. Perhaps it is more about how the Parliament leads the culture and society in Scotland. That sounds very philosophical.

**Mr Gibson:** It is matter of encouraging diversity by employers, for example. A number of interesting initiatives on that are being carried out.

**Robert Aldridge:** It is important to build up in the community awareness of the breadth of people who become homeless, rather than allow stereotypes and opposition to be built up. Anyone can become homeless. We all have a responsibility to build up that awareness. We have a large amount of work to do to ensure that communities are welcoming to homeless people who are housed in them.

There are other practical measures that are not for legislation. For example, the tenants movement must ensure that newly housed homeless people are welcomed into the tenant participation services that are being developed. We need to ensure that homeless people are included in the mainstream activities of their new communities.

**Gavin Corbett:** The general point is about tone and leadership. If Robert Aldridge had continued to read from the 1977 *Hansard* from which he quoted, we would have found some alarming examples in which leadership from politicians was lacking. The tone of discussion in the Scottish Parliament is much more progressive. That is really important.

A couple of practical things could probably be done. Perhaps the point about homeless people finding employment applies as much to the Parliament and the bureaucracy that surrounds it as it does to local authorities.

I am conscious that, in the scrutiny of the annual spending round, we in the homelessness world have struggled to provide information that allows the committee to go back to the Finance Committee. Perhaps that is something on which we could work over the next couple of years, given the priority that has been given to identifying resource needs. I would like to think that, this time next year—certainly for the 2004 spending review—we will be able to come back with information that is as precise as possible on the kinds of resources that are needed to make the bill work as it is intended to.

**Mr Gibson:** In written evidence, Shelter stated:

“MSPs must ensure that the increase in the rights of access given to homeless people by this bill is matched by the resources to ensure that what homeless people can now access is reasonable levels of affordable accommodation and reasonable levels of support.”

Given the phased approach to implementing the bill, how would Shelter identify what constitutes reasonable levels of resourcing? Are you satisfied

that the resources the Executive has committed to date are adequate for early implementation?

**Gavin Corbett:** Shelter never says that there is enough. That is not something that I am on record as saying. The spending review has produced £8 million for the coming year and £40 million for the two following years. That must cover matters such as developing a new model of last-resort accommodation—we need to find a better term for that—providing support where money from the supporting people programme has not been put in place and various things to do with staff training and staff development, which are important.

That is a reasonable start. There is an argument for more. The big resource needs will come from 2007, when priority need is expanded. There is also a big question about whether the supporting people programme, which takes over funding next April, will be able to provide enough of the support that we need to make the bill successful.

Perhaps Robert Aldridge would like to add something.

**Robert Aldridge:** Thank you so much. *[Laughter.]* There are concerns about whether the supporting people programme will have sufficient money in the pot to enable new support ideas to be developed. The supporting people programme moves from a demand-led, housing benefit-based system to a cash-limited system. It is up to local authorities and others to identify projects that are in the pipeline almost immediately, so that they can be funded from the total pot. We have some concerns that, if projects are not identified, additional resources from some source or another might be required to ensure that the support that is needed to make the bill work is available.

11:00

**Mr Gibson:** Kathleen Caskie talked about the Department for Work and Pensions. Would the restoration of benefits to 16 and 17-year-olds make a difference?

**Kathleen Caskie:** Yes! I am sorry: that was what in America they call a no-brainer. Yes. Those without income are vulnerable, particularly if they are homeless. Do I need to add to that?

**Gavin Corbett:** Nobody is going to say no to such a restoration of benefits.

**The Convener:** We have no hostility towards brief and clear answers. They are welcome.

As there are no other questions, I thank you all for coming along this morning. We found your evidence useful. As I said before, if you want to explore any points with us or to expand on anything you said, we are more than happy to receive further written submissions from you.

11:01

*Meeting suspended.*

11:11

*On resuming—*

**The Deputy Convener (Mr Kenneth Gibson):** I call the committee to order. The convener sends her apologies. She must attend another committee meeting because she has lodged amendments to another bill. I will take the chair for our next evidence session.

I welcome our three witnesses: Ian Robertson, who is the chief housing officer of the Hamish Allan Centre in Glasgow; Des Ryan, who is the director of Edinburgh Cyrenians; and Isobel Grigor, who is an agent for the Calman Trust. To allow more time for questions, we will not ask people to make an opening statement. I will ask a couple of general questions to kick off.

Has the consultation on the bill been adequate? Did you have sufficient time to formulate a response to the Executive consultation exercise on the bill?

**Des Ryan (Edinburgh Cyrenians):** Looking back, I have been extremely satisfied with the whole consultation process, from the homelessness task force through to the bill. In my opinion, it involved many front-line agencies, such as Edinburgh Cyrenians, and it gave us space to enable us to consult the people who use our services—people who have experienced homelessness. We have been happy to reflect those views in our submissions.

**Isobel Grigor (Calman Trust):** I agree. Momentum has been built up from the homelessness task force. The homeless strategy work in the Highland area has given us the opportunity to consult partners, to develop stronger relationships with them and to obtain a general understanding of what we need to do to improve things in the area. We have appreciated that opportunity very much.

**Ian Robertson (Hamish Allan Centre):** An adequate opportunity to respond and sufficient time have been allocated to the consultation. There has been enough time to allow Glasgow City Council's committees to consider the issues. The Hamish Allan Centre has had more than adequate time to talk to and obtain the views of colleagues and other agencies with which we work in partnership.

**The Deputy Convener:** Do you consider that local authority functions in relation to assessing support needs and providing support are emphasised sufficiently in the bill?

**Des Ryan:** There is an improved emphasis on that. If there is one concern, it is that local authority assessment and support need to go beyond a narrow housing perspective. As is reflected in the homelessness task force's report, there is a need to incorporate people's holistic needs. People's health, their financial situations and their social work support needs all need to be considered. We would encourage, through the local homelessness strategy, an interdepartmental approach, which would mean that different departments and organisations in the voluntary sector would work together in a much more integrated and holistic manner.

11:15

**Isobel Grigor:** Unless that kind of corporate approach is taken, it will be difficult to make real progress. Homelessness is not actually a housing issue—it is a person issue. We need such an opportunity to work strategically towards joint solutions.

**Ian Robertson:** There could probably be more emphasis on assessing support needs and providing support. In Glasgow, we have opened Clyde Place, which is the first joint assessment facility the city has had. Previously, homeless applicants would come to the Hamish Allan Centre and, ostensibly, their housing needs would be assessed. Now, once that process has taken place, they are assessed in a multi-agency environment at Clyde Place, where we have housing, social work and health staff. Those staff are able to assess not only what housing needs applicants have—whether they require a furnished flat or supported accommodation, for example—but the level of support that is required to keep them in that accommodation. That is obviously the key to keeping down the number of repeat homelessness presentations.

We have been running the facility for the past five or six months. As we pick up momentum, we are beginning to find that those who come out of Clyde Place tend to be much more positive when they go into their new accommodation, because support is available from day 1. After moving in, there is no longer a gap of three or four weeks before a social worker or whoever comes on the scene to help them. It is clear that the support package has to be linked with the assessment process at an early stage. For a homeless person to benefit from all the services that are necessary to allow them to maintain their tenancy, assessment and support have to be delivered in a seamless fashion.

**The Deputy Convener:** As you might have heard, one of the previous witnesses, Mr Stephen Strang, said that it was his experience that there were no resettlement workers in the Hamish Allan



Centre. Is that comment more relevant to the past or is an absence of resettlement workers still a serious issue in the Hamish Allan Centre?

**Ian Robertson:** The Hamish Allan Centre provides a 24-hour service. We offer emergency accommodation. Everyone who comes through the centre receives a fairly rudimentary assessment, so that we can put them into accommodation. We are developing our network by setting up nine geographic casework teams that will be based in accordance with the nine geographic areas of our social work department. We are in the process of recruiting. There are also two specialist casework teams; one is based in Barlinnie prison, the other is specifically for refugees. That will be the method by which people will be picked up and dealt with through casework, once they have gone through the assessment process at the Hamish Allan Centre.

Our vision is that someone who approaches Glasgow City Council will be assessed and then receive a casework service. A member of staff will be locked on to that individual to see them through their crisis and on to their sustainable accommodation. The staff member will continue to work with them until they have a permanent tenancy and will ease off only when assessment has revealed that they no longer need that level of support.

**Robert Brown:** We should encourage people to do the kind of work that Glasgow City Council is doing. Other local authorities might be beginning to follow such a pattern. Should the bill include some sort of duty to ensure that the assessment process is not based narrowly on housing, but takes account of wider support needs? Is the bill defective to a degree in that respect, as Des Ryan suggested in his written evidence?

**Ian Robertson:** I think that it is, because the onus is not on conducting the assessment process in a multi-agency way. From our experience in Glasgow, it is clear that unless a multi-agency approach is taken all we can do is place somebody into accommodation. In Glasgow, two thirds of presentations—about 7,000 to 8,000 people a year—are repeat presentations. Simply placing somebody in accommodation is clearly not the answer. We must place them in accommodation and allow them the wherewithal to stay in that tenancy. We must support them if they have a drug or alcohol problem or if they suffer from mental health problems, and that is not specifically a housing function. We must bring in the other agencies to work with us at the assessment stage.

We must identify what the problem is and load on the resources from day 1, when the person moves into their accommodation. In the past, we have found that the crucial period is between day

1 and day 7. If somebody can be sustained for a week to 10 days, there is a chance of keeping them in accommodation. The number of people who stay in accommodation for only one or two nights, then disappear and come back into the system again, is quite high.

**Cathie Craigie:** I know from your submissions that you support the extension of the principle of priority need and its ultimate abolition. We have heard this morning—and from other people who have given evidence to the committee—that that would have an impact on their ability to provide housing. Do you have any concerns that local authorities will not be fully geared up and able to manage the change and the impacts that it will have?

**Ian Robertson:** At the moment, we go beyond what is required by the current legislation, so we do not anticipate an immediate problem. However, as other groups are brought in, there could be difficulties. It is difficult to gauge the number of people who will be involved, but we reckon that between 2,000 and 4,500 additional people would fall into the system if everyone was brought in at the same time. That would present a fairly big resource issue for Glasgow. The mechanics of processing those additional applications would also present difficulties.

**Des Ryan:** We understand the need for a staged abolition of priority need. The hope is that the increased duty will provide the impetus to create the additional housing that will be required. Given that the bill represents the achievement of the goals for which I and many others have been campaigning over the years, it seems churlish to ask for more. However, we hope that the Executive will consider extending the priority need category relating to young people to include 20 to 24-year-olds.

Our agency works with the young people who are most at risk of long-term homelessness, and just over 60 per cent of our service users have a background of local authority care. If one considers their life stories, it is really when those people are between 20 and 24 that they are able to engage with the services and rebuild their lives. We find that many people are caught in the no-man's-land that exists because of the current housing department view of their vulnerability with regard to their age and the fact that the benefits system is prejudiced against them until they are 25. The 20-to-24 age group is of particular concern to us, especially those who are most vulnerable. Therefore, although we recognise the pressure that will inevitably exist on local authorities to satisfy their duties under the bill, we will lobby for the consideration of that group as well.

**Isobel Grigor:** Yes. The clients with whom we have worked to date have been young people who have been treated by local authorities as having a priority need under the terms of the code of guidance. The bill simply brings that into statute.

I agree that there is a need to extend provision to 20 to 24-year-olds, but we have another underlying concern. The service provided by the Calman Trust in Easter Ross has been around for only six or seven years. We now receive a regular flow of referrals—of about 40 to 50 young people who are vulnerable and at risk of homelessness. Previously, there was a trickle of young people who visited the local authority. Most of them do what applicants to the Calman Trust do before they contact us: muddle on with whatever personal solutions they can arrive at.

If we extend that situation across the Highlands, where there is no comparable service, a family facing breakdown or a young person in crisis at home in Ullapool, for example, will find that there is no slack in the system and no support to call on. I do not doubt the concern of the local authority staff of every service, but there is not a local response and taking that person out of the area creates further difficulties for them and their family. Underlying all our concerns in the Highlands is that lack of capacity.

**Ian Robertson:** I want to add that although we agree that priority need should be abolished over a phased period, at the end of that process we will end up with no priority but a lot of applicants. By definition, some cases will be more of a priority than others, so I do not think that it is a simple as saying that there is no priority need within the categories that will apply. Some people will still require attention more quickly than others. There must be some compromise that includes a reference to how people can be dealt with under no priority need provision but with an acknowledgement that some people's cases will be more of a priority. As the numbers grow and more people apply to one authority, it becomes more of a difficulty.

**Cathie Craigie:** That was one of the questions that the convener and I put to the previous panel of witnesses. How are those people prioritised according to priority need?

**Ian Robertson:** If a woman is fleeing violence with a couple of kids, and she has clearly been abused, most people would recognise that as a number 1 priority. How can that be done if 10 or 15 people are present at one time and nobody has any priority? In operational terms, the people who apply tend to be prioritised.

**Cathie Craigie:** Yes, but our question is: who sets those priorities? We wondered whether the bill needs to define that in more detail, to stop an

individual making those decisions. Indeed, my next question was: do you think that the definition of priority need should be expanded? You made your pitch for the 20 to 24-year-olds. Are any other groups not mentioned that should be?

**Des Ryan:** It is very difficult and a matter to which Edinburgh Cyrenians has paid new attention. We have run a rent deposit guarantee scheme for a number of years. We picked up on the fact that we have been dealing with an increasing number of 18 to 30-year-old refugees who had been given permission to stay and who have come to Edinburgh. It has been of increasing concern to us that many of those people face complex problems with not only their accommodation, but their need for culturally appropriate support. We are currently examining the particular support needs of that group.

We are working with many other agencies to establish how we can integrate our services to prevent those people from becoming the new long-term homeless of tomorrow. Evidence from other European capitals seems to suggest that they are a vulnerable group.

I realise that there are difficulties about whether that is a matter for Westminster and so on. The fact is that it is a significant problem on the street, here and now. We, at a grassroots level, must try to address what is clearly a growing problem.

11:30

**The Deputy Convener:** Do members of the panel agree that while they are in favour of the abolition of priority need, in practical terms, the achievement of that laudable aim could lead to difficulties? As Ian Robertson said earlier, it could lead to subjective rather than objective decisions being made and to there being a disparity throughout Scotland—or even within specific local authorities—in how certain groups are treated.

**Ian Robertson:** Yes. The problem is that unless the priority is clearly laid out in the legislation, it is left to the individual local authority and the individual members of staff in the organisations, who have the presentations in front of them, to make the decision. That cannot be good for continuity throughout Scotland.

If there is no priority, the difficulty is that there will be an onus on individual members of staff to interpret their view of priority and to deal with people accordingly.

**Des Ryan:** I am sure that a new set of problems is being introduced with the graduated abolition of priority need, but it is a better set of problems than the ones that we had previously, when we created barriers that excluded people who were in need from receiving the help that they clearly needed.

There will certainly be problems with assessment, allocation and all the rest of it. That leads to another point about implementation and refers back to the question that was asked about assessment and support. Local authorities will be faced with the need to train their front-line staff—their assessment staff—in a much more intense and holistic manner, which will enable them to provide a full assessment of a person's situation. They will then be able to get an idea of the person's needs and establish which agencies will need to be brought in to meet their needs in the best way, so that they are prevented from becoming homeless or are enabled to escape the homelessness trap.

**Isobel Grigor:** I will come back to my concern about the fact that in Highland prioritising is always done in the face of incredibly scarce resources. The existence of two potentially equally demanding cases in a community in which one house might be available and in which there is no accessible support means that work needs to be done to build up the basic infrastructure, so that some of the problems of priority need can be addressed more constructively. Currently, the pressure on front-line housing staff is acute. Inevitably, fairly idiosyncratic decisions are made. The handling of such decisions is in part a training issue, but it is also fundamentally about resources.

**Karen Whitefield:** I want to discuss intentionality, which we have already covered. You will probably agree that there is a need to change the existing legislation in respect of intentionality. Do you support the replacement of the duty on local authorities to investigate intentionality with a power to investigate it? Why is that necessary? What difference will it make?

**Des Ryan:** The homelessness task force's research papers and the figures for the first quarter of 2002 make it clear that where investigations took place, the numbers involved were very small. I wonder how much the duty panders and is a sop to the opinion that people who are homeless are chancers. The change in the bill will enable local authorities to target their time and resources where they can be used best, so that, rather than having a duty to investigate intentionality, they can investigate if there are reasons to do so. The bill enables us to move the agenda to the real problems that we have discussed. How can effective help be brought to people with the most intractable problems? We should face the real problems. Rather than gatekeeping and keeping people out, we should let people in and try to find creative ways of working with them, so that we have a richer society that is less burdened by people in intractable situations and people with intractable problems.

**Ian Robertson:** I completely agree. Many people who are intentionally homeless are very vulnerable and have health assistance requirements. It does not do anybody any good simply to put up barriers and exclude them—their problems will not get better and society's problems will not get better. They are probably among the most difficult cases to resolve, but at the end of the day, such cases must be resolved—if not, they will only get worse. We have an obligation to those people to take them on board and properly assess their needs. Such cases might be extremely costly to resolve and might be resolved only in the long term, but that is their nature. They are not easy to resolve.

**Isobel Grigor:** Other submissions show that local authorities, for example, are anxious about the intentionality provisions, and I see where they are coming from. However, the experience and confidence of a vulnerable homeless person must be considered. Any concerns on the landlord's part must be balanced with the fact that someone who is at such a low ebb is faced with many additional hurdles and will have the opportunity to begin to address those constructively. Cases of domestic abuse in which individuals need to demonstrate that they are vulnerable and genuinely homeless are extreme cases. To add that requirement to their experience at that time might be a fig leaf that satisfies certain attitudes in society, but it is not where we want to be.

**Karen Whitefield:** Will the fact that the bill will place an obligation on a local authority to continue to provide accommodation and support for homeless people, irrespective of what happens—unless it finds a tenancy for such people—also ensure that the support that is needed to help a person to maintain a tenancy will be given?

Will local authorities have an incentive to provide that support? Are problems possible when, despite the best intentions in the world, it sometimes becomes more complicated to resource those needs continually? If so, what is done with such individuals? What accommodation should be provided for them?

That relates to an issue that we touched on in the other panel session. Some witnesses shook their heads because they agree about not necessarily wanting to provide hostel places into which people who have the most needs and are the most vulnerable can move.

**Ian Robertson:** People use the word “support” as the end of a sentence, as if it is the solution. We must sit down and ask what support means. In the community of a tenement close that has 10 other residents, we might place someone who might not be as well behaved as people in that close would like. The community and the neighbours need to be reassured that that

individual or family can be supported to a standard that the local community will accept. Many communities, and people in general, are frightened that somebody whom they think has many problems will be dumped with them. Whether or not that person has problems, people always generally associate homelessness with many difficulties.

We must reassure the community that that person will be supported. That means ensuring that the person's problem is contained and does not spill out on to the landing, into the close or on to the street. That is usually what happened initially and is probably why the person was evicted. That requirement is difficult to meet and is not just a matter of arranging a visit to that person once a week. The community and the neighbours must be involved and we must explain what can be done for people. We must be up front and we must place people in the community sensitively. People must take responsibility.

It is inevitable that some such situations break down. They break down less when the right support is in place, but even with the right support, many such situations break down. In Glasgow, the person involved returns to the hostel scene, which we are trying to eliminate. We are trying to replace hostels with more supported accommodation, such as furnished flats, core and cluster accommodation or small accommodation units in which five, 10 or 15 individuals live in a communal setting. Controlling people in such situations is easier. We can work with them, rehabilitate them—as it were—and put them back into the community.

A fallback position from a tenancy or a temporary tenancy must exist, because many people do not make it first time. We must allow for success the second, third or fourth time. We cannot just say, "It didn't work, so we'll forget about you." We must allow people to go back down to the level that they are at, then pick them up again, reassess the support and put that back. I have found that we must act swiftly when people begin to complain about neighbouring tenants.

**Des Ryan:** Such cases probably attract headlines, but I suspect that their number is quite small, compared with the big picture. My charity works with the most complex cases and the people who are the most difficult to help, so we tend to see more than our fair share of such problems. We work with people for years, with small successes and repeated failures, but we continue to work tenaciously and flexibly with people.

In most cases, positive outcomes are eventually achieved. We know that doing that involves a range of interventions and of professions and means co-working and integrating our work with

that of others. We must provide people with real-life opportunities that are attached not only to their housing situation or their homelessness. We introduce them to opportunities to train, to obtain a job and to deal with health matters that have hindered their progress, and we introduce them to educational opportunities. All those things, as is reflected in the homelessness task force report, need to be part of a local strategy and part of the package that is available to people at the service delivery end.

In the previous evidence session, the emphasis was on the models of accommodation that might be developed for the most intractable situations. I tensed a little during that discussion. Accommodation comes into it, in the sense that if we are trying to enable someone to enter a normal lifestyle, the housing situation has to reflect that, but I echo the point that the traditional hostel route needs to be a thing of the past. Rather than looking at models of accommodation, we should be looking at models of support and an integrated package that enables people to attend to the problems that are holding them back the most from taking up their places as contributing members of society.

11:45

**Isobel Grigor:** At the risk of repeating myself, in Highland the underlying issue is: how will the person be able to access the tenancy and support if the resources do not exist within their community? That is a huge underlying issue.

We provide support to young people who are in tenancies. The quality of that support depends on the fact that it is person centred. We provide a package of support to address the question: what do you need to achieve a sustainable lifestyle? We provide help to access benefits, to learn to pay bills and to access training, and we help to deal with all the issues around maintaining a home and dealing with friends. For a young person, that is not an unalloyed pleasure. Very often—and it does not apply exclusively to young people—a new tenant finds that the responsibility is beyond anything that they wanted and beyond anything with which they can cope.

At the point where it becomes clear that the situation will not work for the individual, our support tries to address the alternatives with the individual, if they wish to give up their tenancy. The bottom line is that there are times when we achieve a chance for the individual to move on to another solution, probably with family and friends, but without a bad housing record, without debt, without a trashed flat, and without all the circumstances that make it more difficult for them to come back into the system. Recognition that housing issues need to be tackled holistically and

that the individual has to be worked with is key to moving on.

**Ian Robertson:** We have found that the approach whereby a key worker is attached to an individual works reasonably well and achieves a reasonable success rate. It precludes the individual from coming back into the system and starting from square one again. Homeless people are critical and often say, "I'm being assessed again. It's a different person and I've got to tell the same story yet again." The system loses the reasons why the person has failed; they are not known to anybody. It should be possible to keep one person attached to the individual, so that if they go out of the system and come back again, the person picks them up where appropriate. It would not mean starting from scratch; it would mean starting with a history of what did not work, and the same mistakes would not be made again.

**Karen Whitefield:** I appreciate that the number of individuals who will need intensive support will be small, and that if people's homelessness could be addressed at a much earlier stage, their needs would be less complex, but irrespective of how small the numbers will be, that will be time and resource intensive. Local authorities are already having to implement all the other provisions arising from the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. Bearing that fact in mind, will local authorities be able to implement, as the bill suggests, the intentionality regulations and provide the types of services and resources required by people with complex needs—for which you have so effectively made a case this morning—so that they have homes to live in?

**Ian Robertson:** For Glasgow, the answer is yes. There is a numbers issue for Glasgow. At any one time we will have about 1,250 single people in our hostels. Some 70 per cent of those people will have drugs problems; 50-odd per cent will have mental health problems; and 80-odd per cent will have alcohol addiction problems. Those problems are all combined and some people will have two or three of them. We know that the people have the problems only by their admission, so the figures are bottom line. The services and support network that those people need are very similar to the needs of the vulnerable people that you mentioned, which are not picked up at the moment. Whatever is being developed would be complementary and would assist the other people who join the system who are not priority need cases.

**Des Ryan:** I do not think that there will be much of an additional burden on the local authorities, because the people we are talking about eventually receive the help from the safety net of voluntary organisations. The bill will enable us to take those people as referrals from the local

authority rather than receiving them by default. It will enable us to catch the problems earlier and to work in partnership with the other agencies rather than finding people on the street X amount of time later when their problems have been dug deeper. In an overall social context, I do not see a great additional burden on service provision. I see this as an incentive for services to work together better.

**Isobel Grigor:** I keep saying that there are issues that are specific to the Highlands. We know that the people who are at particular risk are women after relationship breakdowns, people with mental health problems, young people and rough sleepers. We know that those are the vulnerable and at-risk groups, but we do not know the numbers. We know that although voluntary organisations are operating in communities, particularly in urban centres, in more rural parts of the Highlands they cannot provide the support that individuals want. Some people make it clear that they would prefer a voluntary sector option to statutory services. It is difficult to see how the deficit in support can be addressed in the Highlands without clear strategic direction and support. We need to establish the basic infrastructure so that people can access support in their communities. That would redress the progression down to Inverness and Fort William of people who are in crisis.

**Robert Brown:** You made a clear point about a particular case in the Highlands and we take that on board, because remoteness, the small number of houses and the lack of voluntary sector infrastructure are the key issues. I am not sure whether people on the panel can answer this. Is the problem restricted to the Highlands, or is it echoed in areas such as the Borders or south-west Scotland? Is it a general rural issue, or does it apply particularly in the Highlands?

**Ian Robertson:** It certainly does not apply to Glasgow, although as we get into the Glasgow Housing Association era, the situation might be different. I do not see that picture in Glasgow.

**Isobel Grigor:** The underlying factors in the Highlands are to do with historical development as well as distance and the numbers concerned. I have done a lot of work in the Highlands, but I do not know about the areas that you identified. Unless the historical record has been different for any reason, I would have thought that the issues of numbers and distances would prevail in any rural community.

**Robert Brown:** We are dealing with a particular rural aspect. We talked earlier about the model for support as a last resort. I got the impression from the evidence, particularly from Ian Robertson, that development of new types of facility is taking place in Glasgow. However, there is still a lack of

agreement about how to deal with people with really intractable, multifaceted problems, with whom a variety of measures have been tried and failed. Are we still developing models? Should we hold fire a little in that area, until one or two things have been tried, or are these measures applicable generally? Will they deal with the problems of even the most difficult people?

**Ian Robertson:** As each project is developed, we eat into the number of people who fall into the category to which Robert Brown refers. In Glasgow, that group is now relatively small. We have experience of working in partnership with Turning Point Scotland. We developed and designed from scratch a purpose-built building with many different multi-agency supports for more difficult clients. There is a problem with people being unable to contain their behaviour, becoming volatile and abusing or assaulting staff. At that point, it is impossible to deal with them.

The number of people in Glasgow who have been everywhere and with whom we do not know what to do is decreasing. As we develop more models of support, the number will decrease still further. I do not know whether we will ever eliminate that group, but considerable inroads have been made into it. A couple of years ago, several hundred people would have fallen into that category, but at the moment there are between 80 and 100 people who go round the system, have been everywhere, have been removed from everywhere and for whom we seem unable to find a sustainable solution.

**Robert Brown:** My final question relates to an issue that I have raised before—the probationary element of the short tenancy, on which we have heard different views. Your perspective is slightly different from that of the bigger agencies. Do you think that there should be greater landlord control of the short tenancies that will be available to those who are intentionally homeless and are in a difficult situation, or do you think that the rights of the tenant should be emphasised, as they are in the bill?

**Des Ryan:** I am glad that the member raised that difficult issue. When a practitioner is working with people who are in their problem, rather than working with it, it is sometimes helpful for the practitioner to have a mechanism that allows them to make it clear to the person concerned that there will be consequences if they are unable to make progress. However, I do not think that that creates a good climate for productive working—it is a matter of last resort.

As we said about hostels, the more normality that we can provide when working with people, the greater the opportunity for progress. Creating a situation of insecurity or threat is not the best basis on which to establish a trusting, productive

relationship. I see the other side of the equation. We live with these dilemmas.

**Ian Robertson:** I agree. There is a fine balance to be struck. I doubt that there are arguments for swaying it on either side. On the one hand, we must deal with individual presentations—persons who are vulnerable and require support. On the other hand, we must place people in communities that consist of other individuals, who have views and must be protected.

The issue is very difficult. The key to resolving it is support. When support breaks down, we should be able to remove people—for their own good—and to place them somewhere else. We must be aware when a situation is breaking down and not wait for a community to be up in arms. If that happens, we will lose face with other communities in which we try to place the person concerned. We must be committed to removing people and placing them somewhere else if a placement does not work. That assures people that someone is looking after their interests, as well as the interests of the vulnerable individual.

**Robert Brown:** You are suggesting that, instead of simply allowing the 12 months of the tenancy to expire, there should be an ultimate power of management transfer.

**Ian Robertson:** I think so. There will be situations in which it would be much more satisfactory to transfer the person compulsorily, for their good and for everyone else's good. That would keep an equilibrium in the community and provide the balance that you are trying to offer in relation to giving assistance to people.

12:00

**Isobel Grigor:** We currently operate with landlords who offer short assured tenancies and with landlords who offer assured tenancies. Support has been given to tenants in each of those settings. In both situations, the role of the landlord is that of a support provider and the aim of the tenant is to progress towards independence, at which point the support is withdrawn and the tenant sails on fine.

The issues that the tenant needs to address to allow them to reach that point are not primarily ones that are key to the tenancy but are whole-life issues. The determinant of which model operates best comes down to the relationship that the landlord and the tenant have and the tenant's ability to move on.

**Mrs McIntosh:** The submissions from the Calman Trust and the Cyrenians talk about making local connections. The Calman Trust submission expresses concerns about the growing discontent in some areas about issues such as

perceived queue jumping. Is the problem that there are not sufficient support services available to enable people to move out with the areas where they have a local connection and the support of not only social workers and health workers but their family?

**Isobel Grigor:** We experience that problem in various ways. The issue of a critical community perceiving people as jumping the queue is to do not with local connections but with the lack of houses. If a young person is given a house next door to yours and you know that your family has been waiting for a long time, that can arouse hostility.

**Mrs McIntosh:** What is the basic problem? Is it the fact that there are not enough houses? What should we be doing to address that? How many houses do you estimate would be needed to address the problem?

**Isobel Grigor:** I cannot put a figure on that, but I can say that there is almost no resource in the Highlands. You asked about a person's ability to transfer. We support young people in tenancies in Invergordon and Alness, which are about 3 miles apart and are linked by a bus route. However, young people from Alness do not settle well in Invergordon and vice versa. The problem is to do with social networks and being in touch with what is familiar. It is also to do with the fact that the local transport system is not adequate to take people from where they are to where they need to be to sign on or to go through any of the basic requirements.

**Des Ryan:** The basic problem is the lack of housing. We used to be primarily an Edinburgh-based charity and got a lot more people drifting in from East Lothian, West Lothian and Midlothian. That is happening less and less as more services become available to people in East Lothian and West Lothian. More integrated work is being done and we are exporting some of our work to those local authorities and working with them to ensure that people can stay in their home areas. Inevitably, some people need to get away from their locale for all sorts of reasons, and we make provision for that as well.

One of the ways in which the new legislation can be implemented effectively is by ensuring that there are mechanisms that enable all local authorities to move ahead in the spirit of the legislation and to invest equally in providing solutions that work for people. That implementation needs to be carefully monitored.

**Mrs McIntosh:** I asked my question because members who represent constituencies have people turning up at surgeries and writing letters because it appears to them that people are jumping the queue. Isobel Grigor mentioned such an example.

**Isobel Grigor:** I work with various agencies, one of which provides housing with support for older people, and I have found a total contrast in people's attitudes. The same community that criticised the provision of housing for young people welcomed the provision of housing for older people and people with disabilities. Concern was expressed about the housing of a vulnerable young person in the community. We are not talking about local connection on a council basis; we are talking about allocating a tenancy within a 20-mile radius, which was done because there was no housing available in the individual's home area.

**Des Ryan:** Attitudes towards homelessness are one of the major obstacles to eradicating it. People are embarrassed to present themselves to local authorities to get the help that they need because they are ashamed of being homeless. People have stereotypes in their minds, which they do not fit. They often sofa surf or stay in fragile situations longer than they should instead of seeking the help that they need.

The wider societal attitudes towards homelessness, to which Kathleen Caskie referred, are another issue. On the evening of the minister's announcement about the provisions of the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Bill, local newspapers kicked off with headlines such as "Edinburgh to become the honey pot," and "Edinburgh to be swamped with homeless people." It sets our work back hugely when such things happen. Those are the moments when public officials or people in the public limelight must stand up and counter that view. They must defend us and say, "Look at the facts and figures—that is not the case." Such things cause us real problems in relation to public attitudes towards people who are homeless.

We recognise that there are sensitivities around the bill's impact and we are nervous about the perceptions that are put around in certain quarters regarding the bill's consequences. However, as I have said in relation to other aspects of the bill, I would much rather deal with those problems than go back to the Elizabethan poor-law solution of whipping homeless people across the parish boundary.

**Mrs McIntosh:** So we have an awareness-raising task ahead of us.

**Des Ryan:** Absolutely.

**The Deputy Convener:** Ian Robertson will remember that, back in 1991, Glasgow City Council abolished local connection points within the local authority area. Is the issue not more about local connection within a local authority area than about local connection across authority boundaries? People in certain communities—of

which Ian Robertson and I are well aware—may grow up thinking, rightly or wrongly, that their children should get additional points so that they can obtain housing in the same area rather than compete with people from other parts of the city who have no connection with the area.

**Ian Robertson:** I agree. Glasgow is a large conurbation and people tend to be fairly settled in an area and recognise that geographic patch as their own. There was a lot of concern about outsiders from Glasgow coming into areas, which was quite peculiar. Perhaps that will no longer be an issue as we move on to the GHA. I presume that the registered social landlords will have their own letting policies.

The question of refugees is specific to Glasgow. Currently, an English court has ruled that refugees have a local connection with the city. Our argument is that people were dispersed to Glasgow not by choice but simply because that is where they ended up as part of the dispersal programme. Therefore, they do not really have a connection to the city. As members are probably aware, a court case is currently handling an appeal against a ruling that somebody should be sent back to Glasgow because they have a local connection. If the trend were to continue, the number of refugees in the city could impact on homelessness fairly dramatically.

**Isobel Grigor:** I totally understand what Ian Robertson is saying about specific issues in Glasgow but, for me, the issue of local connection is probably a red herring. You need to look through the telescope from the other end and see what services the individual needs and what will meet that person's needs. For us, the issues are about establishing the capacity within the community to support and respond to the needs of people in the community. If community support exists, local connection does not become a significant issue.

**Cathie Craigie:** I do not know whether you will have expertise on the question that I am about to ask, but you will probably have opinions on it. Do you support the bill's provisions on repossession and evictions? Do you think that the bill should require organisations to demonstrate what action they have taken to avoid having to undertake an eviction?

**Ian Robertson:** Absolutely. It is quite clear that it should not be easy to evict people. The consequences for the individual and the difficulty of getting them back into the community are immense, not to mention the costs involved. It is incumbent on the landlord to try everything possible to keep the person in the tenancy and for the local authority and the landlord to come together before there is an eviction to see what can be done. When somebody is evicted, the

whole machine goes back into trying to get them into alternative accommodation. If you put all that effort upstream and introduce it before they are evicted, the process is the same. The help and support that a person needs to stop them getting thrown out is exactly the same help and support that is needed to get them in again. We have to intervene when they are still in the tenancy and not out on the street.

**Des Ryan:** As a body that runs a rent deposit guarantee scheme, the Edinburgh Cyrenians certainly welcome the provision that requires private landlords to communicate their action to local authorities. That is a good step.

**Isobel Grigor:** I agree, and I would simply reinforce what I have said at various points. The balance of the relationship between landlord and tenant, where support is provided, is crucial to establishing a positive outcome.

**The Deputy Convener:** The executive summary of Des Ryan's submission states:

"We judge that implementation of new duties on local authorities will require a major expansion of rented accommodation but that this should be set up in such a way that does not create benefit dependency".

How can that be achieved?

**Des Ryan:** That takes us back to a point that was referred to earlier. I know that discussions are currently going on between the DWP and the Executive on a range of matters. Rents are obviously higher in the private rented sector. We continue to work with individuals, once housed, to help them to move into training, education or employment, so we come face to face with the fact that people are unable to afford to move off housing benefit and into other situations.

As Robert Aldridge said, we will see what happens with the supporting people programme. It might have a beneficial impact, but I am concerned about another strategy that is offered to local authorities as a solution, which is the expansion of furnished accommodation. Communities Scotland needs to examine whether the cost of furnished accommodation will be passed on to the end user. The supporting people programme will not meet the costs, so will rent levels be put up to an extent that puts the tenants in the trap of not being able to afford to move off benefits and into employment, training or education? That is an abiding concern.

I hope to see creative work between the DWP and the Executive to come up with solutions. They should pilot inventive schemes to lower barriers and provide manageable tapers for people to allow them to move through the key transitions and prevent them from being permanently unemployed. From our research, it is clear that the biggest threats to the sustainment of tenancies,



particularly among young people, are boredom, loneliness and isolation. That is how tenancies break down—that is the root of the evil. Housing is a great and essential first step, but it is only the beginning of the work to help people to establish and maintain a life away from the vulnerability of homelessness.

12:15

**The Deputy Convener:** I want to ask the panel a couple of questions about resources. The issue of resources has pervaded this and earlier discussions. Do you consider the funds that the Executive has announced for building houses and funding support services and staff training to be of the magnitude likely to enable local authorities and other agencies to meet the bill's resource implications?

**Isobel Grigor:** Coming from the Highlands, I have to say no. Last week, Highland Council spoke about the extent of the building programme for social rented housing that it felt was needed. An underlying concern in the area is the fact that the funding of support through the supporting people programme—which is coming in next year, and is based on this year's pot size—assumes that we know where we are this year, but we do not. Support needs are unmet in all areas covered by Highland Council because the providers do not exist to deliver the support. There is a potential shortfall, which, if it is to be addressed, will have to be met from another pot, but we do not know the scale.

I have another concern, which I flagged up in the submission. We find that working with vulnerable young people in their temporary accommodation is crucial to their success from then on in. Breakdowns when living in temporary accommodation are difficult to recover from, whereas good building work at that point can set the platform for effective entry into a tenancy and the move towards a stable lifestyle. From the information that we have, our understanding is that such early pre-tenancy work is not fundable through the supporting people programme. At present we fund such work through charitable giving. Were we unable to do that, we would find it much more difficult to establish the constructive relationships with young people that make a stable life more achievable.

**Des Ryan:** Let us see how we go. For someone who has been involved in homelessness for 25 years or so, these are exciting times. The doors that we have been pushing at for many years are flying open and we have to face the challenges on the other side. The mechanisms that we have in Scotland are very exciting. As well as the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Bill, we are looking forward to local

authorities producing their homelessness strategies. The rhetoric is about joined-up thinking and work, and there are lots of exciting initiatives.

The direct answer to the question is that I do not know—indeed, I doubt that anyone knows yet. We must ensure that in future the process is needs driven. We need to ensure that we accumulate evidence not only about needs but also about the impact of the good work that is going on. We need to be able to target current resources at the most effective interventions and not waste them on those that simply maintain people in homelessness in human warehouses or dead-end support services.

Now that the money is there, let us ensure through the mechanisms of the local authorities, which will be overseen by Communities Scotland and the Scottish Executive, that what we use is used effectively. We need to take that brave step. We also need to have a realistic understanding of the complexity and difficulties of the problems that we seek to address.

**Ian Robertson:** I agree. Nowadays, we are talking about being more inclusive in relation to the much more difficult cases. It is inevitable that the accommodation and support that those individuals require will require more funding. A lot of the cases that we are beginning to examine will result in default, which means that the individuals will come back into the system. The committee will have to consider how it is possible to sustain support for such people over long periods of time.

The issues that we are beginning to examine in Glasgow have resulted from the disbandment of the big hostels. Probably the only saving grace of the big hostels is that they are relatively cheap to manage. If 250 people are moved out of one of them and dispersed into other types of accommodation, the staffing resource and finance associated with supporting those people grows quite dramatically, and nobody knows whether the money will stretch. We are beginning to see the serious cases and it is inevitable that they will require a lot of assistance, support and money.

**The Deputy Convener:** Is 2012 too ambitious a date to meet the abolition of priority need if the supply of affordable housing is not increased above the current planned levels?

**Des Ryan:** I was very pleased to see a target, as it allows us to map out what needs to be done between here and a better place. The bill is not the end of homelessness; it is probably not even the beginning of the end of homelessness—if I can use that paraphrase.

**Mrs McIntosh:** Such enthusiasm.

**Des Ryan:** I will not go on. We will learn a lot on the way, but there is a continuing need for

dialogue from top to bottom—between the Parliament and the grass-roots agencies. That has been reflected in the build-up to the bill and in this evidence-taking session. Such dialogue represents a journey of exploration that makes us feel proud to be part of a country that will have the most progressive legislation and attitudes to dealing with these age-old problems.

**Ian Robertson:** I agree. It is good that a date has been put on paper, as it gives us a date to work towards. Our ability to achieve targets will depend on how good we are at stopping people coming back through the door. As I said, in Glasgow, two thirds of people come back through the door. If it is possible to eat into that number, a lot of money and heartache will be saved. I hope that, as we become more knowledgeable about how to deal with people's problems on an inter-agency basis, we will be able to solve the problems by keeping people in the system long enough to deal with them before moving people on to normal living.

The strange thing that becomes apparent if one examines the situation in Glasgow over the past three or four years is that the number of presentations has remained constant. It is almost as if a group of people were locked in the system. If we begin to unlock their repeat presentations, we will see how to eat into the homelessness numbers in the city.

**Isobel Grigor:** Tremendous progress is under way, in the sense that local authorities, voluntary organisations and other services are working together towards a much clearer agenda. I have harped on about the issues in Highland, but the shortfall that needs to be addressed is on such a scale that to achieve anything like the 2012 target that the deputy convener mentioned will require incredibly strong strategic direction.

I am concerned that the continuing downward pressure on authorities and services to deliver ever-new initiatives will mean that we fall back on thinking about the issue as a housing issue. If we do that, we will lose a lot of the momentum that has been established. If we are to achieve the targets that are envisaged in Highland, I make a plea for a vehicle to be put in place that sets out clearly where we have to go and for someone to take charge of implementation.

**The Deputy Convener:** As the committee does not have any further questions, and the witnesses do not have further points to make, we will wind up the session. I thank all the witnesses for their attendance.

*Meeting closed at 12:25.*

Members who would like a printed copy of the *Official Report* to be forwarded to them should give notice at the Document Supply Centre.

No proofs of the *Official Report* can be supplied. Members who want to suggest corrections for the archive edition should mark them clearly in the daily edition, and send it to the Official Report, 375 High Street, Edinburgh EH99 1SP. Suggested corrections in any other form cannot be accepted.

The deadline for corrections to this edition is:

**Monday 25 November 2002**

Members who want reprints of their speeches (within one month of the date of publication) may obtain request forms and further details from the Central Distribution Office, the Document Supply Centre or the Official Report.

#### PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

##### DAILY EDITIONS

*Single copies: £5*

*Meetings of the Parliament annual subscriptions: £350.00*

The archive edition of the *Official Report* of meetings of the Parliament, written answers and public meetings of committees will be published on CD-ROM.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT, compiled by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre, contains details of past and forthcoming business and of the work of committees and gives general information on legislation and other parliamentary activity.

*Single copies: £3.75*

*Special issue price: £5*

*Annual subscriptions: £150.00*

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS weekly compilation

*Single copies: £3.75*

*Annual subscriptions: £150.00*

Standing orders will be accepted at the Document Supply Centre.

Published in Edinburgh by The Stationery Office Limited and available from:

**The Stationery Office Bookshop**  
71 Lothian Road  
Edinburgh EH3 9AZ  
0131 228 4181 Fax 0131 622 7017

**The Stationery Office Bookshops at:**  
123 Kingsway, London WC2B 6PQ  
Tel 020 7242 6393 Fax 020 7242 6394  
68-69 Bull Street, Birmingham B4 6AD  
Tel 0121 236 9696 Fax 0121 236 9699  
33 Wine Street, Bristol BS1 2BQ  
Tel 01179 264306 Fax 01179 294515  
9-21 Princess Street, Manchester M60 8AS  
Tel 0161 834 7201 Fax 0161 833 0634  
16 Arthur Street, Belfast BT1 4GD  
Tel 028 9023 8451 Fax 028 9023 5401  
The Stationery Office Oriel Bookshop,  
18-19 High Street, Cardiff CF1 2BZ  
Tel 029 2039 5548 Fax 029 2038 4347

**The Stationery Office Scottish Parliament Documentation**  
Helpline may be able to assist with additional information  
on publications of or about the Scottish Parliament,  
their availability and cost:

**Telephone orders and inquiries**  
**0870 606 5566**

**Fax orders**  
**0870 606 5588**

**The Scottish Parliament Shop**  
George IV Bridge  
EH99 1SP  
Telephone orders 0131 348 5412

[sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk](mailto:sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk)

[www.scottish.parliament.uk](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk)

**Accredited Agents**  
(see Yellow Pages)

and through good booksellers