

Number of homeless families in B&Bs greatly reduced in Edinburgh

The number of homeless families being sheltered in B&Bs has reduced dramatically over the last 18 months, from 80 in February 2018 to 10 in a recent report.

The fall is reported despite a warning about officials juggling more than 100 cases at a time.

An internal audit report into the city council's homelessness services presented at the Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee found that some officers are dealing with up to 190 cases at once – an average of 135 each. The average case length is now 365 days.

This prompted Labour Cllr Gordon Munro to ask whether additional resources could be put into the service. Four new officers, who will support people presenting as homeless from private rented housing, are set to be recruited by the end of September.

Cllr Munro said: "I do still have concerns with capacity. I'm aware that extra resource was put into this, but it still strikes me that a workload of 130 to 190 cases per officer is a substantial workload.

"We need to put resource in here to lessen the stress for our workforce and also to improve the service to the people we are serving."

Director of Communities and Families, Alistair Gaw, said that

the audit report showed there are “process issues” that should be tackled first.

He added: “Rushing into just putting additional resources in before we have sorted out some of these processes may be a bit premature.”

Legal B&B placement breaches, where families are there for more than seven days have dropped from 166 in the first quarter of 2018/19 to 43 in the second quarter of 2019/20.



Councillor Kate Campbell Housing and Economy Convener Photo
The Edinburgh Reporter

Cllr Kate Campbell Convener of Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work said: “I was pleased to see that the service has responded really well to the audit, working with the internal audit team to put in place robust procedures and implement the management actions as soon as possible.

“Homelessness services is a team of people working really hard in a difficult environment – they provide services to some of the most vulnerable people in the city and at the same time

have been working with the homelessness task force and creating and implementing the rapid rehousing transition plan. This has meant coming up with innovative new services and solutions which are providing better services and helping to prevent homelessness. It's clear this is working from the huge reduction in breaches.

"The audit is the opportunity to robustly examine core services and make sure that we have the best processes and procedures in place to get them absolutely right too."

Despite the workload on case officers, the situation for families in B&Bs is said to have improved.

In February 2018, more than 80 families were being sheltered in the unsuitable accommodation for an average stay of 10 weeks.

Now, fewer than 10 families are currently in B&Bs – with the average stay at three weeks.