



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Social Justice and Social Security Committee

Thursday 4 November 2021

Session 6



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - www.parliament.scot or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

Thursday 4 November 2021

CONTENTS

	Col.
DECISION ON TAKING BUSINESS IN PRIVATE	1
PROPOSED SCOTTISH EMPLOYMENT INJURIES ADVISORY COUNCIL BILL	2
HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING (SESSION 6 PRIORITIES)	7
SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION.....	43
Council Tax Reduction (Scotland) Amendment (No 4) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/337).....	43

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL SECURITY COMMITTEE

9th Meeting 2021, Session 6

CONVENER

*Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

Natalie Don (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con)
*Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con)
*Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab)
*Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab)
*Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
*Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Maggie Brünjes (Homeless Network Scotland)
Lorna Campbell (Dumfries and Galloway Council)
Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Gordon MacRae (Shelter Scotland)
Lorraine McGrath (Simon Community Scotland)
Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP) (Committee Substitute)
Dr Beth Watts (Heriot-Watt University)
Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Claire Menzies

LOCATION

The Mary Fairfax Somerville Room (CR2)

Scottish Parliament
Social Justice and Social Security Committee

Thursday 4 November 2021

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:00]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Neil Gray): Good morning and welcome to the ninth meeting of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee. Apologies have been received from Natalie Don, and I am pleased to say that Evelyn Tweed is attending as her substitute.

The first item of business is a decision on whether to take items 5 and 6 in private. Do members agree to take those items in private?

Members indicated agreement.

Proposed Scottish Employment Injuries Advisory Council Bill

09:00

The Convener: Under agenda item 2, the committee will take evidence on the statement of reasons that has been lodged to accompany the draft proposal for a Scottish employment injuries advisory council bill and decide whether it is satisfied with the reasons that the member in charge of the proposed bill has given for not reconsulting on the draft proposal. At this stage, the committee is not required to give its views on the contents of the proposed bill.

I welcome to the meeting the member in charge of the proposed bill, Mark Griffin MSP, and Mary Dinsdale, senior assistant clerk, from the Scottish Parliament's non-Government bills unit.

I refer members to paper 1 and invite Mark Griffin to make a short opening statement.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): Thank you for inviting me to attend the committee to talk through the statement of reasons that accompanies my draft proposal.

The bill proposal was lodged in response to reports that thousands of people were suffering from long Covid that they had contracted at work—most likely, workers in health, social care, retail and public transport, whom we all depended on and applauded throughout the pandemic. In the absence of any action from the United Kingdom Industrial Injuries Advisory Council, a Scottish council could commission research and come up with recommendations on how to support people such as nurses, care workers and supermarket staff who caught Covid, now suffer with long Covid and are no longer fit for work.

When I looked further into the industrial injuries system, it became clear that it is completely out of date. It really only recognises injuries and illnesses of male workers in occupations that were common in the previous century, it does not recognise modern occupations and it completely fails female workers. Only 6.5 per cent of applications under the prescription route come from women.

The purpose of this evidence-taking session is for the committee to decide whether to accept the statement of reasons that I have provided on why I consider it unnecessary to carry out a further consultation, but I wanted to give a flavour of the motives behind the proposed bill.

I note that the committee has received a letter from the Scottish Government. I hope to work with the Minister for Social Security and Local Government to overcome any policy differences

and timetable issues. However, as the committee knows, nothing in his letter is relevant to the statement of reasons.

It is less than a year since the draft proposal was lodged and consultation began. It is only six months since the consultation summary was lodged ahead of Parliament rising for the election recess. That consultation was undertaken with the non-Government bills unit's support, my thanks for which I put on record.

The proposal is broadly similar to the one that I lodged last November

“to establish a Scottish Employment Injuries Advisory Council”.

However, I have improved the wording to sharpen up the proposal and to reflect more precisely the purpose and role of the proposed council that was consulted on and the outcome of that consultation. There is nothing new that was not previously consulted on or on which views were not sought.

The additional terms in the proposal confirm that the council would be a statutory body, as was explicit throughout the consultation document and at question 1 in the consultation questions, and that it would have the ability to commission its own research, as was also made clear in the aims of the proposed bill and specifically consulted on at question 2. They also confirm that the bill would define the council's membership, which was the focus of question 5.

The consultation on my previous proposal ran for 12 weeks and received responses from a range of individuals and organisations from relevant sectors. I wrote to a number of academics, civil society and third sector organisations, professional associations and business organisations, as well as occupational safety campaigns and, of course, trade unions. There is a breadth of responses across those sectors, which provides new, positive engagement in the social security space.

The consultation was publicised in comment pieces and blogs, notably in *The Herald*, in the *Daily Record* and on Reform Scotland's *Melting Pot* blog. Media coverage in which I highlighted the issue raised in the consultation document—that Covid-19 should be prescribed as an industrial disease—was raised with the First Minister in December 2020. Close the Gap blogged about the gaps in provision for women under the existing benefit and about women's health and safety more widely, and it also covered the issue of Covid-19 in the workplace. Two events, which were conducted on Facebook and via Zoom, were hosted by the GMB's health and safety group. Separate focus groups were arranged with women members, who shared their experiences of health and safety in the workplace.

The consultation closed in February this year, and I do not believe that respondents' views will have changed since then, or that there have been any material changes to the case for an advisory council. The UK advisory council has since refused to prescribe Covid-19, which perhaps strengthens the case for evolution of the benefit here, and the Scottish Government has not yet made any legislative commitment to establish a new council.

For a process that has been carried out so recently, repeating the consultation would seem to me to be an unnecessary duplication of work and effort, including for those organisations and individuals who took the time to respond to the previous consultation.

I hope that members will agree that further consultation is not necessary. I am more than happy to expand on any of the points that I have made, and to take questions.

The Convener: Thank you very much, Mr Griffin. I thank all those correspondents who have been in touch ahead of today's meeting. My inbox has been rather full of emails on the subject.

I invite colleagues to ask any questions.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): Thank you for setting out the position, Mark.

As the convener has said, we have received a number of emails that call for Covid-19 to be made an industrial disease under the new benefit; others have said that women make up just a fraction of the applicants and that the benefit must start to recognise women's injury and disease in the workplace. Your bill does not propose to do that, so could you tell the committee how it will contribute to dealing with those issues?

Mark Griffin: I am glad to hear that your inboxes are so full, although I am sorry for your staff who are dealing with that. It shows the strength of feeling in support of the proposals.

Ms Duncan-Glancy is right that the proposal will not, in itself, change any of that, but it is the first step on the road. The current entitlement is fit for the 20th century, not the 21st century. An employment advisory council would have the expertise of people with lived experience of 21st century workplaces. There would be expertise from epidemiologists and other experts in the field. There would be a gender balance on the council to ensure that illnesses and injuries in workplaces that are predominantly female were reflected. As I said in my opening statement, only 6.5 per cent of applications currently come from women. If an equality impact assessment was done of the benefit today, it would immediately say that that was entirely inappropriate.

For me, all those aims and objectives are the end point, but the starting point is to establish the council, with its expertise and its ability to commission research, to start to address those challenges.

The Convener: I note from the minister's correspondence that it is the Government's intention to introduce legislation to bring about employment injury assistance. He suggests that your proposed legislation is therefore "unnecessary". How would you respond to that?

Mark Griffin: The minister has set out that he intends to introduce legislation to establish employment injury assistance. That is obviously something that the Government has to do as a result of the Scotland Act 2016 and the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018. What the minister has not mentioned, and what the Government has not committed to, is establishing an advisory council to scrutinise the regulations on the new entitlement that the minister would lay. I believe that it is crucial that research is carried out in advance of that entitlement being established.

We can either lift and replicate what I feel is a failed and completely out-of-date UK system or we can get the expertise on board early, set up the council, advise the Government and scrutinise the regulations. All the parties in the Parliament and the Government have accepted that it is right to have an independent statutory body to scrutinise social security legislation—indeed, that is why we have the Scottish Commission on Social Security. I am just asking us to go a step further and create another body that has the expertise to look in depth at the range of injuries and illnesses in Scottish workplaces, with the aim of updating the benefit in question to ensure that it best serves the people of Scotland.

The Convener: You do not feel that SCOSS could provide that scrutiny or advice.

Mark Griffin: I am proposing that the membership of a Scottish council include representation from the trade unions. It will take primary legislation to change SCOSS's role to mandate that it have trade union membership so that it can consider workers' lived experience of illness and injury at work. As the committee knows, SCOSS already has a lot of work on its plate, and I think it important that we create a new body that has not only the ability to look specifically at the very detailed nature of employment injury assistance, but a research function to look at illnesses and injuries that are emerging across the developed world and ensure that the Scottish system is fit for the 21st century, not the last one.

The Convener: That was very helpful. My only other question before we decide whether to allow

you to proceed without having to reconsult is about your intentions with regard to liaising with the Scottish Government before you reintroduce your proposed bill.

Mark Griffin: When I raised the issue in the chamber with the First Minister, I think that I received a sympathetic response. I also flagged up to the minister the consultation response and my intention to introduce legislation, but at that point he was only two or three days into the job, so the issue might not have been at the top of his list.

I really want to work with the minister on this. He has set out his concerns about policy and timetabling, but with my British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill, I have a track record of working with the Government to ensure that there are no concerns on either side. I would want to open a discussion with the minister and his officials and take a joint working approach to ensure that my proposal is right and that it works for the people of Scotland.

The Convener: Thank you very much. The committee will now decide whether it is satisfied with the statement of reasons. I thank Mr Griffin and Mary Dinsdale for their time this morning and invite them to step away from the table while the committee comes to an agreement.

I suspend the meeting briefly.

09:12

Meeting suspended.

09:13

On resuming—

The Convener: The committee is now required to decide whether it is satisfied with the statement of reasons and that a further consultation on the proposal is not necessary. At this stage, we are not required to give our views on the proposed bill's contents.

Is the committee satisfied with the statement of reasons?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The minutes will reflect that decision. Before we move on, I again thank Mr Griffin.

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping (Session 6 Priorities)

09:14

The Convener: Agenda item 3 is an evidence-taking session on homelessness and rough sleeping. Our plan is to hold some stand-alone evidence sessions on topics that are covered by the committee's remit to establish priorities for future work in the current parliamentary session, and this is the first of those focused sessions.

Given that homelessness is also of interest to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, we have invited members of that committee to join us today. In addition to Mr Briggs, who is a member of both committees, I have great pleasure in welcoming Elena Whitham, who is deputy convener of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. I hope that we can continue to carry out such joint committee scrutiny where there is a crossover of issues.

09:15

I also welcome our panel of witnesses, who are joining us remotely: Maggie Brünjes, who is chief executive of the Homeless Network Scotland; Lorna Campbell, who is financial wellbeing and revenues manager at Dumfries and Galloway Council; Lorraine McGrath, who is chief executive of the Simon Community Scotland; Dr Beth Watts, who is a senior research fellow at Heriot-Watt University; and Gordon MacRae, who is assistant director of Shelter Scotland.

I have a few housekeeping points to highlight for colleagues in the room and those who are joining us remotely. I ask everyone to allow our broadcasting colleagues a few seconds to turn your microphones on before you start to speak. Witnesses, you can indicate with an R in the dialogue box in BlueJeans, or simply with a show of hands, if you wish to come in on a question; I will monitor that as best I can. You should not feel that you have to answer every single question—if you have nothing new to add to what others have said, that is okay.

I invite members to direct their questions to particular witnesses. We are fortunate today in that we have such a wide range of witnesses before us, but in the interests of time—we have about an hour and a half—I hope that we can direct our questions to individuals.

I now invite colleagues to ask questions. The first comes from Jeremy Balfour.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): I direct my question to either Lorraine McGrath or Gordon MacRae. It is on the lessons that have been

learned in the past 18 months, during the pandemic. It is clear that a lot of work was done around homelessness, and we almost saw the end of people being on the streets at all for a period last year.

My question is quite broad. What lessons have we learned from that? Have we—local authorities, the third sector and the Scottish Government—regressed even since then? Have we learned those lessons, and are we now implementing that learning as we go forward? Perhaps Gordon MacRae can start, followed by Lorraine McGrath.

Gordon MacRae (Shelter Scotland): The pandemic showed us that having greater resources, more staff and better joint working between the third sector and public bodies does actually work. From Shelter Scotland's perspective, looking at where the levels of homelessness are—not just rough sleeping, but homelessness more generally—the pandemic exposed some of the things that we can do well, but also some areas that we had perhaps lost sight of. The fact that significantly more people were ending up in hotel accommodation than had been approaching the hostels prior to the pandemic tells us that there was still a problem with people not being prepared to approach the hostels, and with their perception of what the homelessness system, through the local authority, would be able to do for them.

However, we have also seen issues go away, in Glasgow in particular. Lorraine McGrath can talk more about the practical steps that we are taking. A couple of years ago, Shelter Scotland took Glasgow City Council to a judicial review regarding its continued breaches around local gatekeeping and the ability of some people to access the temporary accommodation system. We have seen that issue pretty much go away during the pandemic, which is testament to the resources that have gone in—we have seen new staff, new casework teams and new property becoming available. From our perspective, that is not a surprise—it is what we were pushing for the whole time—but it is regrettable that it took a health pandemic to bring about that shift.

The challenge now is that it is difficult to disaggregate exactly where that money has come from, and how much of the money and staffing can be retained. We would certainly look to the Scottish Housing Regulator's data to try to keep abreast of exactly what the sustainable level of resource is that is needed in the city.

Lorraine McGrath's team is far more involved on the ground, day to day, than the Shelter teams are, so I am happy to hand over to her.

Lorraine McGrath (Simon Community Scotland): Good morning, everybody. I am delighted to be joining you this morning.

I completely agree with everything that Gordon MacRae said. The pandemic has presented an incredible opportunity, and I am happy to say that the interagency liaison work that had been done on rough sleeping and people with complex needs has really come into its own in a remarkable way. People on the front line have felt empowered. That was a key pillar of the front-line work of the homelessness and rough sleeping action group and the organisations involved in it. It was important that the power to make decisions was in the hands of the people who had the best connections and relationships with those who had experienced the most extreme forms of homelessness and destitution, such as rough sleeping.

It was great that we were able to mobilise so quickly. We quickly removed the institutional barriers and the professional hierarchy, which often get in the way. The need for protocols, pathways and processes can be a barrier. We focused on what people needed in that moment and on how we could respond more effectively. It was remarkable that local leaders saw the opportunity to act. We did things that we had always known were possible and were important to the people whom we supported, but which we had never been able to make happen for institutional reasons or because of barriers in the system. The circumstances of the pandemic gave us power to make decisions and take action. People saw opportunities rather than challenges or risks, and they took those opportunities.

We are talking about the most extreme forms of homelessness, such as rough sleeping. That tends to be the focus of discussions, but there was a lot of other activity with people who had lower-level needs. That activity went on in the background with councils. People needed rapid access to accommodation and to stay safe. A critical part of that was the ability to support people who were perceived as having no recourse to public funds. They were given accommodation and brought into places of safety. As a result, we built a much greater understanding of their needs. There could be much more intensive case management because those people were in stable accommodation in which they could engage with staff and other services.

A lot of the front-line empowerment has stayed in place, and many of the relationships that were formed during highly pressured periods have been sustained. However, a little bit of bureaucracy is starting to creep back in. People's day jobs are taking priority again, and they are not so able to

invest in working with colleagues across the sector.

The collective endeavour to see the person, not the problem has contributed heavily to our ability to keep the number of rough sleepers in both cities low. We do not see a number of people, a system challenge or a resource challenge; we see what a person's circumstances are and what we can do collectively to make a difference for that person and for everyone else who comes along. That is still one of the most powerful drivers, along with the additional resources in the cities that Gordon MacRae referred to.

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): Thank you for the invitation to attend as a representative of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee.

I worked closely with some of the witnesses during the pandemic when I was the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities lead spokesperson on housing. I thank them for their hard work.

As I listened to Gordon MacRae and Lorraine McGrath, I was struck by the fact that it was a collective endeavour. My grave concern is that we will start to slip back on that true multi-agency working and the step change that we saw in removing those institutional barriers. I am concerned to have heard Lorraine McGrath say that some bureaucracy is starting to creep back in.

Are we likely to see an increase in homeless presentations with the changes that are coming down the line, such as the end of the furlough scheme and the end of the longer notice periods in the private rented sector? How can we ensure that bureaucracy does not creep back in so that we do not again start to see bad results for people presenting as homeless to councils?

That question is for Maggie Brünjes and Gordon MacRae.

Maggie Brünjes (Homeless Network Scotland): I thank the committee for taking evidence on homelessness and for considering the issue among your early priorities. It is obviously important to each of us here.

In thinking about starting to answer that question, perhaps I could remind everybody what some of the key challenges were with regard to homelessness before the pandemic, because that really matters when it comes to understanding what is going to happen next. I will be as concise as I can be.

In broad terms, our challenges were, first, ensuring that we had a supply of, and access to, housing in the places where people really wanted to live; secondly, a system that was characterised by overreliance on temporary accommodation and, in particular, the length of time that people

stayed there, and the fact that not all of that accommodation was suitable; thirdly, changing the conditions that created homelessness, especially reducing poverty, which we all know is a primary driver of homelessness—laws to prevent homelessness are vital, but the fundamental shift in homelessness will happen much further upstream; and, finally, what is sometimes called the implementation gap. We really do have great policy and legislation on housing and homelessness in Scotland, but the key challenge is ensuring that that policy delivers on the ground for every person in the intended way. Of course, that final challenge means more focus on implementation. I want value to be given to staying the course.

That all matters, because the pandemic has magnified all that. In addition to the immediate public health risks, the pandemic has created the same conditions that create homelessness. That, of course, gets to Elena Whitham's point.

On thinking about what might be around the corner and what is ahead of us, we know that homelessness follows big global events, such as recessions and pandemics. We expect homelessness to be a bit of a lagging indicator of the pandemic—we might not see it immediately. Indeed, the most recent statutory count of homelessness showed a slight reduction. However, we tend to see an increase in homelessness further down the road. People starting to experience money worries, pressures on housing and employment, the end of the furlough scheme and all the other factors will contribute to housing insecurity.

Exactly what we need and what has been successful over the last period is the big government leadership that we have seen, which has really worked—the national endeavour of thinking about housing, health and homes all together. We need to ensure that there is no rollback on the acute collaboration that happened over the period, which Lorraine McGrath has just described, because that, too, works. We need things such as the housing first approach at the helm to redress the most severe multiple disadvantages, and we need to do that first.

Gordon MacRae: Yes, we should anticipate a rise in homeless presentations. We do not put too much stock in the homelessness statistics for last year because, clearly, we had an effective evictions ban. The private rented sector is one of the principal places in which people who presented as homeless were previously housed. Therefore, in some respects, there is a bit of a false perspective about what the levels of homelessness were at the point when the furlough scheme ended and the courts reopened.

We see the cost of living crisis and the continuing increasingly precarious nature of employment as being part of the structural reasons for homelessness. It is important to understand that, when we talk about homelessness, we are talking about statutory homelessness. Obviously, we need to understand the level of hidden homelessness, but Scotland's system is based on rights and duties that are set out in a statutory framework.

09:30

I have been struck by some of the evidence, especially from the Crisis homelessness monitor, for example. We had failed to make a real dent in homelessness. Despite a very positive set of initiatives, such as the ending homelessness together action plan, housing first and many other individual initiatives, we were not seeing a significant reduction in homelessness. In fact, it was on the rise; it was trending upwards for two years in a row before the pandemic.

Sometimes we need to remind ourselves of the scale of the challenge that we face. Rough sleeping is absolutely at the acute end of the homelessness system but, in numerical terms, it is relatively small in proportion to the size of the problem.

I absolutely endorse Maggie Brünjes's comment about the implementation gap. Now is the moment to reflect on how we can get a whole-system approach to tackle the homelessness problem in Scotland.

We absolutely endorse models such as housing first and extending prevention duties to other public bodies. However, we also have to take a step back and recognise that, over the past six years, there has been a 75 per cent increase in the number of children who are in temporary accommodation. More than 7,000 children are in temporary accommodation. We know the harm that that causes to their life opportunities.

We need to avoid deep diving into one narrow piece of the homelessness sector and take a broader role. Some of the elements of the ending homelessness together annual report have not yet been progressed—for example, a gendered analysis of the system and the embedding of a stronger ability for people to get recourse on their rights if those are denied. As difficult as it is, we need to approach homelessness issues with equal energy across the piece.

We are concerned that, if we focus in on only one area, we will have an unintended consequence in another. Certainly, the rise in children in temporary accommodation is a direct result of a focus that was solely on the rough-sleeping and more acute end. Some people are

not even counted when it comes to things such as core homelessness, which is a statistical and not a legal model. It explicitly excludes people who are in long-term temporary accommodation. Those are some of the consequences.

As I have said, we need a whole-system approach. We think that there are some really good pillars for what that will take: better rights but, ultimately, more homes. We cannot achieve housing first if tenancies are not there for people to move into, and we cannot achieve rapid rehousing if homes are not there for people to access. However, we do not want to go backwards into forms of priority need, whereby some groups are deemed to be more important than others simply because of a set of circumstances. We support needs-based analysis that looks at people who are making presentations at that time.

The structural need for more resources—for more homes—is the lesson to learn from the pandemic. When we put the money and energy in, and when the Scottish Government took a leadership role through the Scottish ministers—I did not touch on that earlier—in the response to the pandemic and put cash directly into third sector bodies for that immediate response, those things made a difference. We are very keen to ensure that, through the work of the committee and through forums such as the homelessness prevention and strategy group, we will be able to continue that progress.

Dr Beth Watts (Heriot-Watt University): There is absolutely no doubt that there is acute concern among local authorities in particular that we will see a rise in homelessness, and we need to take that very seriously. From a range of sources, there is reason to be somewhat optimistic. The lesson from international and UK-wide homelessness policies and trends is that the economy's negative impacts on homelessness are not inevitable—there is nothing necessary about them—and that policy plays an extremely important role in breaking the link between those economic factors and a rise in homelessness.

I also want to draw attention to the work done in the monitor on projecting trends in homelessness over various time horizons and to pull out a few core messages from that. The real core message is that some of the things that can make the most difference in stabilising and, indeed, substantially reducing homelessness in Scotland are in the hands of the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament. Some things that would help are out of our hands, but the key ones that could make a big dent are not. Moreover, there are some things that are already in the ending homelessness together action plan, and I underline that the core focus should be on seeing the plan through over a longer time horizon than

the five-year period that was, understandably, the initial focus.

Rapid rehousing into settled housing, whether that be social housing or appropriate private sector housing, is projected to make a huge difference in the numbers in the short and medium term. In addition, a huge amount more can be done in Scotland to maximise the gains from homelessness prevention, which I hope that we will talk about.

I will leave it there, convener.

The Convener: Thank you very much. I believe that Elena Whitham has a supplementary question.

Elena Whitham: Actually, it is more of a comment just to wind up this section of questions.

I think that we need to put down a marker with regard to the policy implementation gap and fully recognise that situation. After all, as Gordon MacRae and others have said, we have world-leading legislation, rights and responsibilities in Scotland. In that respect, the cross-committee work will be truly important because, thinking of the work of my own Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, I suggest that the housing system as a whole has to come together if we are to have the supply of houses with which to respond to any increase in homelessness or, indeed, the level of homelessness that we have at the moment. That will be fundamental, but I think that national planning framework 4 will be vital, too, so we have to get that right.

I am just putting a marker down with you and the committee, convener, to ensure that we carry out that cross-committee work.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Good morning, panel, and thank you for your testimony so far. I have some questions on temporary accommodation and evictions, which have been touched on already. We know that there are a large number of children in temporary accommodation. What can we do to move them rapidly—I think that that is the word that was used—into more settled accommodation? Would it be possible to do that before Christmas? I would like to think so, but I am keen to hear how we could do it.

It was rightly pointed out that the change to the ban on evictions has had a serious impact on the numbers. Do you have any concerns about the lifting of the ban and its impact on homelessness?

The Convener: Who are you directing your questions to?

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I promised that I would remember to do that, convener. I ask Dr Watts and Maggie Brünjes to comment.

Dr Watts: I am very happy to do so. I recognise the importance of the story that Gordon MacRae told about the high numbers of children in temporary accommodation, which should absolutely be a core concern for us. That being said, I also want to reflect on the variability of such accommodation. Gordon referred to the lens on core homelessness, which takes a broader view than rough sleeping and overlaps with statutory homelessness. We take that approach because we believe that it is important to point out that people in temporary accommodation can be in a range of better or worse circumstances.

In a study of temporary accommodation that I did a few years ago, I focused on families with children, and it was clear that some of them were in an okay situation. They were in self-contained, furnished properties in locations near the children's school that they were okay with. Other families were not in such a situation, however. They were in accommodation that was extremely overcrowded, unsuitable and damaging to their lives in a number of ways. When it comes to prioritisation, I point out that people have different experiences. We should focus on getting everyone out of temporary accommodation, but we should maintain a nuanced approach and look at the different situations that people are in.

I absolutely believe that there are things that we can do in the very short term. You asked about doing something before Christmas. That conversation might be more for local authorities and landlords than for me, but the lesson from the pandemic is that we can make very substantial differences to homelessness very quickly. You are right to highlight that rapid rehousing should be the focus. Prioritising households that are in temporary accommodation and homeless households, or rapidly rehousing people into social housing and appropriate private rented accommodation, could achieve that quickly.

The key point on the evictions ban is that its phasing out should be slow and managed. People are not evicted overnight; it is a long process. That gives an opportunity for extremely good and intensive advice to be given and for landlords to take responsibility for ensuring that evictions are used only when necessary and that they do not result in homelessness. In such situations, homelessness prevention activity often works really well, either by enabling the household to stay in the accommodation or by securing alternative appropriate accommodation before the eviction happens. There is a real need to emphasise the policy control that we continue to have over the impacts of the phasing out of the eviction ban.

Maggie Brünjes: Pam Duncan-Glancy made an important point about temporary accommodation.

As I said, one of the chief concerns about the homelessness system is that it is characterised by households, including families with children, spending far too long in temporary accommodation and other individuals staying in unsuitable temporary accommodation. The issue is a huge priority for those of us who work in the sector.

At the start of the pandemic, we almost ended rough sleeping and definitely closed communal night shelters by opening up hotel rooms and through local authorities finding access to other types of temporary accommodation. In that moment, we were all on board with that, and in any reflection on that period we would probably all say the same things. However, the result of those actions is that we are now talking about 13,000 households being in temporary accommodation. That number is up significantly on the previous year. There was a time early in the pandemic when it peaked at around 14,000 households, which was the highest number ever, and this is in a country that already has an overreliance on temporary accommodation as a tool to respond to homelessness.

That is a chief concern, although the fact that, during the pandemic, which we are still in, local authorities have started to demonstrate a bit of a reduction from that peak in the use of temporary accommodation shows that progress is being made. Progress can be made if the right policy and practical decisions are made, and we are seeing some evidence of that at a local level.

I support what Beth Watts has just said. One of the tools that the homelessness monitor provides for reducing homelessness and the reliance on temporary accommodation is simply to increase the proportion of lets that social housing providers and others make to homeless households. That is one of the simplest but most effective mechanisms that we can put in place to get the system moving more quickly and to get people spending less time in temporary accommodation and less of their lives in limbo, which is what is happening.

A linked point is that the councils that have the biggest challenge with temporary accommodation, which are those in the cities, as you would expect, are also those that will find the unsuitable accommodation orders most challenging. The principle of that legislation is the idea that, if accommodation is not good enough for some of us, it is not good enough for any of us. It is important for us to hold on to that. For many of us, that legislation was the final piece in the jigsaw of creating a universal set of rights for people who experience homelessness. It is incredibly important. I know that everybody is on board with it, but the reality is that a minority of local authorities will not be able to fulfil its terms.

Fundamentally, we need to recognise that those areas with the greatest challenges around temporary accommodation overall and the related use of unsuitable temporary accommodation will need the most support, which needs to come from national Government, housing providers in their areas and the range of health and social care providers that can help with the move.

09:45

Our organisation is part of a wider collective of around 35 academic and third sector organisations that mobilised at the start of the pandemic under the umbrella of Everyone Home, and one of our priorities is that there should be no evictions into homelessness. We understand that there are circumstances, particularly in cases of antisocial behaviour, in which eviction cannot be prevented, but there can be no grounds for expecting people to leave a household and have no roof over their heads. In national policy terms, as well as in what happens locally, much more can be done to prevent that situation and commit to that principle.

One thing that we hear about the position of housing associations on eviction because of rent arrears is that eviction would not be started if somebody who is in rent arrears had a payment plan with their housing association, was meeting its terms and had additional support. A number of us want to support that principle. We probably need some more evidence, but that is always the case in all areas and across all housing associations. We should provide more tools and support to enable housing associations to stick to that principle, because it is the right one.

The Convener: As we are talking about prevention, I will bring in Lorna Campbell to talk about the work that is being done in the local authority setting, particularly on financial resilience, and to touch on the points that Maggie Brünjes made about rent arrears and ensuring that people have financial resilience in order to avoid falling into homelessness. Lorna, will you touch on those areas from a local authority perspective, please?

Lorna Campbell (Dumfries and Galloway Council): Good morning, everybody. I will talk from the local perspective in Dumfries and Galloway, but what I say will apply across most local authorities.

Before the pandemic, we focused heavily on the prevention side, and particularly on rent arrears. At the start of the pandemic, we worked closely with our housing associations. Dumfries and Galloway Council is a stock transfer authority, so we do not have our own housing stock, but we work closely with our main housing provider and all the other housing associations, particularly where tenants

have rent arrears and are struggling financially. We put in additional supports and work with the teams to look at areas such as benefits maximisation, the underlying reasons and, if appropriate, referrals to employability schemes.

Recently, we had the addition of the Covid tenant support grant, which has been given to local authorities from the beginning of September, and we have been working with housing associations and private sector landlords to highlight tenants who have arrears, particularly in relation to Covid. We have been working with those landlords and tenants to facilitate engagement and address the arrears.

We heard some comments earlier about potential evictions and the current economic climate with the ending of furlough, the changes to universal credit and the other economic situations that are putting the squeeze on people with low incomes. At the moment, we are not seeing a rise in evictions. It has been explained that there will be a time lag before we start to see homeless presentations because of the economic climate. However, local authorities are seeing increased demand for things such as discretionary housing payments and Scottish welfare fund grants. That is probably a precursor that shows that people are beginning to struggle and it will probably lead eventually to people struggling with their tenancies.

We already have the contacts in place and there is a cross-sector approach—with our housing associations, the third sector and citizens advice bureaux—to getting support in as early as possible so that we can help tenants to work with the agencies, address any issues that they have and, eventually, prevent homelessness from occurring.

Gordon MacRae: Pam Duncan-Glancy asked what can be done now. Maggie Brünjes mentioned the unsuitable accommodation orders, which have been extended to all households. We support that—it was long overdue and much delayed—but it has not attracted any additional funding for local authorities to implement it. We need to consider the situation where more responsibilities have been placed on local authorities by central Government without additional capacity and resources being offered to meet the new goals. Seven local authorities will probably be in breach on day 1, or are already in breach of the new duties.

Those are legal rights, but Shelter Scotland has cases every day where we defend the rights of people who have been denied suitable temporary accommodation. We seem to tolerate breaches of legal duties in the homelessness system that we would not tolerate in other areas. It is unfathomable to imagine a local authority denying

a child the right to a place at school, but it happens routinely in relation to homelessness.

Both before the pandemic and post-pandemic, local authorities have breached their legal duties to provide suitable temporary accommodation. That is why Shelter Scotland is increasingly trying to shift the discussion away from asking how we do the best with what we have in the housing and homelessness sector towards how we create the structural changes that are required. We do not accept that seven local authorities should have to focus on reducing harm with ever-reducing budgets. Small amounts of money have been given—£8 million or £15 million over the next few years—but if there is one thing that can be done, it is to connect resources to new policy requirements and duties from now on.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I have a question about temporary accommodation and I will ask for your input on trends in relation to the individuals that we are talking about. Findings from the “Hard Edges Scotland” research by Heriot-Watt University show the complex needs of those individuals and that they often fall through the gaps of services.

From my five years as an MSP trying to help such people, I know that they are often ex-military, people with learning disability issues or people with drug and alcohol problems. Do you have any evidence that you could provide the committee with about individuals who seem to be constantly in temporary council accommodation? Should we consider different models, such as a supported living model when individuals cannot hold down a tenancy?

Having referenced the “Hard Edges Scotland” research, I will bring in Dr Watts first.

Dr Watts: That is a great question. I will make a preliminary point then I will come to the question of solutions. The group of people that Miles Briggs refers to, who are the focus of the “Hard Edges Scotland” research, experience a huge number of challenges anyway and I emphasise that some of the forms of temporary accommodation that they have access to can exacerbate the situation. However, it is understandable why, within the current system, local authorities put them in those forms of accommodation, such as hostels and bed and breakfasts. Scotland should be very proud of its legal rights on homelessness, such as the right to temporary accommodation for people who are experiencing homelessness, but there are too many people in temporary accommodation that is not fit for purpose, especially for the group that Miles Briggs highlights.

One of the key messages of the “Hard Edges Scotland” report is that local authority housing and homelessness departments end up carrying the

can for that group of people, but their needs are much broader than housing and homelessness. It is essential that we recognise that point. Bringing other public sector bodies to the table to contribute to the issue is a key principle of the prevention review group recommendations. I want to emphasise that point.

I will make two points in relation to housing solutions, and I recommend that you go to Maggie Brünjes after me. Housing first, with which I am sure members of the committee are familiar, is to some extent a key solution for the majority of the group of people that we are talking about. It is a hugely respected set of evidence that demonstrates that even people with very high levels of complex needs can function and flourish in self-contained housing if the wraparound support is right.

There is a very small sub-group of that group of people who need something else, however. I am delighted to have been involved in some work headed up by Homeless Network Scotland that has been thinking about the role of supported accommodation for those for whom housing first does not work. A few brilliant publications have set a policy direction for that, which involves a core-and-cluster model that maintains the principles of self-contained accommodation, but ensures that support is available on site and in an even more intensive way for the people who need it. There has been a gap in the amazing policy making that has been happening in Scotland on homelessness over the past few years, and it would be nice to square that circle.

Miles Briggs: Perhaps we can bring in Maggie Brünjes here.

On the point that Beth Watts has raised and on one of the issues that is important to note, we have already heard that nine local authorities—or at least seven—are likely to be in breach of the unsuitable accommodation order. What accommodation is there for the individuals whom we are talking about? I know from a visit that I undertook last Friday in my region that there are more than 50 people in Edinburgh with alcoholic brain damage who are currently on waiting lists to get into supported living. That accommodation does not necessarily seem to be in existence currently.

On the support that people need, wraparound care is expensive, and the workforce is not necessarily there. I turn to Maggie Brünjes now. What should the committee suggest to the Government needs to be put in place for that group? My experience is that people often end up ping-ponging around services, sadly. What, in your expert opinion, could be a solution for that cohort of clients?

On that note, we have lost you, Maggie.

Maggie Brünjes: Hello. Can people hear me now?

Miles Briggs: Yes.

Maggie Brünjes: I will answer the question that I think I was asked. To start with—this is similar to what Beth Watts said—I will state the important point that with the right support, most of us, even the hard edges group that we have been talking about, can manage our own home. For the people whom you have described, who are not getting the type of response that they need, part of the issue is that, although housing first is the right model, it is not yet at sufficient capacity to reach everybody who needs it.

Through the pathfinder, we know that more than 550 people have now accessed their own tenancy, and a high number of people are sustaining that successfully. However, that is a drop in the ocean according to some of the modelled forecasting that has been done on levels of demand for housing first in the future. We are talking about 3,500 people across the country per year over the next 10 years. That is the level of housing first that we need to enable everybody who needs it to access that type of support and service. You can see that we are some distance away from reaching that level. One of the key points that I would make on housing first is to recognise that, although a significant majority of local authorities are now committed to housing first and are already delivering it, the numbers and forecasts for housing first are far too modest. We need to be thinking much bigger now.

All that said—and as was explained in the interim independent evaluation undertaken by colleagues at Heriot-Watt University—we know that there are three circumstances where housing first does not work. First, generally, it does not work where people do not have the capacity to understand the terms of their tenancy agreement. Secondly, it can be the case that it does not work where the level of health and support care that people require is beyond what can be provided under an independent mainstream tenancy. Thirdly, there are people who just do not want a tenancy. It is not that they will never want their own place but, whatever their circumstances are, they do not want it right now.

The research that was published just last month explored those three circumstances in which housing first does not work for the groups that we are talking about and it considered what is needed. It was a significant piece of research, and a policy position, that was fine tuned by the research advisory group, which comprised a number of key partners, including national and

local Government, the housing support enabling unit, providers of supported housing and others.

10:00

In summary, the recommendations of that research, and the policy position, set out a direction of travel towards supported housing as a settled housing option for a small number of people who want or need 24-hour support available to them on site. Supported housing is currently used in a temporary form, and we want to push it towards being a settled housing response.

For some people—the small group of people that we are talking about—that is exactly what is needed. The housing should be homely and should fit all national policy objectives around independent living, and, as far as possible, it should not be labelled as homeless accommodation, because it is somebody's home. The models that are already provided in health and social care, such as core and cluster independent living places, are exactly the type of models to which we should aspire as a response to homelessness.

Some of the modelling that has been done around scale suggests that the scale of need for that type of supported housing, with on-site support, is between 2 and 5 per cent of the number of people across the country who make a homeless application every year, which amounts to between 400 and 1,300 people. We are talking about a small number of people, but it is an incredibly important group. As Miles Briggs highlighted, those people need a better response.

Lorraine McGrath: I endorse everything that Beth Watts and Maggie Brünjes have said. The starting point is to see people in a way that ensures that they are able to achieve equity of access to health and social care services. One of the big challenges that we face, even with the success of housing first, is that that approach still sits very much within a housing and homelessness agenda, rather a than health and wellbeing agenda.

As Miles Briggs outlined at the start of the discussion, the issues are much wider than the circumstance of someone being homeless. There are people with significant complex needs; that group makes up the majority of the people to whom we provide on-going support across the country. We know those people by name and by the circumstances to which Miles Briggs referred, in particular in Glasgow and Edinburgh. We know their histories and their engagement, and we have relationships with them. The challenge is being able to achieve equity of access for them to the

whole health and social care system in order to address that range of needs.

Miles Briggs mentioned alcohol-related brain damage, for instance. A lot of people are perceived to have a level of cognitive impairment, but they will not ever have easily been able to access a proper neuropsychological assessment to enable them to get to a place of understanding of what their actual needs are. From a homelessness perspective, the barriers to access to the other parts of the health and social care system are significant, in particular regarding trauma response services, mental health services, the links between mental health and addictions and recovery services.

All those issues become barriers to people being able to move outwith temporary accommodation, and they just bounce about from service to service because they either struggle to engage with what is available to them, or what is available does not provide enough safety, structure and security for them, and that becomes a problem for the service provider.

The fact is that we do not have an integrative model in most areas, where housing first and planned services sit outwith health and social care structures. There is not the right level of integration yet, but opportunity abounds right in front of us just now, with the development of the national care service, to address that and to create equity of access. We also need equity of status. There is no way that we would consider someone who has a forensic learning disability in a supported accommodation service, or an older person in residential care, to be homeless simply because it is not their tenancy.

However, we consider someone who is in a homelessness supported accommodation project to still be homeless, even if they have been there for 12 months plus, two years plus or three years plus as they rebuild their life and recover from all the harms that they experienced that led up to their homelessness and the further harms that they experienced during their experience of homelessness. We need to scale back and see the person as someone with complex needs and complex issues, one of which happens to be homelessness.

There is a housing need there, which needs to be focused on the individual person's circumstances. We know from work that we have done in Glasgow through the multi-agency CAN—city ambition network—initiative that focused on the group that we are talking about that, when we work collectively to address the individual's circumstances, to place the person at the centre of the process and to think about what will work best for them, based on who knows them best, who has the most trusted relationship with them and

who has the opportunity to connect with them from a relationship-first point of view, we can absolutely support such people to transform their lives. Some of the stories about the impacts that people have been able to achieve for themselves, with the right wraparound support, are off the scale in how spine-tinglingly incredible they are.

In most areas, we have yet to have a full system of wraparound support around the housing first approach. The issue still lies largely with housing/homelessness support and the third sector. We are doing a great job, but we can do better in terms of scale and from the point of view of bringing about improvements in people's wellbeing as we develop the housing first service. We need to provide equity of access for people who are transitioning into settled living through the homelessness route.

Foysoil Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): This question is probably for Beth Watts. Do you think that the rapid rehousing transition plans are well enough resourced?

Dr Watts: No, I do not. However, I want to preface that “no” by saying that rapid rehousing transition plans are the right tool and the right mechanism, and that progress has already been made with the implementation of rapid rehousing transition. More than half of local authorities have changed their social housing allocation policies in line with the principles of those plans, and all local authorities have produced such plans in ways that reflect the fact they understand and are on board with the vision. There have also been increases in flipping the use of temporary accommodation, where it is appropriate to do so.

All of that is a really good start. The pandemic hit at a time when we might have been about to see an acceleration in the implementation and impact of those plans, and it made such progress harder. As a side note, local authorities also found rapid rehousing transition plans useful in guiding their response to the pandemic. However, there is no doubt that the pandemic slowed that progress.

In addition, the vision of transformation that is outlined in detail in the ending homelessness together action plan, which rapid rehousing transition plans are seeking to implement, is a big one, and it was always going to be the case that that transition would take more than five years. It will take more than five years, because we are talking about a longer-term vision.

It is the right vision, and it is essential that we see it through. There is absolutely no doubt that that requires more resource. It is clear from the initial plans what local authorities were asking for funding to contribute to. Those requests were all in line with the principles, but the funding that was allocated fell short. That was recognised and

various boosts to that funding were provided. In the homelessness monitor, we found that rapid rehousing transition plans were extremely highly valued by local authorities, which want to see the vision through and would be grateful for any further resource.

The plans are the right tool but they are not adequately resourced. We need resourcing and a longer-term vision that extends beyond 2023. We have done so much incredible work to outline a plan and a vision. It would be a real tragedy if our progress on that slipped and we did not see it through.

I have one final brief point. There was a massive transition in Scotland's response to homelessness during the 2000s. The priority need criterion was phased out. That criterion had blocked a lot of people from accessing the full right to rehousing. Virtually all homeless households now have that right.

That transition process took a decade. The transition was right and good and it was successfully achieved, but it was less multifaceted and challenging and was narrower in scope than the transformation that Scotland is now trying to pursue on homelessness. We must see the transformation as achievable, but in the longer term.

Jeremy Balfour: To pick up on some of those themes, I have had a number of meetings with women's groups, particularly in Edinburgh and the Lothians. There are concerns about women and children being put in temporary accommodation that is just not suitable. There may be single men there, or no proper kitchen facilities. The spaces may be unsafe.

Gordon MacRae, what is Shelter's view on how Scotland is providing for homeless families? How could we do that differently, particularly for women and children?

The Convener: Do we have Gordon MacRae?

Jeremy Balfour: Perhaps he is on mute or taking a break.

The Convener: The technology will catch up. Do we have Gordon MacRae?

Jeremy Balfour: I would be happy for someone else to jump in if Gordon cannot answer or if he cannot hear us. I am conscious of time.

The Convener: I think that there is a problem with microphone selection.

Gordon MacRae: I am on. Sorry about that.

I can take the last two questions together very quickly. Provision of accommodation for children in the east of Scotland—in Edinburgh, the Lothians, Fife and the Borders—it is totally inadequate. This

area has the greatest level of affordable housing need in Scotland, but we are not seeing central Government funds being allocated to match the greatest demand. The Scottish Government is funding new social housing in the long term, which is the only long-term answer that we have, but it is not yet directing that towards the places with greatest need.

The Audit Scotland report that came out at the start of the pandemic looked at the lack of additional impacts from the affordable house building programme. That report has not yet had scrutiny, because of the way that it came out. It lays out the need for the next phase of the affordable house building programme to be specific about what it should achieve. One thing that we think the programme must do is build larger properties for families who are trapped in temporary accommodation.

I have already said that there should have been some additional resource from central Government to match the appropriate extension of the unsuitable accommodation order for single people. That resource might in some respects alleviate the knock-on effect of allocations to people in temporary accommodation. Single homeless people are now covered by the unsuitable accommodation order that always covered children and families, and that is putting additional pressure on the already limited stock of accommodation. We see examples of some people being placed in properties that are too big for them, while others are placed in properties that are too small. That happens because people do what they can the time, as a means of harm reduction.

10:15

On the bigger issue of funding, I totally endorse Dr Watts's point about the lack of resource. Looking at the interim evaluation of housing first, I point out that, if it costs between £8,000 and £14,000 per person housed, resources of somewhere between £30 million and £50 million a year will be required if we extrapolate that up to 3,500 people per year. We are some way from those amounts.

Of course, some of those costs are already sunk in local authorities. Moreover, it is not always about having additional resource but about changing the way in which we work. That said, it reinforces the comparison with the 2012 homelessness commitment, which shows that these things take time. The difference between the 2012 commitment and rapid rehousing is that the former had statutory underpinning, while rapid rehousing is, at this point in time, just a best practice guide. Its transition plans have no legal basis. Unlike the homelessness strategy, nothing

in the rapid rehousing transition plan will allow an individual failed by a local authority to seek a judicial review or any other recourse. As a result, we would like rapid rehousing plans to be put on a statutory footing to ensure that they become embedded and that they uphold the rights-based approach that we have in Scotland.

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): What benefits are service users getting from rapid rehousing and housing first? Are they really making a difference to people's lives? Perhaps Lorraine McGrath can respond.

Lorraine McGrath: The easy answer is yes, they are absolutely making a difference. With housing first, people have access to their own home. They get good-quality housing with wraparound support, and they influence how that support is managed, delivered and received. They remain in control of things. They have access to furniture packages to make their house a home, and there is a team of skilled staff who can advocate for them in accessing other services in the community in which they go to live, in ensuring community engagement, in finding meaningful activity and in meeting their aspirations and goals.

Some of the stories of the 500-odd people involved in housing first in Scotland are just remarkable. People who, until very recently, were rough sleeping, whose lives were in utter chaos and who would have fitted into the category that Miles Briggs highlighted earlier are now settled in their own homes and are engaging in educational activity or pursuing employability options. They have re-engaged with their families and are getting treatment for addictions or to recover from mental health problems, and the transformation in some has been remarkable.

In Glasgow in particular, rapid rehousing has been the underpinning factor over the past year in the rapid change in moving people from temporary accommodation and in addressing the pressures that had been created in the system. That approach has created that opportunity, and we have also had the added resource of additional caseworkers in the homelessness system to facilitate the rapid moving on of people. It has also had a big leverage with regard to increasing allocations in the housing system. There is no doubt that it has had a huge impact.

However, there is a long way to go. As I said earlier, housing first's wider wraparound system is not yet in place in all areas or to meet all circumstances. Moreover, the people involved are not being seen with the same lens or treated in the same way as those coming from other routes, such as mental health or learning disability, with regard to equity of access of services. We face big challenges in areas such as Edinburgh, where we simply do not have enough stock. We need to

think differently about that and consider the private rented sector or the role of social investment in helping us develop more stock.

I am excited to say that, this week, our first tenant will be moving into a lovely flat in Edinburgh through a social investment route. We have secured £5 million to buy tenancies and to provide them to people who cannot access mainstream housing as quickly as we would like.

The Convener: Beth Watts wants to come in on the back of that. I ask her to be brief, please.

Dr Watts: The answer to the question, in the strongest possible terms, is yes. In the simplest terms, the housing first and rapid rehousing approaches mean ensuring that people experiencing homelessness have access to what most of the rest of us and our families are lucky enough to take for granted: a normal home that they can be complacent about and take for granted. The evidence base on that is enormous, and I am happy to share it. The key message is that people's quality of life benefits hugely from their being rapidly housed in mainstream housing and being supported through the housing first approach. I want to emphasise that.

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): I thank the witnesses for their submissions, which I found really helpful. In your evidence, you emphasise the importance of involving people with lived experience of homelessness. That seems to be a good way, in practice, of achieving what we want. Did the pandemic hinder progress in any way? How do we maintain the momentum on that?

Lorraine McGrath: Involving people with lived experience is a critical aspect of everything that we do on homelessness. It has been welcome that, over the past few years, that has become a central pillar of policy development. We have had support from Maggie Brünjes's organisation in developing the all in for change team, the change team and the prevention commission. It is easy to think that we are now doing everything right, but we should continue to invest in the area, to reach more people, to bring in more voices and to think about what those voices should be.

During the pandemic, engaging with people in any way other than face to face was a big challenge, given that we are talking about people who are probably the most digitally excluded group in our society and communities. It was a challenge for them to engage in influencing activity when they did not have the basics to allow them to connect with the world and their communities in the ways that we have all taken for granted in the past 18 months. We need to be clear about where the barriers are. The Covid pandemic threw up a number of barriers to people's connection with, and engagement in, all parts of the system,

including their opportunity to influence. Resources were required for that.

I am sad that, although Connecting Scotland has done incredible work across a wide range of disadvantaged groups, people experiencing homelessness have not been prioritised in that work. The work that has been done to give people digital devices to allow them to connect and to influence their care and support and future designs has been done largely by the third sector. In individual cases, some devices have been routed from Connecting Scotland by the third sector, but that has not been done in any strategic or organised fashion.

Maggie Brünjes will be able to talk in more detail about this than I can, but the pandemic definitely affected our ability to reach further and to connect with people's experiences. Digital exclusion played a big part in that, because people were not able to engage through face-to-face services. However, some organisations such as Simon Community Scotland continued to meet people, in order to keep them safe and well, because there was no alternative—there was no online version of such support.

We need to keep an eye on that, ensure that it remains a central pillar and ensure that we find new ways for people who do not find it easy to engage in influencing activities to bring their voices to bear.

Marie McNair: The Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Act 2021, which will come into force in December 2022, will help to prevent women's homelessness by barring the perpetrator of domestic abuse from the home and giving landlords the ability to transfer tenancies to the survivor. How impactful will that be in tackling homelessness among women? Are other improvements needed to better assist women who are at risk of being made homeless?

Maggie Brünjes: The 2021 act is among a suite of proposals that the Scottish Government has developed in partnership with a range of organisations, including women's specialist organisations, and that, taken together, result in the type of improvements that women who are at risk of homelessness need.

In housing and homelessness, we are all becoming much more alive to the point that the housing system is fundamentally not sensitive to different forms of inequality. It is fundamentally a biased system. The homelessness sector has been developed over many years and is geared more towards the circumstances and experiences of men than of women. We understand that men and women experience homelessness very differently. That does not mean that men who experience homelessness experience a system

that works for them, because it does not. The system does not work for everybody all the time but, in its design, it inherently does not meet the needs of women and, as Jeremy Balfour said, women with children who experience homelessness. We can all do better on that.

A number of people are coming together. I mentioned the Everyone Home collective, which has connected with the homelessness unit in the Scottish Government and started to explore what the situation means, what the common understanding of it is and what we can do first to help to move forward the discussion about ensuring that our responses to homelessness are gender informed. We are interested in facilitating some sort of project that enables women to help us to focus our minds on what matters most. It feels like there is a fundamental gap in our understanding, so we need to speak to, and work alongside, women to improve the system, the services that they have and their access to the different conditions and policy that you described in your question.

There is a lot to be done and there is a lot to learn from organisations that already operate in that space—specialist organisations such as SAY Women, Scottish Women's Aid or Lorraine McGrath's organisation, which provides a number of specialist services for women who are affected by homelessness. There is loads to learn from that. We need to centre an overarching equalities approach to homelessness in Scotland as a priority within our planning structures to enable us to make the practical adjustments that we need to make on the ground.

Elena Whitham: Having worked closely with the Chartered Institute of Housing and Scottish Women's Aid on their report "Improving housing outcomes for women and children experiencing domestic abuse", we are now waiting for implementation groups to be created. In light of the gold standard domestic abuse laws that we have, does Scottish Government policy use a sufficiently gendered approach to, and analysis of, homelessness response and prevention? Do we need to revisit some of it?

Dr Watts: That has been an area of progress since the publication of the first ending homelessness together action plan. Other members of the panel have been more closely involved in that than I have, so I defer to them on progress to date.

Your question specifically refers to homelessness prevention, and the point that I want to emphasise is that homelessness prevention is a vague, loose and large concept. There are an awful lot of tools that we can use to break that down into practical things. There is a useful typology of homelessness prevention that

distinguishes between universal upstream prevention, which is about lowering the risk among the population at large; targeted prevention for those who are about to experience homelessness; and work that prevents people who have already experienced homelessness from experiencing it again. The prevention of rough sleeping is different from the prevention of family homelessness among women who have children in the household, for example.

10:30

I guess that my key message is that, in taking forward the prevention review group recommendations, which would be an enormous and brilliant step forward in Scotland, there is a need to focus on specific sub-groups such as women, rough sleepers, young people and those who are leaving institutions. We can do a lot of specific things to improve prevention work for all those groups, including through a gendered lens, which is absolutely essential but which is only one of a number of lenses that we need to look through.

Elena Whitham: I ask Gordon MacRae for his opinion on that, as women will have come to Shelter for advice on homelessness through domestic abuse.

Gordon MacRae: We have to hold up our hands and say that the ending homelessness together action plan initially had some blind spots, and gender analysis was one of them. Homelessness is experienced mainly by marginalised groups, whether they be economically marginalised, people who have disabilities, or people of colour, which often goes under the radar in Scotland.

Some limited progress has been made since then. Scottish Women's Aid should be commended for constructively challenging in relation to some of the missing elements of the ending homelessness together plan. It has also made itself central to the work with the CIH that I know Elena Whitham has been personally involved with.

We have to go further. We certainly see that the voice of women and children in the homelessness system is limited. We talk about ensuring that we hear the voices of people who have lived experience, but we need to make sure that it is the lived experience of the whole of the homelessness system.

Shelter Scotland has what we call the time for change programme, which involves people who have experienced homelessness providing peer support to people who are going through the system. We are not yet doing enough to provide that gender lens, such as females peer supporting

other females who are going through the system. The pandemic has certainly made that harder.

All that goes back to the point that I made earlier. If we focus only on a few areas at the expense of the whole system, we create perverse unintended consequences. I keep going back to the fact that, in the six years since 2014, there has been a 75 per cent increase in the number of children who are in temporary accommodation in Scotland. We in Scotland have the power to address that, and we need to give a voice to the women and children who are going through that system so that we can understand their needs. I am not convinced that organisations such as mine can accurately reflect that at this point in time.

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): My question is for Lorraine McGrath, but given Shelter's focus on prevention in its contribution, Gordon MacRae might want to come in. Certain groups are more at risk of homelessness. How much of that stems from the accessibility of local authority housing and how much of it stems from the rigidity of application processes? What changes could be made to address those aspects?

Lorraine McGrath: When we look at high-risk groups, such as prison leavers, care leavers—*[Inaudible.]*—there is a lot of variability in terms of people's experiences of accessing the housing system and the response that they get. We are not doing well in a lot of the areas, and we are still seeing a lot of challenges.

In the context in which we operate, we see challenges for prison leavers in particular, some of whom have lost their accommodation or access to their home as a result of their involvement in the criminal justice system. Things are better, but still not perfect, for those with long-term sentences. However, on their release, people with short-term sentences, people on remand and those who have been released from court struggle to access the housing system and get appropriate offers of accommodation. That is because of some of the challenges that they experience; it is also because the availability in the system is not matched to, or designed around, the needs of people with complex and challenging circumstances and histories.

I link that to Gordon MacRae's point about the whole system. The read across of all the different forms of homelessness and impacts of homelessness is important when we think about what accommodation should look like and what access to the housing system can look like.

On what we can do better, it comes back to equity of access. Someone who comes to the system through the homelessness route should experience the same response as anyone else in

the system, particularly around health and social care interventions, because those are often what make the difference to a person's ability to access the housing system, sustainable living circumstances and a stable home thereafter.

I will pick up on something that Gordon MacRae has said. I agree with him that, just now, a danger in the system is that we start to think that bits of it, such as our response to rough sleeping, are fixed. We are good at responding to rough sleeping, but we are not yet good enough at preventing people at risk of rough sleeping from rough sleeping. Therefore, we still require a lot of resources and investment—across the multi-agency response—to maintain the positive position that we have.

People in high-risk groups quite often find themselves in that space, because they have not been able to access the housing system. We regularly see care-experienced people and women accessing our emergency and crisis response services because of a breakdown in a relationship or because they are fleeing violence. We see people leaving prison and arriving when the system is not available to respond to them. Even though a good response might normally be available, they are arriving at our services on a Friday afternoon. It is increasingly challenging to maintain our response. Those people would end up rough sleeping if we were to take our foot off the pedal in any way with regard to the multi-agency response that we have in place at the moment.

The Convener: Emma suggested that Gordon MacRae might want to come in on that. Gordon, do you have any further brief reflections?

Gordon MacRae: My point goes back to the prevention model. How do we ensure that the system can respond to people where they are and when they become at risk of homelessness? Although we have considerable reservations about some of the proposals around placing a prevention duty on local authorities or how we could adapt existing responsibilities on local authorities, we agree whole-heartedly that wider public bodies, such as those in health, justice and education, should have a legal responsibility to consider and ask about homelessness.

When we look at those groups that are not well represented in policy-making frameworks and discussions, we must consider whether we focus on only adapting homelessness services or whether we focus on those other services that those groups are approaching and accessing. That is where we can make the biggest gains.

The prospect of placing a prevention duty on other bodies and the Scottish Government's commitment to embedding the human right to adequate housing in any future economic and

social rights legislation provide us with opportunities to take homelessness solely out of the housing sector and move it into the wider public and social responses that we have to the trauma that people have experienced.

Emma Roddick: Lorraine McGrath, to what extent would a negative initial response turn off those groups from interacting with housing services in the future?

Lorraine McGrath: That plays a huge part. The daily trauma impacts that people are living with and their experience of survival living just to get through the day have an effect on their ability to make informed decisions. Their ability to sit back, rationalise and think, "Okay, I'll come back tomorrow and maybe it'll be a different story" is just not there. It often takes a huge amount of effort, time and energy from support services and front-line support workers to persuade people to re-engage with the service and to make that a big enough priority for them in the face of chronic addictions and survival living. People are concerned with just getting through the day, and feeling more in control of their circumstances and their choices. They simply do not engage. We make it too hard for people.

One thing that we have learned from the pandemic is that, where we have good-quality emergency accommodation that can be rapidly accessed, and where control over that access lies with the front-line team, we can make things happen for people in exactly the circumstance that I have described. We can get them into a stable, high-quality environment, and we can wrap good engagement and a high-quality, compassionate response around them. We can then quickly move from there to accessing the fuller system, including the housing system. We have been able to do that.

Previously, we have not been able to do that for an awful lot of people. However, we have been able to do that recently, because we could make things happen there and then without any further process, and we were able to provide something that was of sufficient quality and comfort, with warmth, compassion and wraparound support 24 hours a day. The vast majority of people did move on within the housing system, from a hotel base to better-settled or temporary accommodation options. Hotel accommodation is not ideal for the longer term, and the notion of rapid-access accommodation of sufficient quality, with sufficient wraparound support for the particularly high-risk groups, is really important.

The Convener: Before I bring in Pam Duncan-Glancy, I invite Lorna Campbell to reflect, from a local authority perspective, on the priority groups that were referred to in an earlier answer from Lorraine McGrath, and on the policies that you

have put in place in your authority, in particular for prison leavers, for people in black, Asian and minority ethnic groups and for women and children fleeing domestic violence. Is there anything that you want to mention in relation to what you are doing to help those people?

Lorna Campbell: We have a number of policies and procedures in place at local authority level around those groups in particular. Through our prison liaison officers, we work very closely with our local prison and our justice services on housing direct from prison. Prior to the pandemic, we had some limited success. Even during the pandemic, we looked into early intervention and planned releases.

We know that release from prison will happen. It is a matter of getting networks in place with prison services, and following the sustainable housing on release for everyone—SHORE—standards—which came out more than two years ago. That has worked quite well for a number of people but, as has been reflected on, it is still work in progress, and it takes cross-service and close working to make that happen. Unfortunately, we still have situations in which somebody is released on a Friday night, they turn up on the homelessness service doorstep and we have to respond very quickly in an unplanned way. As I say, it is work in progress. There are plans in place in most local authorities, and the success of those vary across authorities—it depends on how well their partnerships are working.

It is similar for other areas. There are local arrangements for tackling domestic violence, and we have commissions with our excellent local women's aid services, with which we work closely. For homelessness, it is a matter of ensuring that temporary accommodation, where that is needed, is provided and that we can fast-access permanent housing.

As was touched on earlier, accessing housing where it is needed can be challenging, particularly for women with families. As a large rural local authority, we face particular challenges around that. For example, we obviously do not want to move children away from their school or sport areas. However, because of that challenge, those families might spend longer in temporary accommodation than we would like them to. Again, trying to identify such accommodation as quickly as possible and support families to move on where possible is work in progress.

10:45

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I will continue the theme of equalities and ask about disabled people who present as homeless. In the interests of time, I will put these questions to Lorraine and Gordon in

particular. Will you briefly explain the experience of disabled people who apply through the homelessness route? Are enough accessible homes being built to put people into?

Lorraine McGrath: I do not think that it is very different for disabled people. I do not think that they always find themselves going into the most suitable forms of emergency and temporary accommodation. That speaks to the lack of options that are available to people and the challenges that local authorities have in responding in the moment for people in crisis.

Access to accessible housing is particularly challenging. To take Edinburgh as an example, even disabled people who have gold priority under the common housing register application process—it is called EdIndex—will be among many other people with similar priority. It is particularly challenging to support people to access appropriately designed accommodation that meets their needs.

I would like to say that people always get a good response, but they do not. We have had situations in which people in the homelessness system were in hospital having amputations and their planned discharge was back to a tenement flat with stairs.

Again, it is about dealing with those very personal circumstances and providing that equity of access that I mentioned earlier. We are not responding to those people who, unfortunately, have a homelessness label and who come through that route, which is generally outwith the health and social care system. We view those people differently and we respond differently. We would never contemplate taking that approach for an older person or for someone who has come through the system from a different route.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Thank you.

The Convener: I will bring in Marie McNair for the final theme of questioning.

Marie McNair: This question, which is for Beth Watts, is about future developments. Like you, I think that we can make real progress with the powers that we have. However, UK policy is a hindrance in some respects. You say in the homelessness monitor study that changes to welfare policy, including increasing local housing allowance, would assist in reducing homelessness. Is that simply you stating the obvious, or are you optimistic that there will be movement in that regard?

Dr Watts: That is a great question. Those are undoubtedly important parts of the picture in relation to responding to homelessness adequately across the UK and in Scotland. In many parts of Scotland, there is a positive story, because the housing market context is more

positive than in the south of England and London. Some of the really pernicious welfare reforms that we have seen drive up homelessness since 2010 have had less of an impact in Scotland. Nevertheless, the impacts of the reforms have been really challenging across the country but especially in places such as Edinburgh. Part of the Covid response was to increase the local housing allowance rate, which was really important. It certainly helped in Edinburgh, and I am sure that it also helped elsewhere, so it is very sad to see that it has been refrozen.

We are currently in the process of writing the homelessness monitor for England, through which we try to get a sense of any likely policy movement on those issues. Although we have no special insight to offer on that, I do not think that we will see radical changes to local housing allowance rates or to the benefit cap, which we continue to see as a real problem.

One of the committee members mentioned discretionary housing payments and the Scottish welfare fund. I underline that, from our work on the homelessness monitor for Scotland, local authorities are very clear on how enormously valuable such pots of money are when it comes to responding to and preventing homelessness; they offer local authorities a bit of resource for dealing with the welfare safety net, which is far from ideal and which has been decided by the UK Government.

My final comment is that the welfare policy context for Scotland's tackling of homelessness is a challenging one, but I redirect you to the levers that are in the hands of the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament and to how much can be done within that. However, I very much agree with the broad thrust of your comment, and we will keep directing those arguments at Westminster.

Miles Briggs: I will ask a few questions on the theme of prevention and on future opportunities for the Scottish Government.

The programme for government contains plans to strengthen the law on homelessness prevention. I put on record that I often feel that people have to declare themselves homeless before any support is made available. What would panel members' ideal model be for changing that, so that support starts earlier? For example, some ideas that have been put forward include public sector bodies having a conversation with vulnerable individuals up to six months before they face a crisis point.

I will start with Gordon MacRae, because he touched on that earlier, and I will then go around any others who want to come in.

Gordon MacRae: As I mentioned, there are a couple of opportunities on the horizon. You will

hear quite a lot of consensus among us today, but there are probably some differences in nuance and focus, and I think that this is one of them.

In Shelter Scotland, we fully endorse the prevention review group's proposal on extending to other public bodies some of the responsibilities for preventing homelessness. We also endorse a move from two to six months for the public body—the local authority—to start preventative work for people who are at risk of being homeless. However, we are sceptical—I would not put it any more strongly than that—on downgrading from “permanent” to “stable” the form of tenancy that people get at the end of that process. We recognise that that would allow some of the shared accommodation models that were discussed earlier, but we do not yet have such shared accommodation models, and it would be of significant risk to level down our drive towards security of tenure as the proposed outcome for people who are going through the homelessness system.

The other area that we are concerned about is any duty on local authorities to relieve homelessness for people who already meet the definition of statutory homelessness. If someone meets the definition of statutory homelessness, that should be a trigger for a support needs assessment and for other forms of intervention from the local authority. Some of that will come out as we develop some of the proposals, and I am sure that there is space to find a way that brings that consensus. However, I think that we sometimes get trapped in discussing principles rather than details and, although we are very supportive of the principle behind the prevention duty, there is some devil in the detail of the way that that is currently phrased.

Dr Watts: I will respond directly to Gordon MacRae's concern, with which I am familiar—that the PRG recommendations weaken the rights of homeless households. That does not resonate at all with me, my colleagues or, I know, the very wide range of people who were involved in developing the proposals. The proposals are designed to offer the greatest flexibility to both homeless applicants and local authorities, so that the most appropriate form of accommodation can be found. Many homeless applicants are single young people, and permanent social and council housing might not be the most suitable option or what they want. Other aspects of housing beyond security of tenure are very important too, such as location.

In any case, I would want to emphasise that the proposal is that, where the offer is not a permanent social or private let, the applicant has an absolute right of veto over the offer—they can refuse it without penalty, so no one is forcing

anyone to take any not-settled accommodation. The proposals also include increases in the safeguards that homeless applicants have as they go through the process, including strengthened appeal and review rights.

I think that the proposals add up to a package that substantially enhances people's rights instead of restricting them. I very much hope and expect that this will be an on-going conversation in which we can iron all that out. I will pass over to others now.

Lorna Campbell: In my view, what is needed, and what we have been fighting for for quite a time, is better prevention. If we are going to end homelessness and the dependence on temporary accommodation, we need to upstream prevention so that problems are dealt with much earlier. Having a wider partnership, particularly with health and social care, and identifying threats of homelessness at an earlier opportunity would give us a better chance to work with individuals, whether through an economic response or by sourcing better or more sustainable housing earlier to help people. Often people come to homelessness services only when there is a crisis and they will be homeless that night or are under an immediate threat of homelessness, and that limits the time that we have to help and support people. Moving that further back and identifying issues earlier would be key.

We are in a rather vicious circle in the local authorities. We have an increased demand for temporary accommodation, which means that we have to take extra accommodation from housing associations and private landlords, which reduces the amount of accommodation that we have to discharge as permanent accommodation. Prevention at an earlier stage stops the need for so much temporary accommodation. We have been very keen to progress that, but time and resource means that we are constantly firefighting. We need to start it upstream far more effectively.

Lorraine McGrath: I just want to make the point that, although legislation is important, and I wholly support all the recommendations from the PRG and the widening of the range of people's accommodation options, legislation is not enough. A huge amount of this is about attitudes and behaviours and the silo effect that we have for people experiencing homelessness within the range of professionals.

We know where the touch points largely are, and we know where the opportunities are to intervene at a much earlier stage. We know that we are not making best use of our rent data, whether that be from the benefits system or within the local authority system. We are not making best use of the soft intelligence, or people's points of connection within the system, whether that is

someone who is looking at a social welfare fund application for a person or someone who encounters a person in a doctor's surgery. We know from strong evidence that engagement with the health system almost always happens right before people's first episode of homelessness.

There are lots of opportunities that the legislation will support, but we also need to think about how we change attitudes and behaviours so that people see value in asking or acting—value to their part of the system and their job with that person in front of them at that moment in time.

The Convener: Thank you. There is a brief question from Miles Briggs, to be followed by Emma Roddick.

Miles Briggs: I want to go back to a point that Gordon MacRae made earlier, with regard to Edinburgh and the east of Scotland, and specific pressures that we are seeing in our cities with regard to delivering services. Mr Balfour, Mr Choudhury and I represent Edinburgh. We see and we know from our public bodies the pressures that Edinburgh faces in delivering these services.

I wonder about potential solutions. Would you support, for example, pressured areas, such as have been developed for London, specifically, given the cost of delivering services that we have seen. Do you have other suggestions on the specific issue of cities, which you have highlighted? Gordon, I will bring in you, as I referenced you in the question.

11:00

Gordon MacRae: In partnership with the Chartered Institute of Housing and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, we commissioned an affordable housing needs analysis ahead of the previous Scottish election. It identified that there was greatest demand in the east cluster of local authorities and that new social housing—I want to be clear that, in this context, we are talking about social housing, not other forms of affordable housing—was not being delivered at the scale that was required.

That was compounded by the evidence that came from Audit Scotland's review of the delivery of the affordable housing programme, which, as I said earlier, identified that it lacked any measure of success beyond just the number of units. It is self-evident that, if we build a disproportionate number of the units in places where there is not sufficient demand, we will not alleviate pressure in the system. That is why we are calling on the Scottish Government to produce an annual social justice and social housing report, so that we can monitor the social impact of the programme, because there are outcomes beyond just the number of units.

I am not familiar enough with the London example that has been raised, but I am happy to look at it and then come back to the committee with a view.

Emma Roddick: Dr Watts, I note that, in your written submission, you say that you favour raising housing allowance. When housing allowance is raised, how much of the benefit to people who struggle to afford housing is offset by private landlords raising rents in response?

Dr Watts: That is definitely a concern. My understanding from academics at Sheffield Hallam University is that that is an effect but not the only effect. I would want to defer to an expert on private sector market dynamics. However, I certainly do not think that that is a reason not to keep local housing allowance rates in line with a decent proportion of the private rented sector. The modelling that my colleague Glen Bramley has done shows that that will make a real difference. I want to emphasise that.

The question of landlords' behavioural responses is hugely important and should be considered in the policy debate, but I would want to defer to someone with more expertise on that.

Emma Roddick: Gordon MacRae, to what extent are "No DSS" listings affecting the ability of homeless people to find accommodation? What can be done to address that?

Gordon MacRae: That issue has been addressed by my Shelter colleagues in England. They have taken some test cases through litigation to demonstrate that it is a form of discrimination for a landlord to list accommodation as "No DHSS". However, you can go on to any listings website today and see that it remains an issue.

We have chosen to address the matter by approaching letting agents and landlord bodies, but that takes us only so far, because 94 per cent of landlords in Scotland have only one property. We have a vast amateur—I do not use that word in a pejorative way—landlord sector. The people who join the Scottish Association of Landlords are the professionals who know their rights and responsibilities. The problem is that a large proportion of accommodation is not yet being managed by people with that level of professionalism. That creates a problem because it disproportionately affects the lower end of the market, which is where people who are homeless or who are at risk of homelessness are more likely to seek accommodation.

Universal credit is an in-work benefit, so we are not talking about homeless people who are otherwise at risk; we are talking about people who are simply reliant on the welfare system because the housing system is broken and does not

provide housing at a cost that is commensurate with wages in the current economy.

It is a major barrier, and the courts have already addressed it, so the issue is now practice within a broadly amateur private landlord sector.

The Convener: I thank all the witnesses for their time. We provided considerable latitude by extending the time for the session. It was interesting to hear from all of you and to get your insights in the area. That has certainly been of benefit to all members of our extended committee today—I thank Elena Whitham for joining us and for her contributions.

I appreciate everyone's time and patience with some of the technical difficulties that we had—broadcasting colleagues used a very technical term when telling me that BlueJeans was "sticking" at some points. I thank the witnesses for their perseverance and broadcasting colleagues for ensuring that things went as smoothly as possible.

Subordinate Legislation

Council Tax Reduction (Scotland) Amendment (No 4) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/337)

11:05

The Convener: Under item 4, the committee is invited to consider a negative Scottish statutory instrument. Background information to the regulations is outlined in paper 7. Members will note that the regulations were drawn to the attention of the Parliament by the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee on reporting ground (j), because the instrument was laid less than 28 days before coming into force. However, that committee also noted that the regulations were introduced on an emergency basis in order to provide people arriving from Afghanistan access to the council tax reduction scheme. The DPLR Committee was therefore satisfied with the reasons that were given for the breach of the 28-day rule.

As members have no comments on the regulations, are they content to note the instrument?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: That concludes the public part of the meeting.

11:06

Meeting continued in private until 11:35.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* of this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.parliament.scot

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers
is available here:

www.parliament.scot/documents

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000

Textphone: 0800 092 7100

Email: sp.info@parliament.scot

