



# Briefing to Social Justice and Security Committee November 2021

*Combatting the causes and effects of homelessness*

Registered Scottish Charity No: SC003076 | Limited Company No. SC137419

## **Simon Community Scotland Briefing for Social Justice and Social Security Committee.**

We are delighted that our CEO, Lorraine McGrath will be joining you on the 4th November to share our direct delivery experience and the views of the people we support and the staff that support them.

### **Introduction**

We are Scotland's leading specialist homelessness provider and in 2020 we were recognised as the Scottish Charity of the Year.

Our vision is that everyone should have a safe place to live and the support they need. Our principal client group are people with multiple and complex vulnerabilities for whom homelessness is a consequence of a journey often started and peppered with trauma. Last year we supported over 6000 people, on the street, in temporary and supported accommodation, in institutions and into and in their own homes.

At the sharp end of our work we reach, engage and support people rough sleeping in our two largest cities; Glasgow and Edinburgh. Our street teams are out 7 days a week morning to evening helping people to find a safe place to sleep and access the help they need.

We provide the full range emergency, temporary and long term accommodation, including six specialist women's services recognising their risks and vulnerabilities are unique to those of their male counterparts. In rural areas and the cities we deliver Housing First, housing support and tenancy sustainment helping people turn houses into homes. We are creative, innovative and effective in responding to the challenges people face creating services including; Period Friendly Points, Streetcycles, Storytelling, Interagency Environments, Community Hosting, Streereads and Shared Living as examples of our ability to create and deliver innovation

We have just celebrated the first year's operation of a groundbreaking initiative in Glasgow, where the Access Hub provides a no wrong door approach with access to over 25 multi-agency responses for people. You can take a virtual tour of the Access Hub here:

 The Access Hub - a Virtual Tour

Over the last 5 years we have also been championing the critical role that digital inclusion plays. We have a national programme that supports specialist local providers across Scotland to provide digital skills assessment, training and access to devices and data packages. More details of our most recent work in this area can be found here: <https://www.getdigitalscotland.org/>

Our strategy continues to centre around identifying and stepping into gaps. Recently this includes a new £5m social investment programme that will deliver a minimum of 30 new permanent homes for people who have found it difficult to access mainstream housing in Edinburgh.

We are privileged to bring out delivery experience to contribute across a range of national and local forums focused or related to homelessness, including HRSAG and the current HPSG.

**Key statistics:**

- We work with over 6000 people each year, including people at risk of or experiencing rough sleeping.
- We deliver over 150 Housing First packages
- Our team is made up of 380 staff and volunteers many of whom have direct experience of homelessness, addictions and the related harms.
- Staff had administered Naloxone in over 100 instances of non-fatal overdose in the last year.
- Our Access Hub in Glasgow has

More details on our work can be found on our website at <https://www.simonscotland.org/>

**Key reflections and challenges**

We are very pleased to have the opportunity to share our delivery experience with the Committee and provide this short briefing to highlight some of the areas of priority from the perspective of that delivery across Scotland and we look forward to expanding the discussion in relevant areas during the upcoming session.

There is no doubt that the sustained political focus on tackling the causes and effects of homelessness has had a major impact with significant progress against the Ending Homelessness Together action plan, to make new things happen at both a local and national level.

However, many system level challenges remain if we are to fully address the many root causes of homelessness and in particular the most extreme and chronic forms, including the risk of rough sleeping.

**Current and emerging priorities**

We welcome the Committee's attention on homelessness. Below are some the key emerging priorities from our perspective at SCS:

- Increasing the focus on prevention, taking forward the recommendations from the Prevention Review Group at pace, with a particular focus on the high risk groups
- Recognising that the routes into homelessness may be changing as a result of the economic impacts of the pandemic. We need to think differently about how we reach and respond to this potentially emerging risk before the trauma of a homelessness crisis leads to enduring harms and increased complexity of need.
- Investing more recognition and resources into the realities that those who experience the most extreme forms of homelessness also experience serious impacts from trauma and complex mental health challenges. More rapid and more easily accessed and trauma informed interventions and treatments need to be explored.
- The development of improved mental wellbeing resources for people within the homelessness system needs to be matched and linked with aligned harm reduction initiatives, that recognise the links between trauma, complex mental health issues and chronic and chaotic substance misuse.
- Continued and strengthened recognition that homelessness is as much a public health issue as a housing and accommodation concern.
- Recognition that whilst we continue to manage to maintain extremely low numbers of

people experiencing ongoing rough sleeping, this requires significant multi agency working and resources to continue to maintain. We have found the key to resolving the challenges of high rough sleeping numbers but not preventing people being at risk of rough sleeping. Our street teams prevent an average of 50 people every week from sleeping rough in Glasgow and Edinburgh.

- Recognition and action to sustain improved access to accommodation and support for people who are perceived to have No Recourse to Public Funds that has been possible due to the public health imperatives of the pandemic, without a continued ability to respond. I would draw the Committee's attention to the collective endeavours of the Everyone Home Collective (<https://everyonehome.scot/>) and the development of the Fair Way Scotland plan to end destitution in Scotland in which SCS is a key stakeholder.

### **Learning from the Covid-19 Pandemic**

The pandemic and resultant restrictions has had a dramatic impact on the homelessness system and the people it exists to serve. There has been huge learning about how to deliver rapid change, much of which we already knew was possible.

- When historic and traditional systemic and institutional barriers are bypassed the result is much more effective multi agency working via more informed and intensive case management.
- When we empower the staff to utilise their relationship, visibility and connectability with people to rapidly respond with immediate actions, connections and interventions, most notably with direct decision making on access to accommodation, we can virtually eradicate the need for anyone to sleep rough in Scotland and dramatically improve our understanding and planned responses for those with the most entrenched and extreme circumstances and needs.

### **Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan**

As noted in the recently published annual report, much progress has been made across a wide range of the priorities contained within the action plan. SCS were privileged to bring our delivery experience to HRSAG and welcomed the review of the action plan in light of Covid-19. We would welcome ongoing emphasis on:

- Continuing to drive changes in attitudes, culture and behaviours across the whole system, particularly in relation to anticipated legislative change that will place duty to act on all aspects of the public sector.
- The investment in ensuring people with lived and living experience having primary influence, alongside staff involved in direct delivery, has been critical. The role of and support for the Change Team is invaluable. The continued challenge is to ensure that we keep expanding the reach and inclusion of people from across all aspects of homelessness and we continually seek new ways to inform people about the policy direction and find more creative ways to hear the voices of everyone, even if they do not actively engage in influencing activity.
- Continuing the imperative to mainstream and fully integrate the principles and service model of Housing First to bring it in as a system norm rather than a special initiative.
- Continuing to widen the range of housing options available particularly for people who find

themselves looking to access 24 hour supported living due to enduring health and social care needs via a homelessness route, with the role of settled supported housing options for this group being given full consideration as we plan the future of affordable housing provision locally and nationally.