

## Briefing note

**Scottish Parliament Social Justice and Social Security  
Committee**

**12 April 2024**

## **Homelessness Challenges**

## Summary

- 1.1 On 2 November 2023, following a motion by Councillor Meagher, Convenor of the City of Edinburgh Council's Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee, the Council voted unanimously to declare a housing emergency in the city.
- 1.2 The Head of Homelessness and Household Support attended the Scottish Government Security and Social Justice Committee on 1 February 2024 to discuss the challenges faced by local authorities regarding homelessness.
- 1.3 This briefing note provides further information for the Committee with regards to challenges the local authority faces regarding homelessness and temporary accommodation, as well as how these challenges specifically relate to refugees and asylum seekers.
- 1.4 Information is also provided on the Council's perceptions of the rapid rehousing transition plan (RRTP).

### **Homelessness and Temporary Accommodation Challenges**

- 1.5 The number of households in temporary accommodation has increased by 33% in Edinburgh since the pandemic. On the 31 March 2024 there were 4, 969 households in temporary accommodation compared to 3, 570 households on 31 March 2020.
- 1.6 This includes 1, 340 households in unsuitable temporary accommodation on 31 March 2024 compared to 773 households in unsuitable temporary accommodation on 31 March 2020, a rise of 54%.
- 1.7 The increase in temporary accommodation use during the pandemic was mainly as a result of three factors: provision of additional accommodation for those rough sleeping; provision of temporary accommodation for people who may have no recourse to public funds; and a lack of move on or settled accommodation.
- 1.8 This meant that throughput from temporary accommodation services slowed during the pandemic across all tenures including alternative temporary accommodation, the private rented sector and social housing. This position is improving but has yet to return to pre-pandemic levels.
- 1.9 The Council was required to significantly increase the amount of temporary accommodation available to meet demand during the pandemic as noted above. There continues to be a demand for additional temporary accommodation to allow the Council to meet its statutory duty to accommodate people who are homeless.

- 1.10 The number of homeless presentations is also rising, with 3,768 homeless presentations in 2023/24. This now exceeds pre covid levels where there were 3,443 homeless presentations in 2019/20.
- 1.11 Edinburgh also has one of the lowest proportions of social housing in Scotland with 13% of homes in social rent compared to the national average of 22%.
- 1.12 The latest [Strategic Housing Investment Plan](#) identifies a potential development programme of around 11,000 new affordable homes over a five-year period, with over 9,500 of these requiring grant funding through the Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP). These would require an additional £665 million over five years, almost four times the amount of grant funding set out in current resource planning assumptions.
- 1.13 There is high demand for social rented housing with an average of 197 households (on average) bid for homes advertised through Choice and approximately 24,500 households are currently registered with EdIndex.

### **Policy and Legislative Changes**

- 1.14 Recent changes to legislation and policy have also had an impact on homelessness demand, including local connection, changes to the welcome accommodation policy for Ukrainian Displaced Persons (UDPs), and accelerated asylum decisions.

### **Local Connection**

- 1.15 The changes to legislation around local connection mean that households are now able to present and receive homelessness assistance, including accommodation, in any Scottish local authority area of their choice. Following a delay to the commencement date this came into effect at the end of November 2022.
- 1.16 In 2023/24 Edinburgh has seen 97 households from elsewhere in Scotland make a homeless presentation with 60 of these accessing temporary accommodation.
- 1.17 Of these 55 households have been assessed as homeless with 32 of these having accessed temporary accommodation.<sup>1</sup> Presentations have come from 18 other Scottish local authority areas.

### **Scottish Government Warm Welcome Accommodation Policy**

- 1.18 There has also been a change regarding Scottish Government Warm Welcome Accommodation policy for UDPs which came into force in December 2023. This move on and re entry policy means that local authorities must give UDPs two

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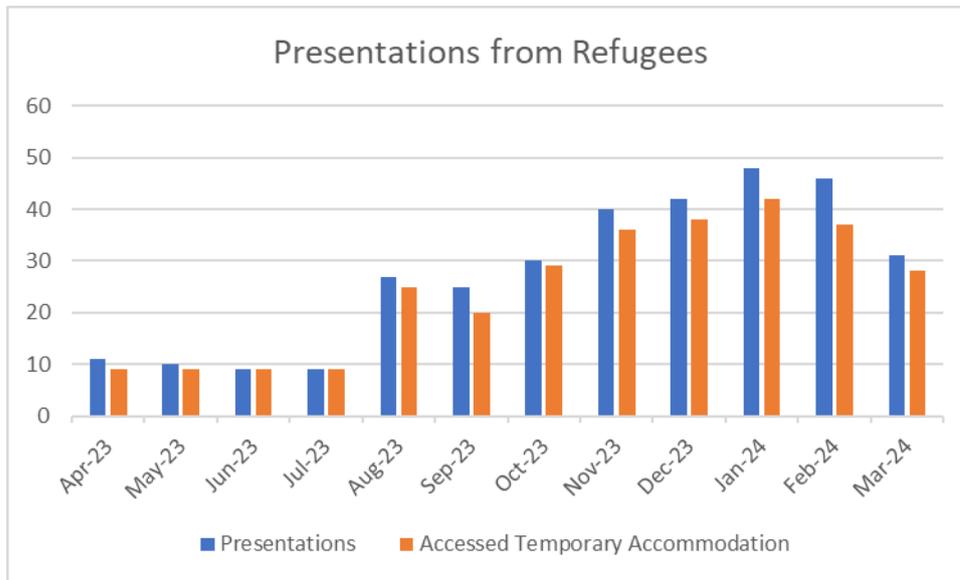
<sup>1</sup> Excluding presentations from elsewhere in Scotland where the reason for presentation was Domestic abuse as presentations from these households would have been accepted prior to the change in legislation.

offers of accommodation (one of which must be a tenancy offer). If both offers are rejected a sixty day notice period is served after which time the household must vacate Scottish Government welcome accommodation.

- 1.19 The re entry policy states that welcome accommodation is only available for new arrivals under the Super Sponsor Scheme or those with significant safe-guarding concerns. All other arrivals therefore not entitled to welcome accommodation are directed to local authorities for assistance.
- 1.20 Given that Edinburgh is the main arrival hub into the country and due to local connection legislation the impact on Edinburgh is likely to be significant in comparison to other local authorities.
- 1.21 Edinburgh currently has 750 individuals estimated to be living in Scottish Government Welcome accommodation as well as 900 individuals (estimated) in host arrangements.
- 1.22 Edinburgh is already seeing the impact of this change in policy with the number of homeless UDPs rising. There were 24 homeless UDPs in temporary accommodation on 31 March 2023, this has risen to 46 on 31 March 2024. This is likely to continue to rise.

### **Refugees and Asylum Seekers**

- 1.23 Since August 2023 Edinburgh has seen a rise in the number of homeless presentations from households who have recently had a positive asylum decision and have been asked to leave home office accommodation.
- 1.24 In 2023/24 there were 328 homeless presentations from these households. This included households as noted above and households from refugee resettlement programmes. The table below shows the monthly breakdown of both homeless presentations and households accessing temporary accommodation.

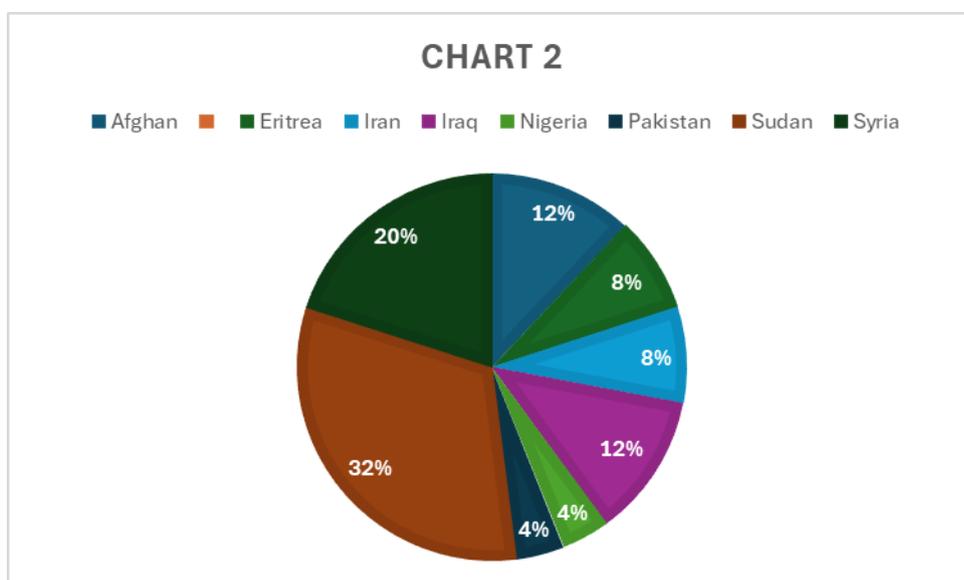
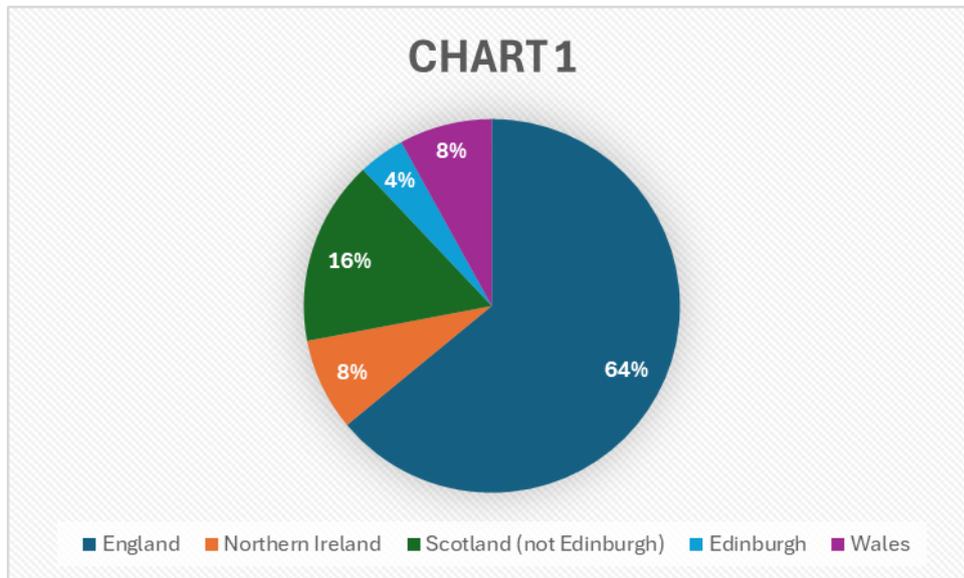


1.25 89% of presentations resulted in the household accessing temporary accommodation for at least one night. This is likely due to the lack of alternative options for people, as they may not have family or other support networks.

1.26 At the end of March 2024 there were 165 households in temporary accommodation. This equates to 3% of the total number of households in temporary accommodation.

1.27 Further analysis of the 31 presentations during March 2024 has found that:

- 81% of presentations were from households who have recently had a positive asylum decision, 19% were from households from refugee resettlement programmes. This includes members of households who had arrived as children with their parents under previous resettlement schemes, who are now adults seeking homelessness assistance.
- Of the 81% of households who had recently had a positive asylum decision, the vast majority (64%) of households had previously resided in Home Office accommodation in England, as noted in chart 1 below.
- Analysis of the nationality of households found that people come from a wide range of countries, with 8 nationalities represented in March as shown in chart 2 below.



- 1.28 The differences in homelessness legislation in Scotland and England may be a contributing factor in the number of presentations from households who have previously resided in Home Office accommodation in England.
- 1.29 In England, a person gains a local connection with a local authority area from residing in Home Office accommodation. In Scotland, no local connection is gained from residing in Home Office accommodation, meaning that a person leaving Home Office accommodation can present to a local authority of their choice.
- 1.30 Furthermore, priority need remains in English homelessness legislation, whilst this no longer exists in Scottish homelessness legislation. This means that single men (which the majority of households are) are not entitled to homelessness assistance beyond 56 days in England but are entitled to full homelessness assistance in Scotland. This includes access to temporary accommodation and settled accommodation.

- 1.31 These new trends add to the challenges of maintaining an adequate supply of temporary accommodation, particularly suitable temporary accommodation. This also adds to demand for settled homes in the city.
- 1.32 This has required Edinburgh to significantly increase its homelessness budget to meet its statutory duties. In 2019/20 the budget was £28.2m and this has increased to £62.6m in 2023/24.
- 1.33 This has included significant investment in homelessness prevention activity. Following a pilot period and evaluation Council agreed to the continuation and expansion of 44 posts focusing on homelessness prevention as part of the 2023/24 budget setting process.

### **Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans (RRTPs)**

- 1.34 All Scottish Local Authorities were instructed to develop, produce and cost a five year Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) by 31 December 2018.
- 1.35 Further to this, local authorities were asked to submit updated RRTP's. The second iteration of the Edinburgh RRTP submitted to Scottish Government in 2020 with annual updates on progress provided every summer.
- 1.36 The Edinburgh RRTP is aligned around four strategic objectives:
- Preventing homelessness in the first place.
  - Where temporary accommodation is required, it meets the needs of the household.
  - Supporting People to access settled accommodation as quickly as possible.
  - Reducing the number of people sleeping rough.
- 1.37 The RRTP and associated funding has allowed us to:
- increase homelessness prevention activity, such as the Private Rented Sector Team who support people at risk of homelessness from the Private Rented Sector. The team have prevented homelessness for 372 households in 2023/24.
  - Transform the mix of temporary accommodation and develop innovative models such as long term supported accommodation for people with alcohol issues.

- Increase the percentage of social rented lets to homeless households and support people with the transition from temporary to settled accommodation.
- Develop services for rough sleepers such as the rapid access model of temporary accommodation to ensure that rough sleepers can access accommodation directly from the street via street based outreach workers.

1.38 Edinburgh welcomes the continued funding for 2024/25 and would like to see this continued further given the ongoing challenges in the city.

## **Recommendations**

2.1 Scottish Government Social Justice and Social Security Committee is asked to note the content of this briefing note.