

Cautious welcome for reduction in homeless numbers in Edinburgh

The number of people presenting as homeless in the Capital has fallen by 20 per cent in the last five years – despite a warning that high rental costs in the city could hamper progress.

Last month, the city council submitted its rapid rehousing transition plan to The Scottish Government, which outlines a costed strategy to eradicate temporary accommodation for homeless people within five years.

A rise in the use and length of stay in temporary accommodation has been caused by the increasing length of open homelessness cases, rather than a rise in homelessness applications.

New figures have revealed that the number of people presenting as homeless in Edinburgh has fallen in each of the last five years, from 4,016 in 2014/15 to 3,188 in 2018/19.



Councillor Kate Campbell Housing and Economy Convener Photo

The Edinburgh Reporter

Cllr Kate Campbell, the council's housing and economy convener, said: "Our rapid rehousing transition plan is about getting to a place where the number of homes we are able to allocate to homeless households is the same as the number of people presenting as homeless each year. This will eliminate the need for temporary accommodation as we will be able to allocate a permanent settled home to people as soon as they present as homeless.

"To make this work we need to build more social homes and increase supply and prevent homelessness so that we reduce the demand for homes. This means that preventing people from becoming homeless is a major part of making the plan work.

"It's brilliant to see that our strategies for prevention are working and we've seen another decrease in the number of homeless presentations this year – making it a 20 per cent reduction – more than 800 households – over the last five years."

Four homeless officers will be employed by the council to focus on preventing people who are at risk of becoming homeless from the private rented sector – through support with income maximisation, knowing their rights as a tenant, or working with landlords to prevent an eviction.

In 2017/18, 44 per cent of those presenting as homeless in Edinburgh did so because of a relationship breaking down or a non-violent dispute while 24 per cent lost a tenancy in the private rented sector.

Only 15 per cent of homes in Edinburgh is social housing – compared to a national average of 24 per cent. In the capital, around 10 per cent of the population, who in other local authorities would be living in social housing, are being housed in the private rental sector.

Cllr Campbell added: "We have to be realistic that it will

only get tougher because of the roll out of universal credit, welfare reform and the cost of housing in Edinburgh.

“It’s good to see that the approach we have taken to prevention is working, but we know that we need work even harder to keep preventing homelessness in the years to ahead.”

A leading housing charity has called for the focus to remain on building more affordable homes.

Graeme Brown, Director of Shelter Scotland, said: “Against a backdrop of rising homelessness across Scotland last year, a reduction in homelessness presentations in Edinburgh is good news.

“However, the city still struggles with high levels of housing need and a shortage of good quality temporary accommodation and having to resort to using unsuitable accommodation like bed and breakfasts and hostels, often for much longer than the law allows.

“Only a consistent and ongoing programme of building new homes for social rent will help the Capital’s acute shortage of affordable housing and ensure homeless people are supported to find and keep a home as soon as possible.”



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