

# World Homeless Day – council has ways to help

**World Homeless Day on Monday highlights the issues facing many people without a permanent home in local communities.**

With the cost of living rising, The City of Edinburgh Council want to raise awareness of the help they can offer and is available in Edinburgh and what the council is doing to increase their impact. They have published this handy guide of what to do about it if you are in danger of becoming homeless, or already are.

## **Prevention is better than a cure**

The best way to tackle homelessness is to stop it from happening in the first place and to help as many people as we can before they find themselves at risk of losing their home.

We're looking ahead to this winter and putting plans in place to help those at risk of fuel poverty, with a dedicated [cost of living directory](#), and we're working with Changeworks as we do every year, so that support is available to make homes warmer and more [energy efficient](#).

Our [Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan](#) steps up activity to prevent homelessness, maximises our supply of and access to settled housing options, reduces the time people spend as homeless, especially in temporary accommodation, and helps us to provide tailored support as and when people need it. It is a five-year plan which prioritises prevention and directs

every decision we make to improve the homelessness services we provide.

## **24/7 help and advice**

Despite working to prevent homelessness, sudden events, life changes or circumstances can lead to someone losing their home or rough sleeping unexpectedly. We have an emergency out of hours service which can be contacted at any time on **0800 032 5968**.

We will provide a housing options interview to anyone at risk of becoming homeless within the next 56 days with the aim of stopping each person from losing their home, giving advice on housing options and involving other agencies who can help.

[Streetwork](#) is a charity that supports people who are homeless in Edinburgh. Their team is out on the streets every day and night, helping people to resolve their homelessness as quickly as possible. Anyone can contact Streetwork if they are worried about someone they think is homeless, on 0808 178 2323 or at [streetteam@streetwork.org.uk](mailto:streetteam@streetwork.org.uk). Streetwork will go out to find the person to offer them support.

## **Recognising the impact of high rents**

The Scottish Government has imposed a nationwide rent freeze until March 2023 to help with the cost of living crisis. Yet, Edinburgh still experiences some of the highest private sector rents in Europe.

That's why we've created a dedicated team tasked with reducing the number of people who become homeless from the private rented sector. By the end of March 2022, this team has supported 100 homeless households to access a settled home in the private rented sector or in mid-market rent properties – preventing homelessness for 240 households by helping them to remain in their current private rental tenancy, or by

supporting them to access a new home in a private rented sector or mid-market rent property.

## **Early intervention for Council tenants**

We've frozen rents for Council tenants for two years running and Councillors are considering extending this for another year.

We've carried out an early intervention pilot project to identify and support Council tenants who are at serious risk of court or eviction action from failing to pay rents, but who have been difficult to engage with. Over the course of the pilot, 49% of household referrals engaged with the service and remain in their home and now we will seek to develop the service further.

## **Tailored help at the hardest of times**

We're developing pathways to avoid homelessness for people at key transition points in their life – such as leaving hospital or prison or fleeing domestic abuse – and have specialist support in place for anyone at these junctures.

In 2020 we adopted a new Domestic Abuse Housing Policy which aims to give people affected by domestic abuse access a range of housing options. It prioritises, where possible, those subjected to abuse safely staying where they are or moving quickly and with strong support into a safer space.

## **Breaking the cycle of repeated homelessness**

Experiencing homeless is a hugely stressful and challenging event for anyone. Often there are complex reasons why a person returns to homelessness. We work with our partners like NHS Lothian, Streetwork, Shelter and Bethany to offer mental health, addiction and other help to try and break the cycle.

Providing a home is just one aspect of combatting homelessness. Helping people to access financial support, set up a bank account, find employment, access the internet, and participate in community life are all ways which can support independence and stability. We work with partners in the third sector to provide this help.

Edinburgh Help to Rent is a scheme to help homeless households' access and keep a private rented tenancy in Edinburgh. The scheme provides a rent deposit guarantee bond and offers rent in advance, as well as furniture, and access to support if needed. This service is delivered by Crisis and 138 bonds have been issued to households over the course of the project so far, with 38 issued in the year to March 2022.

## **Better support for people experiencing homelessness**

We have been delivering a scheme called Housing First since November 2018. It provides ordinary, settled housing with separate wrap-around support for people with the most complex of needs. As of 31 March 2022 we had a tenancy sustainment rate of 80% and support has been provided for a total of 153 households.

Delivered by Simon Community Scotland / Streetwork, these interim measures will be in place until the end of March 2023, when we'll commission Visiting Housing Support – an improved one stop service which will include support for people in receipt of housing first, people currently receiving support from the complex needs service and people who currently receive support from the locality visiting housing support services.

## **Additional support for young people**

We provide a homelessness prevention service and advice on housing options for young people who are homeless or at risk

of becoming homeless and are 16 or 17 years old, or under 21 and have been looked after by us. Likewise, special support is available for people with significant support needs.

For young people who are leaving or recently left our care, they are supported to find appropriate, sustainable accommodation. It is a transition to live independently, and we work with young people to create a [Pathway Plan](#).

We've also committed to developing proposals for a youth housing hub, a physical hub providing co-location of core services and hosting for wider relevant services for young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Services provided would include statutory services, employability, housing support, health services, advice and welfare services. A feasibility study has been completed and a draft implementation plan is being taken forward.

## **Moving people through the system quicker**

With demand for housing so high in Edinburgh, many people face long waiting times for a suitable home which best meets their needs. People can also feel unsure about the bidding process.

To help us speed up the system, we've recruited 28 additional officers including 10 new Housing Assistants and a Supervisor. These posts are part of a recently formed transformation team in Homelessness Prevention and Housing Options who are supporting the work to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation.

Our Housing Assistants provide practical help ensuring people understand the bidding process, get support with bidding as required and provide feedback on bids. They re-enforce Housing Options advice. At the end of March 2022, among other positive outcomes, the Housing Assistants' interventions resulted in 892 case closures and 87 homeless households accepting suitable offers of settled accommodation as a direct result of

bidding feedback.

## **Improving our accommodation**

It is no secret that Edinburgh faces a severe social housing shortage and demand for new housing. In the face of these challenges, we are working hard to improve the type and amount of temporary accommodation we have to offer, and we're doing this through some innovative ways.

### **Private Sector Leasing (PSL)**

PSL provides self-contained flats leased from private landlords. The new contract we introduced in 2020 linked rates we can offer to local market rates within Edinburgh. This has allowed more competitive rates to and take up from landlords. At the end of March 2022 there were 1,747 PSL properties, which is an increase of 163 properties compared to the year previous.

### **Home Share**

This is a form of temporary accommodation where three to five people live together in a furnished home in the community. This accommodation has received positive feedback from residents, the number of Home Share properties we're offering has increased from 6 properties and 26 residents in March 2020 to 17 properties and 55 residents across the city by 31 March 2022.

### **Temporary Furnished Flats (TFF)**

We have a plan to increase our stock of these flats as quickly as possible and reduce the amount of emergency accommodation we use. The Covid-19 pandemic impacted on the delivery of this initiative but work has now fully commenced again.

### **Development of gap homes**

Officers are identifying potential gap sites, small suitable

areas of land in Council ownership, which could be used to build temporary accommodation through modular construction methods that meets the needs of service users.

### **Support for refugees**

Since the outbreak of war in Ukraine, we've welcomed thousands of Ukrainian refugees through Edinburgh, providing similar homelessness support to anyone without a permanent home in this city. While most Ukrainian people settled here are on Government schemes, we are also aiding temporary accommodation and support into employment, to receive benefits and with household items.

### **Social homes**

We have a rehousing target of a minimum of 50% of Registered Social Landlords (RSL) lets, both new build and existing, being allocated to homeless households. The target for Council social lets is a minimum of 70%, which means many homes which become available are prioritised to people who have been experiencing homelessness. As part of our housebuilding plans, we are also committed to building new Council homes within 10 years, and to 'retrofitting' thousands of existing homes to bring them up to a newbuild standard.



Cllr Jane Meagher Photo: © 2022, Martin P. McAdam  
[www.martinmcadam.com](http://www.martinmcadam.com)

Cllr Jane Meagher, Housing Homelessness and Fair Work Convener said: “It takes a whole society to work together to help people who face homelessness and prevent families from losing their homes. This World Homeless Day I’m so grateful to the many officers, third sector organisations, partners and volunteers in our city who work day and night to help people in desperate need.

“The daily pressures facing people experiencing homelessness are unimaginable for most. No one should have to experience the stress of not having a safe and permanent home. Sadly, after the pandemic we’re starting to see numbers of homeless cases gradually rise again – highlighting just how important and urgent it is that people understand the help which exists. Particularly in light of the cost of living crisis this winter, we are focusing our efforts on prevention and helping people to stay in their current homes, given the many difficulties households face.



“Edinburgh is a growing city and we face housing pressures like nowhere else in Scotland. With the lowest proportion of social housing in the country and the biggest, most expensive, private rented sector, the current economic climate is of concern. That said, the Council and the city has made huge strides in recent years. There are changes which I think are making a truly positive impact and will make a great difference in the long term. Lots of work has taken place to tackle root causes and recurring issues when it comes to homelessness in our city, and that’s clear to see. Together, we’re committed to keeping the momentum going as we face the cost of living challenges ahead of us.”

For more information, advice and support on homelessness or helping someone in need, please visit [www.edinburgh.gov.uk/homeless-risk](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/homeless-risk).