

Call for review into homelessness 'disaster'

Homelessness 'human and financial disaster' after £28m B&B spend

The Capital's homelessness crisis has been labelled a "human and financial disaster" after it was revealed the city council has spent £28.1m to meet an increased demand for B&B accommodation since 2016.

Opposition councillors have called for a review of homelessness legislation after the number of people in need has increased in each of the last three years – with costs soaring.

In 2018, 4,572 homeless people were accommodated in B&Bs and hotels for a total of 240,652 nights – up from 4,398 people spending 208,761 nights in temporary accommodation in 2017.

In 2016, 3,550 homeless people spent 10,069 nights in B&B accommodation with demand soaring over the last three years.

In 2018 alone, the city council spent £11.7m on temporary accommodation for homeless people – including £6.4m to one provider. The anonymous company has tallied up a total of £15.4m over the space of three years.

Green councillors have claimed that the £11.7m paid out last year could have funded the construction of more than 2,300 council homes to be built.

Green housing spokeswoman, Cllr Susan Rae said: "This is a full bells-ringing, sirens-wailing emergency. Faced with the crisis of homelessness, of course, the council's first priority should be to ensure that people have a roof over their heads. Just imagine if that £12m could be used instead to build over 2,300 council homes – how much better that would be for people and for the public purse.

“This is too big a crisis for Edinburgh to solve on its own. In developing its plans to tackle homelessness in Scotland as a whole the Scottish Government needs to recognise that Edinburgh is in a deep hole over temporary accommodation and needs a transformation in homelessness services and decent alternatives to dig its way out.”

The average stay in B&B for homeless people in Edinburgh is now 53 nights – with the Scottish Government set to bring forward proposals to extend the unsuitable accommodation order, which limits B&B use to seven nights, to all households – not just families.

The council has also spent an additional £407,276 over the last three years to transport people to temporary accommodation including bus tickets to assist people attending appointments.

Conservative housing spokesman, Cllr Cameron Rose, said: “The system is clearly not working to getting people back on their feet. The legislation requiring the council to provide accommodation, without pathways back to independence, needs to be the subject of review to see why it is not working.

“The council needs to learn that its easy promises to end the B&B accommodation, without knowing how that might be done, do not help. Last year the council issued a press release resolving to end families in bed and breakfast accommodation by June 2018. That did not happen.”

In January 2018, the council promised to lift all homeless families out of B&B accommodation by June 2018 – and despite vast improvements since the summer, some families remain sheltered in the accommodation.



Council Leader Adam McVey

The pledge was renewed by Council Leader, Cllr Adam McVey, who said the practice for families will be ended this year.

The council has put in place a range of measures to try and move people out of B&B accommodation – including placements in temporary flats, while B&Bs have been improved to include cooking and washing facilities.

The authority has committed to building 20,000 affordable homes and says it is on track to deliver the goal – which will alleviate pressure on the city's housing market and help more people find a home.

The council has extended a Private Sector Leasing (PSL) strategy, which allows homeless people to temporarily rent a flat, rather than B&B accommodation. A Rapid Access Accommodation strategy for rough sleepers has also been brought forward, after a successful trial.



Councillor Kate Campbell Housing and Economy Convener Photo
The Edinburgh Reporter

Housing and Economy Convener, Cllr Kate Campbell said the

council was “attacking it from every angle”.

She said: “After 10 years of Tory austerity and brutal welfare reform it’s not surprising that we’re in a position where far too many people are experiencing homelessness. In Edinburgh this is exacerbated by high private rents and the low proportion of social housing as compared to other Scottish cities – much of our housing stock was sold off because of the right to buy.

“We recognise that there isn’t one solution and through the work of our homelessness task force we’ve taken lots of actions to improve things. What’s important is that people are able to access good quality temporary accommodation, where they feel safe and can have a good quality of life, and that they are able to move on to permanent, settled accommodation as soon as possible.”

She added: “We’ve extended the [Private Sector Leasing scheme](#) which helps to increase the number of temporary flats. This is alongside ring-fencing mid-market properties for households experiencing homelessness, improving the B&B contract so that they have become shared housing with access to food storage, cooking facilities and a washing machine, and a whole host of other measures including around prevention.

“We have one of the most ambitious housebuilding programmes in the country – with a commitment to build 20,000 affordable homes over ten years. Ultimately, building more affordable homes is the best way to reduce homelessness.”