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## Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

# Housing Inquiry



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# Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

To consider and report on matters relating to local government and planning falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, matters relating to housing and tenants' rights within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, and matters relating to local government boundaries, local governance review and democratic renewal.



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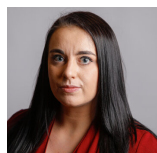
# Committee Membership



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Scottish National Party



**Emma Roddick**  
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**Alexander Stewart**  
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# Executive Summary

1. Housing is a human right but across Scotland homelessness is not only dangerously high in some local authority areas where there is now a systemic failure in their ability to meet their statutory duties, the numbers of people affected are actually continuing to increase.
2. The Committee has heard from the Scottish Government about the range of measures which it is taking in response to the housing emergency to support local authorities in taking targeted action, and also to bring about some systemic change, for example the creation of the Housing Investment Taskforce. Importantly, the Scottish Government's budget for 2025-2026 has seen a significant increase in the Affordable Housing Supply Programme budget.
3. The Committee has heard too from most of the local authorities which have declared housing emergencies about the measures they are taking, particularly through reducing the numbers of void or empty properties and through acquiring additional properties. These actions are quite rightly being pursued as a means of quickly increasing the availability of housing and temporary accommodation. They are not however the sole solution and do not provide the systemic change which must be driven by national leadership by the Scottish Government in collaboration with the wider housing sector.
4. Local authorities have produced Housing Emergency Action Plans in order to coordinate their work and identify what they will deliver. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government develops a national overarching Housing Emergency Action Plan with clear milestones and outcomes to ensure there can be assessment of what progress is being made towards ending the emergency. Without that there is the risk that the housing emergency drifts on indefinitely, and becomes either the accepted 'norm' or quietly forgotten outwith local authorities housing and homelessness departments - and of course those people living without a home or in temporary accommodation.
5. The housing system is undoubtedly complex and the means by which change and improvement can be brought about involves multiple sectors and areas of government. The Committee therefore calls on the Scottish Government to take a whole-systems approach to tackling the housing emergency. Housing has recently been included for the first time in the Scottish Government's own National Performance Framework which is welcome and the Committee hopes is indicative of the Government treating it as a priority. It also recognises the impact on housing pressures of measures outwith the Scottish Government's control such as the freeze of the Local Housing Allowance and the bedroom tax.
6. The Committee heard that the housing emergency was years, perhaps decades in the making, and was therefore both predictable and preventable. In future, a strategic approach as afforded by the existing Housing to 2040 strategy will be critical to re-balancing the housing system and ensuring the current situation is not repeated. The existing Housing to 2040 strategy provides a vision for housing in Scotland which stakeholders across the sector have welcomed, however it still lacks an implementation plan which the Committee calls to be developed by the Scottish Government as a priority.

## Recommendations

7. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government develops a national overarching Housing Emergency Action Plan by the end of this session of Parliament in collaboration with the wider housing sector. This should include clear milestones and outcomes to enable progress to be measured.
8. A whole-systems approach is required that is led by the Scottish Government and its partners in order to stabilise housing in Scotland and help prevent future emergencies. The Committee therefore recommends that the Scottish Government sets out how it will better coalesce its own departments around tackling housing need and ensure that wider policies across different portfolios can have a positive impact.
9. The Committee also recommends that the Scottish Government ensures it assesses the impact of its wider policies on housing, as an important component in tackling the current housing emergency and also in helping prevent future such emergencies. This might require the creation of housing impact statements.
10. The Committee asks the Scottish Government to provide clarity on whether its additional funding for the Affordable Housing Supply Programme budget will ensure that it meets its target of providing 110,000 affordable homes by 2030. It is vital that in the future all spheres of government ensure housing is a priority and that the Scottish Government gives consideration to the importance of retaining the Affordable Housing Supply Programme budget.
11. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government, as a matter of urgency, completes and implements its existing commitments, including its review of the affordable housing target. The Minister told Parliament this would be completed in summer 2024 and the Committee therefore asks the Scottish Government to provide an update on what progress has been made and what the revised timescales are for completion. We have also yet to see the outputs from the Housing Investment Taskforce.
12. The Housing to 2040 strategy sets out the Scottish Government's long-term vision for housing, and the Committee believes that its delivery will be an important component in re-balancing the housing sector and preventing future emergencies. It therefore recommends that an implementation plan should be developed as a matter of urgency.
13. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government explores further the opportunities presented by increasing social investment in housing and in developing the capacity of the non-profit sector to obtain private finance.
14. The Committee welcomes the Scottish Government's financial support for local authorities in providing discretionary housing payments and seeks clarification from the Scottish Government that these will be retained in the long-term.
15. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government should include how it, and other public sector bodies, could help facilitate the sale and use of public sector land in its Housing 2040 strategy or proposed Housing Emergency Action Plan.

16. The Scottish Government needs to provide clarity as a matter of urgency to housing providers on the intended statutory requirement for homes to meet net zero standards. Uncertainty is acting as a deterrent on development and needs to be addressed in order to help tackle the housing emergency.

# Introduction

17. On 15 May 2024, the Scottish Parliament agreed to a motion <sup>1</sup> supporting the declaration of a national housing emergency. At the time of writing, thirteen local authorities have also declared a local housing emergency, beginning with Argyll and Bute Council in June 2023, and most recently East Lothian Council on 12 November 2024.<sup>i</sup>
18. During this Parliamentary session, the Committee has scrutinised a range of housing policies and legislation, including the Scottish Government's Housing to 2040 strategy <sup>2</sup>, the Housing (Cladding Remediation) Bill <sup>3</sup>, and the Housing (Scotland) Bill <sup>4</sup>. Stakeholders have made clear to the Committee that having a safe and affordable home is vital in addressing inequalities. It is critical to all aspects of people's lives, including their health and wellbeing, their educational attainment, employment opportunities and their finances.
19. The Committee therefore agreed it was important that it should scrutinise how the housing emergency is being tackled by the Scottish Government and local authorities, and at the same time explore what a properly functioning housing system would look like.
20. Members agreed to hold a short inquiry focusing on some key questions:
  - How effective are the actions of local authorities and the Scottish Government in responding to the immediate housing emergency including homelessness?
  - How can social landlords make best use of existing stock to respond to the housing emergency?
  - What do we need the housing system to look like in Scotland to prevent future housing emergencies and homelessness?
  - What should the role be of the social and private rented sector in providing affordable housing choices in Scotland?
  - How can we create a sustainable and affordable housing market?
  - How effective are local authorities' and the Scottish Government's current actions in working towards achieving the housing system we need in the longer term?
21. This report provides a summary of the extensive evidence received by the Committee. It begins by looking at the causes of the housing emergency to better understand the context of the current situation, and proposals for immediate action to resolve this. The escalation to the state of emergency must not be allowed to happen again and we conclude with our views on how to prevent this in the future.

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<sup>i</sup> Scottish Parliament's SPICe blog on [Scotland's Housing Emergency](#) provides more background.

# The housing emergency and its causes

22. Whilst there is no established definition of what is meant by a 'housing emergency', it is clear that housing in Scotland is in crisis. A number of local authorities' homelessness duties have been described as being in, or dangerously close to, "systemic failure"<sup>ii</sup>. The Scottish Housing Regulator's risk assessment of social landlords<sup>5</sup> explains:

” For many local authorities the demands in the homelessness system – the number of people who are homeless, and the level of need they have – exceed the capacity in the system to respond. Some local authorities are now at, or are approaching, the limits of their capacity to do more. This is what we mean by systemic failure.”

23. The Scottish Government's latest statistics on homelessness<sup>6</sup> (covering April 2024 to September 2024) illustrate this in stark figures when compared with the same period in 2023:

- The number of households and children in temporary accommodation was the highest since 2002 and increased by 6% and 5%.
- Applications for homelessness assistance increased by 1% (295)
- Households assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness increased by 4% (636)

24. The housing emergency is more acutely felt in some parts of the country than others, and the situation is different across local authorities. In his evidence to the Committee, Professor Ken Gibb (Director of the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence at the University of Glasgow) explained that more than half of Scotland's population live in authority areas which have declared housing emergencies and described there being "...different kinds of dysfunction"<sup>7</sup> across those various local authorities. Whereas homelessness is the main challenge in cities such as Edinburgh and Glasgow, a shortage of rental properties and the impact of second homes can be the principal concern in more rural areas. In some local authorities the affordability of homes is not a problem like it is elsewhere.

25. Regardless of the local circumstances it is people who are at the heart of the housing emergency and who are suffering because of the imbalances within the housing system. Witnesses described how the situation is effectively impoverishing sections of society with long-term implications. Professor Duncan Maclennan (Emeritus Professor of Urban Economics at the University of Glasgow) for example told the Committee that there is an:

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ii In March 2025 the [Scottish Housing Regulator's risk assessment of social landlords](#) noted that they now regard there to be 3 local authorities in systemic failure, increased from 2 in the previous year, and a further 7 are at heightened risk of systemic failure.

” "...ever-increasing proportion of families with children who are paying more than 50 per cent of their quite low incomes to live in not very good properties, and who have to move every year or two years. That simply creates poverty for the next generation... the evidence is that children who grow up in bad housing and who are moved every year or two are two years behind other kids in school by the age of 10 or 11. We start to erode human capital right from the get-go when we have bad housing." <sup>8</sup>

26. The complex causes of the housing emergency are multi-factorial and now all too familiar, having been often reported in the media and discussed at Parliament. During the Committee's scrutiny of the Housing (Scotland) Bill <sup>9</sup> and in subsequent evidence sessions during this inquiry stakeholders highlighted factors including:
- a shortage of affordable housing, both to buy and to rent; <sup>10</sup>
  - cuts to the affordable housing supply programme budget; <sup>11</sup>
  - demand for social housing exceeding supply; <sup>12</sup>
  - increased rents in the private sector; <sup>13</sup>
  - high inflation leading to increased cost of living; <sup>14</sup>
  - increased construction costs following Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic; <sup>15</sup>
  - labour shortages linked to Brexit; <sup>16</sup>
  - cuts in Scotland's capital funding settlement from the UK Government; <sup>17</sup>
  - the long-term impact of the 'right-to-buy' scheme and the failure to replace housing stock; <sup>18</sup>
  - inadequacies within the social security system (including the freeze of the Local Housing Allowance); <sup>19</sup>
  - market failure in building which has seen a large decrease in the numbers of developments; <sup>20</sup> <sup>iii</sup>
  - the impact of well-intentioned policies, such as the rent-freeze which some stakeholders believe may have led to withdrawal of investment <sup>21</sup>, while others hold the opposite view; and
  - limited real increases in incomes, in relation to increases in house prices. <sup>22</sup>
27. This report does not explore each of these factors in detail, but they illustrate the
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<sup>iii</sup> The Scottish Government's Quarterly Housing Statistics to December 2024 show that private sector building starts are at their lowest since 2013. [Quarterly Housing Statistics in the year to end of December 2024 - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/publications/quarterly-housing-statistics-2024-2025/pages/quarterly-housing-statistics-in-the-year-to-end-of-december-2024.aspx)

wide ranging and systemic issues causing the housing emergency. They demonstrate too how the housing emergency has not been created overnight. The Committee heard that the crisis was decades in the making, with one root cause being the failure of wages to keep up with increasing house and rental prices. Professor Duncan MacLennan told the Committee that the creation of a large private rented sector in the late 1990s was due to a failure in home ownership and provision of public housing. He went on to say:

” "...for almost a quarter of a century... the bottom 20 per cent of people, based on income distribution, have had very limited real increases in their incomes. At the same time, real housing rents and prices have gone up. In other words, housing has impoverished significant sections of society..." <sup>23</sup>

28. Professor Ken Gibb made a similar point that the problems in the housing system have been apparent for many years. He also suggested public perception had now caught up with the reality of the challenges which have been in place since the early 2000s:

” "In the private rented market, rent burdens... were increasing significantly, and vacancy rates were way down. In the social rented sector, stock was often diminishing and sometimes deteriorating in quality, and, above all, queues to enter the sector were lengthening significantly. The difficulties of home ownership had grown dramatically for younger people, and there were problems with retaining it for many older people... If there is now thought to be an emergency, it is perhaps because public perception of the issues has grown..." <sup>24</sup>

29. Those pressures were compounded by the impact of Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent cost of living crisis. Other factors outwith the control of the Scottish Government include cuts to its budget from the UK Government, and the freeze of the Local Housing Allowance which is reserved to the UK Government.

30. At the same time however, the Scottish Government made significant cuts to its Affordable Housing Supply Programme budget in 2023-2024 and 2024-2025. Although this has since been increased in the 2025-2026 budget, in real terms it remains significantly lower than in 2021-2022 <sup>25</sup>, and there are ongoing repercussions as Callum Chomczuk from the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) described:

” "Over the past year in particular, we have had a decreasing workforce in parts of the housing sector as a consequence of the decreasing budget. Even if we are fortunate enough to see a recapitalisation of the affordable housing supply budget and we have clarity over everything that we want around standards, we cannot build to the scale that we want immediately - it will take time." <sup>26</sup>

31. Concurrent with the cut in the affordable housing supply budget were the unintended consequences of the Government policy to freeze rents in response to the cost of living crisis. Professor Gibb described the impact that had:

” "It had a positive affordability benefit for existing tenants, but the way that it was designed meant that new tenants, or people who moved within the system, did not get any of the benefit. That led to rents for new tenancies rising extremely strongly. It also led to the withdrawal of institutional investment. It is generally accepted that that is what happened... That has a long-term negative effect." <sup>27</sup>

32. Professor Christian Hilber from the Department of Geography and Environment at the London School of Economics and Political Science described such measures as tackling the symptoms of the problem rather than its causes. <sup>28</sup> Professor Maclennan believed that the issue of home ownership has not been given sufficient attention, explaining to the Committee that:

” "...the policy debate has been more about the big priorities of homelessness and the social rented sector. There has not been a lot of ingenuity in thinking about what you do about young people and home ownership." <sup>29</sup>

33. He also highlighted a further systemic issue as being the widening disparity between wages and property prices:

” "What has not kept pace has been the Government's commitment to what economists call the merit good argument - the recognition that people deserve a decent standard of housing... It is not an economic or financial issue, it is a moral issue. It is about the political choices that get made about whether to support people."

34. As outlined in this section, the causes of the current housing emergency are clearly complex, covering a wide range of long and short term issues across sectors as outlined above. These include the right-to-buy scheme, although the Committee heard different views on the extent which that had an impact on the housing market. <sup>30</sup> Some were unexpected and outwith government control - such as the Covid-19 pandemic - but nonetheless the emergency was years, if not decades, in the making and was therefore avoidable.

35. The following sections of this report go on to consider in more detail the response of the Scottish Government and of local authorities to the housing emergency, before exploring how future emergencies might be prevented.

# The Scottish Government's response

36. In his evidence to the Committee the Minister for Housing said:

” "...by declaring and addressing the housing emergency, we have acted decisively to support individuals and families across Scotland... The housing emergency requires a responsive and bold approach to ensure the best outcomes." <sup>31</sup>

37. The Minister went on to explain that the Scottish Government is prioritising a regional approach, working most with the five local authorities which account for approximately 70-75% of people in temporary accommodation (Glasgow, Edinburgh, South Lanarkshire, Fife and West Lothian). This includes providing £40m to acquire additional homes and to bring void social properties back into use.

<sup>32</sup> Further actions he highlighted include:

- Increasing the Affordable Housing Supply Programme budget by over £200m which is estimated to deliver an additional 8,000 homes;
- An additional £4m funding for local authorities to prepare for delivering new homelessness prevention duties;
- Refocusing the existing Housing to 2040 Governance Board to work on the housing emergency and broadening membership to enable greater collaboration;
- An allocation of £2m for empty homes;
- Work on 'stalled sites' where planning approval has been provided but building yet to begin; and
- Investment of £22m in 2024 in the charitable bond programme, to help deliver more homes, with over £71m of charitable bond donations to supplement the Affordable Housing Supply Programme.

38. However in contrast Gordon MacRae from Shelter Scotland described the Scottish Government's response to the housing emergency as 'lethargic' and compared the Scottish Government's response to the housing emergency to other situations:

” "...where there was even a hint that a local authority might cut teacher numbers, it was threatened with the withdrawal of cash. Those are political choices and self-imposed constraints. If Scottish ministers want to do something different, they are well able to do so, and we think that nothing should stop them in the case of a national emergency." <sup>33</sup>

39. Some witnesses were not positive about progress.. Carolyn Lochhead from the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations said that "...we are not on a long term path that would enable us to come out the situation." <sup>34</sup> Jennifer Kennedy from Homes for Scotland told the Committee that:

” "You need only look at the key indicators, such as the number of children in temporary accommodation, the planning statistics that were issued yesterday and the downward trends in housing completions and start to see that things are not improving. indeed, they are set to only get worse. That is not just our opinion - that is what the data is telling us." <sup>35</sup>

40. When the Committee took oral evidence from witnesses in November 2024, the Scottish Government's Budget Bill for 2025-2026 had yet to be introduced to Parliament. Sharon Egan from the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers (ALACHO) called for additional funding for the Affordable Housing Supply Programme, saying that:

” "...it allows for more strategic planning and for rolling programmes. Some local authorities across Scotland paused or slowed their delivery programmes on the back of funding for the affordable housing supply programme being cut." <sup>36</sup>

41. The Minister told the Committee that he recognised the importance of building more homes <sup>37</sup>, however the Committee notes (as outlined in the previous section) that the Affordable Homes Supply Programme budget has regrettably in previous years been subject to substantial cuts. When questioned by the Committee about whether those cuts have put the Government's target of 110,000 new homes at risk, he explained that the planned mid-point review of that target is underway. The Minister had previously advised the Committee in a letter in July 2024 <sup>38</sup> that the mid-term review had been brought forward from 2026-2027, and that its results would be available in summer 2024. From that letter the Committee understand that the review is not of the target itself, but of the Programme's responsiveness, impact, efficiency and cost-effectiveness. In his oral evidence the Minister also highlighted the work of the Housing Investment Taskforce which is looking at ways of bringing in additional investment.

42. The Minister stressed the importance of identifying actions by local authorities which might have the quickest impact, in particular bringing void and empty properties back into use and the acquisition of existing properties. The following chapter on Local Authorities discusses in more detail their work on tackling voids and empty properties.

43. These though are clearly short-term measures. The Committee asked the Minister about what medium to long-term actions are being considered. At the time of giving oral evidence in January 2025 he said that the next meeting of the Housing to 2040 Board would consider what medium-term actions to take. <sup>39</sup> The longer term strategy is provided by the existing Housing to 2040 strategy which seeks to bring about structural change.

44. The Committee heard from witnesses that there is broad support for the Scottish Government's Housing to 2040 strategy <sup>40</sup>. Published in April 2021, it sets out a vision for what housing in Scotland will look like in 2040 and includes a set of principles to guide policy-making. It is supported by a route map which has four sections:

- More homes at the heart of great places

- Affordability and choice
  - Affordable warmth and zero emissions homes
  - Improving the quality of all homes
45. Key measures in the strategy include; decarbonising heat in all homes, tackling high rents in the private sector, setting a single set of standards for housing quality and accessibility, increasing affordable housing supply and continuing with an updated plan to end homelessness and rough sleeping.
46. However a vision alone, however laudable, does not on its own deliver change, and we heard about the lack of measurement of progress (a theme familiar to the Committee from its scrutiny of the strategy in 2024 <sup>41</sup> ). Professor Gibb said that:
- ” It is comprehensive and wide ranging and gets that all-system reality of the housing system. However, it has never been as strong on delivery or the ongoing, transparent monitoring that is needed to see how effective it is...” <sup>42</sup>
47. Witnesses highlighted to the Committee the importance of there being measurable outcomes in tackling the housing emergency. Gordon MacRae for example said:
- ” One of the key things in the medium term is simply having agreed success measures. We have no target for social house building or all-tenure house building in this parliamentary session... We do not know what the purpose of government policy is from a measurable objective or an outcome that we can put a parcel of objectives together for. Being able to clarify what Scottish ministers expect to happen from the allocation of resources that they are making available would allow us to evaluate whether a measure is working and what we need to do differently.” <sup>43</sup>
48. When asked by the Committee about the Scottish Government's position on outcomes, the Minister explained that work was at an early stage in developing key performance indicators for monitoring progress in tackling the housing emergency, offering the example of a possible indicator being the number of people in temporary accommodation. <sup>44</sup>
49. To measure progress against outcomes, sufficient data must be available. However during the course of the Committee's scrutiny of housing - in particular the Housing (Scotland) Bill - it was made clear by stakeholders that there are significant gaps in the data on housing. Chris Birt from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation made this point about needing data to address the housing emergency:
- ” We need to understand the needs and demands in relation to housing across the country at a national level, so that we can make better policies that will enable local decision makers to make decisions that will enable that outcome to be achieved.” <sup>45</sup>
50. Housing is a human right, and has recently been included for the first time in the Scottish Government's own National Performance Framework which is welcome

and the Committee hopes is indicative of the Government treating it as a priority.

51. The housing system is undoubtedly complex and having been years in the making has come under the influence of a number of governments. The means by which change and improvement can be brought about involves multiple sectors and areas of government. An emergency situation requires emergency action to be taken by all housing stakeholders and spheres of government including providing the resources to deliver change.

52. **The Scottish Government has taken action in some areas within its control by taking steps which it considered would help rebalance the private rental sector including measures in the Housing (Scotland) Bill and by introducing temporary rent caps. But without an overarching, systems-wide approach it is hard to determine the impact of those. They arguably address the symptoms of the emergency, and not its causes.**

53. **The Committee welcomes the Minister for Housing's commitment to delivering a lasting response to the housing emergency. The increase in the budget for the Affordable Housing Supply Programme was an important step, although it remains lower in real terms than in 2021-2022 which suggests that for too long housing was not given sufficient priority by all stakeholders despite the warning signs of a crisis looming. It is vital that in the future all spheres of government ensure housing is a priority and that the Scottish Government gives consideration to the importance of retaining the Affordable Housing Supply Programme budget.**

54. **The Committee asks the Scottish Government to provide clarity on whether its additional funding for the Affordable Housing Supply Programme budget will ensure that it meets its target of providing 110,000 affordable homes by 2030.**

55. **Some progress has been made by the Scottish Government, for example in the creation of the Housing Investment Taskforce to seek new sources of financing housing, but we have yet to see the outputs from that initiative. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government, as a matter of urgency, completes and implements its existing commitments, including its review of the affordable housing target. The Minister told Parliament this would be completed in summer 2024 and the Committee therefore asks the Scottish Government to provide an update on what progress has been made and what the revised timescales are for completion.**

56. **The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government develops a national overarching Housing Emergency Action Plan by the end of this session of Parliament in collaboration with the wider housing sector. This should include clear milestones and outcomes to enable progress to be measured. Without a clear endpoint there is a risk that the housing emergency drifts on indefinitely.**
57. **The Housing to 2040 strategy sets out the Scottish Government's long-term vision for housing, which has broad support among stakeholders and has been welcomed. However - and this point has been made previously by the Committee - it continues to lack an implementation plan. The Committee believes that delivery of the Housing to 2040 vision will be an important component in re-balancing the housing sector and preventing future emergencies. It therefore recommends that an implementation plan should be developed as a matter of urgency. Were that in place, it could provide evidence of progress being made in addressing the emergency.**

## Local authorities' role and the wider housing sector

58. As described above, 13 local authorities have declared housing emergencies, and the Committee heard from witnesses that others are likely to be close to an emergency position. Moray Council for example described their situations as being only "...a bad quarter or two" away from the challenges of other authorities.<sup>46</sup> Ten authorities have been identified as being either being in, or near to, systemic failure in meeting their statutory duties with regards to housing.
59. The local circumstances are particular to each local housing emergency, and so the local authorities' responses are also varied. Each authority has prepared Housing Emergency Action Plans (HEAPs) or regional plans as in the case of Dumfries and Galloway Council working with Scottish Borders Council. Within the context of their existing housing strategies and programmes, local authority actions have been re-prioritised in light of the emergency situation.
60. In January 2025 the Committee wrote to those local authorities who have declared a housing emergency, asking for an update on the actions they have taken in response, and what progress has been made. In general, they reported making progress with establishing and monitoring their housing emergency action plans, and working closely with partners. For example, Glasgow City Council referred to the work being undertaken by the Glasgow Health and Social Care Partnership and the council's Neighbourhoods, Regeneration and Sustainability department (NRS) which is progressing the appointment of a Housing Emergency Response lead to oversee the implementation of the action plan.<sup>47</sup>
61. Their responses though also highlighted that significant challenges remain and that in some cases the number of people who are homeless continues to increase, which is discussed in more detail below. This is in spite of considerable efforts made by local authorities. In his oral evidence, Callum Chomczuk from the CIH told the Committee about the scale of the response by local authorities, saying that:
- ” "...local authorities are working to the limits of their powers and their resources. The 12 [now 13] declarations of housing emergencies by councils have not been made flippantly... However, even those local authorities that have not declared a housing emergency are still working in the spirit of there being an emergency..."<sup>48</sup>
62. Sharon Egan from ALACHO told the Committee that they have been monitoring local authorities' performance for a number of years using the RAG (red, amber, green) system, and they are now seeing performance levels shifting from green to amber, and often to red.<sup>49</sup> She went on to describe the difficulties that all local authorities are facing in respect of their housing provision:
- ” "I want to put across that councils, whether or not they have made an emergency declaration, are under significant pressures from increased levels of housing need from localised issues. We are working flexibly and to capacity in reacting to those changes."<sup>50</sup>

63. And the Committee heard too about the financial challenges which local authorities are dealing with. Eilidh Keay from Living Rent stressed the importance of having sufficient local authority resources to ensure they can fulfil their duties<sup>51</sup>, North Lanarkshire Council said it will cost an estimated £3.3bn for their housing to meet net-zero standards<sup>52</sup>.
64. Carolyn Lochhead from the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations told the Committee about the challenges created for social landlords by uncertainty around net-zero standards, saying:
- ”Until we know what the standard is, when it needs to be met and what funding will be available, we are operating with one hand tied behind our back. You cannot commit full tilt to development programmes when you have a massive bill coming towards you that you do not know what it is, when you have to pay it or who will help you pay it.”<sup>53</sup>

**65. The Scottish Government needs to provide clarity as a matter of urgency to housing providers on the intended statutory requirement for homes to meet net-zero standards. Uncertainty is acting as a deterrent on development and needs to be addressed in order to help tackle the housing emergency.**

### Homelessness and use of temporary accommodation

66. As early as 2023 the Scottish Housing Regulator began identifying systemic failure in some local authorities in delivering their statutory duties regarding homelessness.<sup>54</sup> In March 2025 the Regulator's risk assessment of social landlords noted that they now regard there to be three local authorities in systemic failure, increased from two in the previous year.<sup>55</sup> In local authorities' recent written submissions to the Committee it was clear that challenge remains and that further progress needs to be made in responding to homelessness pressures. In particular, Glasgow City Council appears still to be experiencing acute challenges, with ongoing pressures from households granted refugee status. In the city the number of households in temporary accommodation increased from 3,727 in March 2024 to 4,100 in February 2025. Within the same time period, the number of children in temporary accommodation has increased from 3,060 to 3,503.<sup>56</sup> The City of Edinburgh Council also stated that there remains a significant shortfall in the volume of suitable accommodation needed to meet current and future demand, with currently around 3,000 children and young people in temporary accommodation.<sup>57</sup>
67. Fife Council reported that numbers in temporary accommodation and timescales spent in temporary accommodation have remained consistent throughout 2024.<sup>58</sup> West Dunbartonshire Council stated that whilst the number of open homeless cases has reduced, the number of people in temporary accommodation has remained consistent.<sup>59</sup> West Lothian Council reported reliance on the use of unsuitable emergency accommodation for homeless households, with demand outstripping supply by over 300%.<sup>60</sup>
68. More positively, the submissions from some local authorities highlighted some progress being made in reducing the use of unsuitable temporary accommodation

and the number of children living in temporary accommodation. East Renfrewshire<sup>61</sup> and Aberdeen City Council<sup>62</sup> for example reported a slight reduction in the overall number of households living in temporary accommodation. West Dunbartonshire described significant progress being made, albeit with ongoing budgetary pressures, increase in demand, and reduction in turnover of properties which means the emergency cannot be resolved in the short term and needs to be continually reviewed.<sup>63</sup>

69. Local authorities are also taking preventative action to help reduce homelessness. In East Ayrshire for example, they have amalgamated separate housing teams to help take earlier action and introduced their Our Street Forum to identify signs of tenancy stress early on. About 1,000 council staff are briefed on the Forum, enabling them to identify and report any concerns about tenants or communities more widely.<sup>64</sup> The City of Edinburgh Council is working with the Scottish Government, NHS Lothian and the University of Edinburgh through the Edinburgh Futures Institute and the Smart Data Foundry looking at the predictors and preventers of homelessness. Derek McGowan from the City of Edinburgh Council said to the Committee that they would welcome the Scottish Government taking a lead on the synthesis of that data in order to produce a model to help prevent homelessness.<sup>65</sup>

**70. Homelessness is not only dangerously high in some local authority areas where there is now a systemic failure in their ability to meet their statutory duties, the numbers of people affected are actually continuing to increase. The Committee will ensure that this report is brought to the attention of the Scottish Parliament's Social Justice and Social Security Committee, as homelessness falls within that Committee's remit.**

71. The Committee heard that local authorities have a number of tools available to them, in particular reducing the numbers of void properties, increasing their acquisition of existing properties, and bringing empty homes back into use. These are discussed in more detail below.

### Property acquisitions

72. Sharon Egan from ALACHO explained that acquiring existing properties is far quicker for local authorities than building new homes and more cost-effective too, with around 3 properties being acquired for the cost of one new build.<sup>66</sup> Carolyn Lochhead from the SFHA noted that housing associations can also acquire properties, and that it would be helpful if they were provided with more guidance on acquisitions as the policy is currently focused on more on local authorities<sup>67</sup>.
73. However Jennifer Kennedy from Homes for Scotland made the point that the under-supply of homes across all tenures means that acquiring a property for social housing increases pressure elsewhere in the system.<sup>68</sup> Callum Chomczuk from CIH highlighted that in response to that issue a balanced approach is needed, with the development of new properties also taking place.<sup>69</sup> Shelter Scotland's position is that acquisitions should be utilised to prioritise larger households and alleviate the bottlenecks in the homelessness system.<sup>70</sup>

74. The recent written updates provided by local authorities on tackling their housing emergencies showed that acquisitions have increased in some areas with some councils using additional funding from the Scottish Government, and in some areas acquisitions have been used to target particular house types, for example those suiting larger families. The City of Edinburgh Council has funded the purchase of over 700 new homes for permanent and temporary accommodation.<sup>71</sup>
75. Some local authorities were already taking action in this area before declaring a housing emergency. For example, South Lanarkshire Council expanded its acquisition scheme in late 2023 to allow for more opportunities to purchase homes directly from owners, including private landlords and those with empty properties.<sup>72</sup>

### **Voids and empty homes**

76. There are a number of reasons that a rental property might be empty - void properties are a normal part of the turnover of social housing stock. In between tenancies they may often need repairs or upgrades which require work by tradespeople and utility companies. Sometimes they are part of wider plans for major refurbishment, might be due for demolition, or are of a type of property for which there is no demand locally.
77. Not all councils have reported voids as being a major contributory factor to the housing emergency in their area, for example, Scottish Borders stated in their written submission to the Committee<sup>73</sup> that empty and void properties in the social rented sector are not a significant issue in their context. For other authorities however, tackling voids is a crucial part of their housing emergency action plan.
78. The Scottish Housing Regulator published figures in August 2024<sup>74</sup> which showed there were 630,732 social homes available to rent, of which 44,501 became empty during the year, and those were empty on average for 57 days. The time taken by local authorities to re-let empty homes increased to 73 days in 2023-2024, up from 67 days in 2022-2023. Registered social landlords reduced the time taken to re-let empty homes to 39 days, down from 44 days in 2022-2023 (but still higher than the 26 days it took on average in 2019-2020).
79. Many local authorities and RSLs have been taking steps to bring void properties back into use more quickly to help address the housing emergency, and Sharon Egan from ALACHO told the Committee that at a national level the number of voids are reducing.<sup>75</sup> For example, Fife's Voids Service Improvement Plan makes a commitment to a 20 day turnaround period by the end of the financial year.<sup>76</sup> West Dunbartonshire Council for example reported that their number of voids had reduced from peaks of around 450 to 165, with a further reduction in void numbers anticipated during 2025-2026.<sup>77</sup>
80. However, reducing the number of void properties does not solve wider structural issues in the long-term. Professor Gibb told the Committee that compared with the scale of the challenge it makes a finite contribution<sup>78</sup>, and Professor Hilber estimated that the number of empty units is just 1.4% of the total social housing stock which is a low vacancy rate.<sup>79</sup> In March 2025 the Regulator published a report on Registered Social Landlords' empty homes<sup>80</sup> following a request to it by the Scottish Government to gather data. The report notes that as of 28 February

2025 there were 305,100 homes empty which equates to 1.6% of total stock, a figure similar to Professor Hilber's estimate.

81. Carolyn Lochhead from the SFHA told the Committee that fewer homes are becoming available. She described some other practical steps which associations can take, including funding aids and adaptations to properties to help ensure people can live independently. She highlighted however that the funding to make such adaptations has been cut by almost a quarter.<sup>81</sup>
82. The Minister for Housing told the Committee that the Scottish Government is looking at what it can do to support local authorities in reducing void properties. Funding of £40m will be available in 2025-2026 which is expected to help tackle around 600 void properties, in addition to supporting property acquisition.<sup>82</sup>
83. A particular challenge is the performance of some utility companies in undertaking the necessary work to enable a property to be let. Local authorities often experience long delays to installations and repairs, or in switching from one supplier to another. The Committee is familiar with this issue from previous evidence sessions with witnesses on housing issues, and it was raised again during this inquiry by both witnesses and the Minister for Housing. In the Scottish Housing Regulator's recent report on empty homes one of its main findings was that:  

” Issues with delays caused by Utility Companies, resulting in properties sitting empty for months, was the common theme made by RSLs in the comments section - meter resets, exchanging meters and clearing debt on meters all took weeks/months for the Utility Companies to resolve and the properties could not be let out during this time.”<sup>83</sup>
84. The Minister also described the importance of bringing empty homes back into use. He provided the example of Edinburgh where there are currently around 7,000 empty homes. The Scottish Government has allocated £2m in the 2025-2026 to support local authorities in tackling empty homes.<sup>84</sup>
85. Many councils already had strategies in place for dealing with empty homes prior to the housing emergency, and some councils already employed officers with specific remits to work on empty homes in the private sector. The updates provided by local authorities to the Committee show that some have boosted their capacity to deal with empty homes in response to the emergency. For example, Fife Council reported that the Housing Emergency Action Plan Board have redirected £1m of funding to focus on long term empty properties and has added another Long Term Empty Homes Officer.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, West Dunbartonshire Council has refreshed its empty homes strategy and has a full time empty homes officer to oversee bringing back around 25 homes back into use on an annual basis.<sup>86</sup>

### Property allocation

86. There are additional challenges for local authorities and RSLs in how best to allocate homes to people. Sharon Egan from ALACHO said that:

” "It is about striking a balance between maximising our lets to our urgent homeless list in order to meet need and demand and making sure that there is a bit of turnover by ensuring that lets are being put on the general waiting list and on the transfer list to keep throughput up." <sup>87</sup>

87. Moray Council have for example changed their allocation policy to give more priority to domestic abuse victims in order to alleviate that form of housing need <sup>88</sup>. But where councils are stock transfer authorities and RSLs manage social housing, local authorities have limited control of allocations. North Lanarkshire's housing stock consists mostly of 2 bedroom properties, however the majority of homeless presentations are single people and the policy of most housing associations in that area is to not allocate them a 2-bedroom property due to concerns about the bedroom tax and the potential of that leading to a funding shortfall. <sup>89</sup>
88. City of Edinburgh Council provided an example of the scale of demand for properties, with 16,000 people on the waiting list and an average of 260 bids for each house. As a result they are reviewing their allocations policy, working with RSL partners to increase the percentage of lets to the homeless, and looking at international examples of practice to learn from them. <sup>90</sup>
89. Callum Chomczuk from CIH described how some local authorities are directly engaging in the private rental market, by creating their own letting agencies. He went on though to say that these though are marginal gains at a local level, and that a systemic approach by the Scottish Government is needed. <sup>91</sup>

**90. The housing sector is working hard to tackle the housing emergency, for example local authorities through their Housing Emergency Action Plans. Measures such as tackling void and empty properties and increasing acquisitions are rightly being pursued as a means of quickly increasing the availability of housing and temporary accommodation. They are not however the sole solution and do not provide the systemic change which must be driven by national and local leadership.**

## Preventing future emergencies

91. This section of the report considers what needs to change to avoid Scotland falling into repeated housing emergencies, and explores what a properly functioning housing system should look like. Clearly the priority must be to ensure that homelessness is rare and families are not reliant on temporary accommodation. An increased number of properties must be available, but views on what progress looks like in that respect will differ. The Scottish Government must be clear on what its priorities are, and track the progress being made towards achieving them so it's clear whether the system is performing effectively. Chris Birt from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation highlighted that:

” "Ultimately...we need a stable and predictable system that allows people to plan, that gets us out of the horrendous circumstances in which we find ourselves just now and which gets us back on to a calmer platform so that we can make the generational changes [needed]." <sup>92</sup>

92. Professor Ken Gibb described in more detail what he considers a re-balanced housing system should look like:

” "House prices and rents should not be accelerating or decelerating, but should be stable in the long-term with respect to price inflation...housing should be neutral with respect to society - it should not be creating greater inequality, nor should it be redistributing wealth in favour of one group, and it should complement pensions, social care and social security." <sup>93</sup>

93. Professor Gibb went on to describe the short and long term nature of action required to reform the housing system:

” "The short-term proposals are, clearly, the immediate emergency response, and they consider how to make best use of the pot of available resources, in what other ways resources can be attracted to help, and what can be done to facilitate supply. In the medium term, we think that the system of allocating resources...has to change. In the long term there are issues such as...land reform and a national housing land agency...the point is that the long term will never be addressed because of our short-term electoral cycles, so we need to find ways to take a long-term view and recognise that the long term starts today." <sup>94</sup>

94. Witnesses provided the Committee with suggestions for how change could be delivered which span a range of areas, which are discussed further below. These include the planning system, land acquisition and building, finances, the need for a whole-systems approach to housing, and social security reform.

### Building more homes

95. More homes of all tenures need to be available in order to tackle the housing emergency, however Scottish Government statistics show that between 2023 and 2024 there was a 9% decrease in housebuilding starts across all sectors, and a 7% decrease in housebuilding completions. <sup>95</sup> The Scottish Government has its target of building an additional 110,000 affordable homes by 2032, but no target for other

tenures. Gordon MacRae from Shelter Scotland stressed the need to have agreed success measures;

” “We have no target for social house building or all-tenure house building in this parliamentary session. It is a 10 year target of 110,000 affordable homes. We do not know what the purpose of government policy is from a measurable objective or an outcomes that we can put a parcel of objectives together for. Being able to clarify what Scottish ministers expect to happen from the allocation of resources that they are making available would allow us to evaluate whether a measure is working and what we need to do differently.”<sup>96</sup>

96. The Committee heard about the importance of building the right homes in the right places, rather than just meeting a target figure for construction. Some local authorities have existing social housing stock for which there is very low or no demand, leading them to demolish some buildings.<sup>97</sup>

97. In Professor MacLennan's view, the planning system is the biggest blocker to building more homes. He told the Committee that Scotland needs:

” “...a coherent spatial plan. Spatial planning, infrastructure and housing go together if we are thinking about building or rebuilding a country. We have fragmented those areas progressively since 1990.”<sup>98</sup>

98. Jennifer Kennedy from Homes for Scotland highlighted a report on planning by the Competitions and Markets Authority (CMA) which says that planning is currently a hindrance to building:

” “...the planning system is limiting the level of house building because of the lack of predictability: the length, cost and complexity of the process, and the insufficient clarity and consistency in the system.”<sup>99</sup>

99. Professor MacLennan also highlighted that there can be challenges for authorities in acquiring land from elsewhere within the public sector in order to build, providing an example of where NHS land was sold at full market value.<sup>100</sup> Carolyn Lochhead similarly said:

” We have seen examples among our members where they have been able to acquire land at less than market rate. That is generally down to good local relationships. There is not really any kind of national framework that makes it easy for that to happen. Given that land is one of the key factors in being able to build affordable homes, we need to look at how to create a proper framework for that, so that a view can be taken about what the best use is for a particular piece of land, rather than just maximising the amount of money that is gained for it.”<sup>101</sup>

100. Professor MacLennan provided an example in Canada of an initiative to increase use of public land, where the federal government has:

” "...recently decided that public land is to be offered to non-profits to deliver on homelessness and low-income housing outcomes... The Government is leasing the land for 100 years, so that the value of the land still sits as an asset on the Government's books. That makes good sense. Do not just talk about having a register of public land, do it." <sup>102</sup>

101. The Scottish Land Commission has investigated the options to ensure that sufficient affordable land for housing is available in the right places to meet housing need, and concluded that significant reform is needed to the way land is brought forward for housing and development. In its review and recommendations to Scottish Ministers about land for housing it proposes a new model where the public sector takes a leading role in the housing land market to create places people want to live at prices they can afford. <sup>103</sup>

102. Professor Gibb described the benefits that creating a Land Agency in Scotland could bring in providing the strategic leadership which is needed:

” "A lot of housing practice in Scotland suggests that we would benefit from a strategic land agency of some kind, which could work in partnership with local authorities... The agency would have the capacity, for example, to support builders that are small and medium-sized enterprises... [the agency] needs to be pump-primed for its initial funding but, thereafter, it follows the plan of creating sites that are ready for use or helping with the master planning and development of bigger sites it will take the fee from doing that and recycle it for further investment in land." <sup>104</sup>

**103. The Committee has heard of many advantages of facilitating the sale and use of public sector land. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government should include how it, and other public sector bodies, could support such action in its Housing 2040 strategy or proposed Housing Emergency Action Plan.**

## Funding

104. The increase in public spending on housing in the Scottish Government's budget for 2025-2026 has been welcomed by stakeholders and will have a direct impact on the building of affordable homes. However as described above that budget has fluctuated considerably in recent years, which will have certainly reduced the numbers of homes built and will have caused uncertainty for local authorities and their partners in planning to deliver new homes. To tackle the housing emergency there needs to be political consensus about the importance of long-term commitments by the Scottish Government to funding the Affordable Housing Supply Programme budget through multi-year funding.

105. In his evidence to the Committee the Minister for Housing highlighted that the Scottish Government's Housing Investment Taskforce is looking at maximising opportunities for financing <sup>105</sup>, which will be critical in identifying alternative sources of funding. The Taskforce was due to have identified by March 2025 actions which will unlock new investment.

106. There are barriers though to financing housing which the Taskforce cannot solve. The evidence heard by the Committee during its scrutiny of the Housing (Scotland) Bill made it clear that uncertainty throughout the housing sector about the implications of the rent control provisions in the legislation has undermined investment in the private rental sector. <sup>106</sup>

107. There are nonetheless opportunities for investment by other sectors; Professor Gibb told the Committee about the use of social investment, which he said:

” "...plays a small but important role in working with charities and housing associations...the city of Edinburgh Council is looking at greater use of social investment as a way of providing a financial additionality to help achieve a great volume of social, affordable and temporary accommodation." <sup>107</sup>

108. Professor Maclennan described to the Committee during this inquiry the role that the non-profit sector could also have:

” "The leveraging of assets in the non-profit sector in Scotland is relatively weak... It will be important for the non-profit sector in Scotland to increase the capacity to leverage private finance from the bank into public finance. Public finance is difficult just now, and it might not get any better over the next two or three years." <sup>108</sup>

**109. The Committee welcomes the additional funding in 2025-2026 for the Affordable Housing Supply Programme budget. It recommends that the Scottish Government also explores further the opportunities presented by increasing social investment in housing and in developing the capacity of the non-profit sector to obtain private finance.**

110. Local authorities also told us about the need for increased flexibility in funding arrangements. For example Scottish Borders Council <sup>109</sup> highlighted challenges with the funding criteria for the Rural Housing Key Worker Fund where many key workers serving rural communities may actually live in nearby settlements which are not technically classed as being rural. The Council also noted its limited resources for bringing empty homes back into use.

111. Councils including Argyll and Bute and Scottish Borders highlighted the value of increasing the flexibility in the Affordable Homes Supply Programme funding, in particular calling for the ability to carry over funds to reduce underspend risks. <sup>110</sup> Scottish Borders also suggested:

- Providing Resource Planning Assumptions/Allocations for a minimum of five years to align with the requirements of Strategic Housing Investment Plans;
- Allowing greater flexibility in terms of grant rates and programme arrangements, including a suspension of benchmark rates to better address viability gaps and support Mid-Market Rent developments; and
- Allow more creative use of available capital funding to support initiatives such as bringing private sector empty homes back into use at affordable rental

levels. <sup>111</sup>

112. Donna Bogdanovic from Scottish Borders Council gave the Committee some further examples of the need for increased flexibility in the use of their resources:

” "...last year, despite the fact that we are in a housing emergency, we underspent on our supply programme allocation. There are things that we could have done with that funding - we could have spent it in different ways - but obviously, we are tied to the framework that we have at the moment. Equally, huge viability gaps in local projects meant that the council put in more than £2.5 million to support those projects to deliver affordable housing, when, at the same time, we are not able to spend the funding that is being made available from the Scottish Government." <sup>112</sup>

113. Sharon Egan from ALACHO also called for multi-year funding in the Affordable Housing Supply Programme, and noted too that the Rapid Rehousing Transition Funding would come to an end in March 2025, which had been used by local authorities for initiatives supporting homeless people with complex needs. <sup>113</sup>

114. On the Committee's visit to Argyll and Bute Council <sup>114</sup>, the local authority highlighted that there needs to be advance investment in critical infrastructure such as access roads to developments. When asked about this during his oral evidence to the Committee, the Minister for Housing responded that infrastructure includes transport, education and employment and would therefore require much broader discussions within Government. <sup>115</sup>

### **Whole-systems approach**

115. Clearly the housing system cannot be viewed in isolation, and the importance of better coordination emerged throughout the Committee's scrutiny. Eilidh Keay from Living Rent said that a whole-systems approach is needed to tackle issues in the private sector alongside increasing availability of council and social homes. <sup>116</sup>

116. Callum Chomczuk from CIH made the case for improved collaboration across the public sector:

” Responsibility for housing lies more widely than only with housing departments, RSLs and developers. It is a societal responsibility, and we need to consider the roles of, for example, health boards, justice and education departments." <sup>117</sup>

117. Professor Maclennan made a similar point, that housing should be the responsibility of a number of government departments:

” " In a sense, housing programmes in Government...are the palliatives. They have become the sticking plaster that gets applied when the consequences of the infrastructure policy, immigration policy, environment policy and every other policy impact housing costs and outcomes. Housing has to be thought of in a more constructive way and, in my view, it is best to put it in the infrastructure department." <sup>118</sup>

118. Professor Maclennan went on to highlight the environmental, social and economic outcomes of housing in Scotland and the importance of avoiding harm to the sector caused by wider policies. To mitigate against those he suggested that policies should be accompanied by a 'housing impact statement', akin to environmental impact statements, in order to consider the impact they may have on housing.

” "Housing is certainly underfunded, but the fact is that other policies impact it too, so let us remove the damage being caused by policies if we can, and let us change some of the behaviours." <sup>119</sup>

**119. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government ensures it assesses the impact of its wider policies on housing, as an important component in tackling the current housing emergency and also in helping prevent future such emergencies. This might require the creation of housing impact statements.**

120. Within the housing system itself different housing markets are interconnected, including social housing, mid-market rents, the private rental sector, affordable homes and home ownership. During the Committee's scrutiny of the Housing (Scotland) Bill witnesses highlighted that the increased demand for private rented housing is due to both a lack of social housing and the unaffordability of property prices. Gordon MacRae from Shelter Scotland told the Committee that a whole-systems approach to housing offers a template for making reforms work and said:

” "I caution against making policy on one tenure without understanding that, if you pull that thread, something else might unravel and we will have to deal with the consequences of that afterwards. We are constantly chasing and fixing the previous error." <sup>120</sup>

121. The Committee recognises the importance of collaboration across both the Scottish Government and within the wider housing sector in order to effectively tackle the housing emergency. During his oral evidence to the Committee the Minister repeatedly stressed the volume of engagement taking place with a range of stakeholders. Again however, the output of that collaborative effort is not clear, and a national overarching Housing Emergency Action Plan by the Scottish Government (as recommended above) would assist in articulating the efforts that are underway and their intended outcomes.

**122. As described by witnesses, housing does not exist in isolation; it is both impacted by and affects numerous aspects of society. Both national and local government have duties in respect of ensuring people's right to a home is met. The Committee agrees that a whole-systems approach is required that is led by the Scottish Government and its partners in order to stabilise housing in Scotland and help prevent future emergencies. It therefore recommends that the Scottish Government sets out how it will better coalesce its own departments around tackling housing need and ensure that wider policies across different portfolios can have a positive impact.**

## Reserved issues

123. The Committee also heard from witnesses that some of the levers for system change lie with the UK Government, for example the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) which remains frozen and has not kept pace with increased rents, the two-child benefit limit<sup>iv</sup> and the bedroom tax<sup>v</sup>. Carolyn Lochhead said that:
- ” There are many things that the UK Government could do that would not immediately tackle the housing emergency, because they are a few steps removed, but which are absolutely related to the housing emergency and would make an impact.”<sup>121</sup>
124. Derek McGowan from City of Edinburgh Council told the Committee that the weekly shortfall between the LHA and the average rent in Edinburgh per week for a three-bedroom house is £121.11, which is almost £500 a month.<sup>122</sup> Donna Bogdanovic from Scottish Borders Council agreed that the LHA should be increased.<sup>123</sup>
125. Stephen Llewellyn from North Lanarkshire Council described the impact that the bedroom tax has:
- ” ..the biggest reason for homelessness in North Lanarkshire is relationship breakdown. Nearly two thirds of the applicants are single people, so the abolition of the bedroom tax would be greatly welcomed. We are mitigating the bedroom tax for just under 7,000 current tenants, and we receive funding for that. However, for people who are coming on to the waiting list, the bedroom tax is a barrier just now in relation to some of the RSLs’ policies on house sizes.”<sup>124</sup>
126. The Scottish Government currently provides local authorities with funding for discretionary housing payments to mitigate the impact of the bedroom tax and help prevent homelessness. The Minister for Housing described research carried out by Heriot Watt University on behalf of Crisis which found the biggest factors in rates of poverty leading to homelessness are the LHA and the rate of universal credit.<sup>125</sup>

- 127. There are a number of issues which are contributory factors in the housing emergency and which are outwith the Scottish Government’s control. The Committee notes the Scottish Government’s interventions with the UK Government to mitigate the freeze on the Local Housing Allowance. It also welcomes the Scottish Government’s financial support for local authorities in providing discretionary housing payments and seeks clarification from the Scottish Government that these will be retained in the long term.**

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iv The 'two child benefit cap' restricts means-tested benefits and tax credits to the first two children in most households, meaning families with three or more children born after April 2017 don't receive additional support for subsequent children.

v Under the bedroom tax tenants living in council or social housing with rooms deemed to be 'spare' receive a reduction in Housing Benefit.

## Annexe A: Evidence

128. After holding evidence sessions in February and April 2024 on the Scottish Government's Housing to 2040 strategy, the Committee decided to seek views in writing on the housing emergency from a number of organisations. In particular, the Committee asked about housing voids, property acquisitions, and organisational responses to the housing emergency. Twenty-six responses were received from local authorities, together with responses from the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA), the Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations (GWSF), the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers (ALACHO), the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), and Shelter Scotland.<sup>vi</sup>
129. The Committee subsequently held two oral evidence sessions with a range of witnesses. On [5 November 2024](#), the Committee took evidence from:
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation
  - Professor Ken Gibb
  - Professor Christian Hilber
  - Scottish Borders Council
  - North Lanarkshire Council
  - City of Edinburgh Council
  - East Ayrshire Council
  - Moray Council
130. On [12 November 2024](#), the Committee took evidence from:
- Professor Duncan MacLennan
  - Chartered Institute of Housing Scotland
  - Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers (ALACHO)
  - Living Rent
  - Homes for Scotland
  - Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA)
  - Shelter Scotland
131. Members of the Committee also visited Argyll and Bute Council in November 2024, which was the first local authority to declare a housing emergency in Scotland. The purpose of the visit was to explore how the council has been responding to its

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<sup>vi</sup> The responses received are available on the [Committee's webpage](#).

housing emergency, and in particular the challenges which island and rural communities face. A [report](#) summarising the discussions which took place during that visit is available online.

132. The Minister for Housing gave evidence to the Committee on 14 January 2025<sup>vii</sup> where Members asked him about the national and local response to tackling the emergency. The Committee subsequently wrote to the thirteen local authorities who have declared local housing emergencies to ask what progress has been made. Nine responses were received.<sup>viii</sup>

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vii [Meeting](#) of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 14 January 2025

viii The responses received are available on the Committee's webpage.

- 1 [S6M-13197 | Scottish Parliament Website](#)
- 2 [Housing Emergency and Housing to 2040 | Scottish Parliament Website](#)
- 3 [Housing \(Cladding Remediation\) \(Scotland\) Bill | Scottish Parliament Website](#)
- 4 [Housing \(Scotland\) Bill | Scottish Parliament Website](#)
- 5 [Our risk assessment of social landlords: summary outcomes - April 2024 | Scottish Housing Regulator](#)
- 6 [Homelessness statistics, April to September 2024 - gov.scot](#)
- 7 Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Official Report, 5 November 2024, Col 3
- 8 Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Official Report, 12 November 2024, Col 9
- 9 [Housing \(Scotland\) Bill Stage 1 Report | Scottish Parliament](#)
- 10 [Housing \(Scotland\) Bill Stage 1 Report | Scottish Parliament](#)
- 11 [Housing \(Scotland\) Bill Stage 1 Report | Scottish Parliament](#)
- 12 [Housing \(Scotland\) Bill Stage 1 Report | Scottish Parliament](#)
- 13 [Housing \(Scotland\) Bill Stage 1 Report | Scottish Parliament](#)
- 14 [Housing \(Scotland\) Bill Stage 1 Report | Scottish Parliament](#)
- 15 Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Official Report, 12 November 2024, Col 16
- 16 [Housing \(Scotland\) Bill Stage 1 Report | Scottish Parliament](#)
- 17 [Housing \(Scotland\) Bill Stage 1 Report | Scottish Parliament](#)
- 18 Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Official Report, 5 November 2024, Col 6
- 19 [Housing \(Scotland\) Bill Stage 1 Report | Scottish Parliament](#)
- 20 Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Official Report, 5 November 2024, Col 44
- 21 [Housing \(Scotland\) Bill Stage 1 Report | Scottish Parliament](#)
- 22 Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Official Report, 12 November 2024, Col 9
- 23 Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Official Report, 12 November 2024, Col 4
- 24 Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Official Report, 12 November 2024, Col 2

- 25 Figures taken from [SPICe Blog on the Scottish Budget – 2025-26: Affordable housing supply](#)
- 26 Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Official Report, 12 November 2024, Col 51
- 27 Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Official Report, 12 November 2024, Col 4
- 28 Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Official Report, 12 November 2024, Col 9
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