



# HOUSING EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN 2024 – 2029 MARCH 2024

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## Overview

The City of Edinburgh Council declared a Housing Emergency on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2023, citing significant pressures to the city's housing market, including homelessness rates and housing costs.

There are currently around 5000 homeless households in Edinburgh, being supported in temporary accommodation. These households account for around 7000 individuals, with around 1300 of the overall homeless population living in accommodation that is classed as unsuitable. The current Strategic Housing Investment Plan identifies the need for 9500 new houses to be built by 2029 to keep up with projected population increases.

The actions set out in this plan were developed through engagement with stakeholders across the City, and are intended to mitigate the impact of these extreme pressures and reduce the number of households in Edinburgh without settled accommodation.

The plan itself is the first step in responding to the housing emergency declaration, with 75 projects identified for completion over the next five years. These projects focus on reducing homelessness, improving access to housing and housing advice, improving the supply and quality of housing across the city, preventing harm and improving the experience of tenants in Council housing.

## 1. Introduction

Tonight, in Edinburgh, Scotland's capital city, five thousand households will be without a permanent home. Of those around one thousand three hundred will be in accommodation deemed 'unsuitable' – where people can stay for up to two years. Many of these families have children who, without a permanent home, face deep instability in their formative years.

This is a crisis has been developing for a number of years. The long term supply challenges coupled with an aging stock, has been compounded by a dramatic reduction in social housing numbers in the late 20th Century. This has placed those who need the most support under real, and increasing pressure.

Whilst this is a nationwide crisis, it is in Edinburgh where it manifests most acutely. The city has the lowest proportion of social housing in Scotland, and the demand on this is immense, with approximately two hundred bids for every available home.

The capital's Private Rental Sector too, offers little respite, with the highest rents in Scotland and soaring rental inflation, pushing many individuals and families towards the already critically overstretched social sector, and homelessness.

It is this human crisis that galvanised cross party support to declare The Housing Emergency on November 2nd 2023. This was not a crisis that anyone could ignore, and I hope, it reflected a step change, and a shift in the way that we are to view the issues, engage, and move towards solutions.

It has been fantastic to see the work that has arisen from the declaration. With a total dedication to finding solutions across the sector. I am proud of the work that officers, tradespeople, and partners have carried out. This work has included out a wide range of actions; From exploring innovative finance solutions, to working on repairing Void properties colleagues have been working tirelessly to bring forward the action plan making real change for those that need it.

Ultimately, we must find practical solutions to this human crisis. We are a growing city, and one that needs to be welcoming to all. Our growth should excite us, allow us to develop and thrive. For too long there has been a reluctance to accept the challenges we face. With the declaration of an emergency, with cross party and cross sector support, we will be able to turn the tide – building a city that works for all. We need to be the masters of that growth, shaping the city we want; a city that our residents deserve.



**Cllr Jane Meagher;** Convener – Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee

## 2. Background

The City of Edinburgh Council owns around 20,500 Council homes, with around 20,250 of those available for letting to the public. When empty Council properties become available, they are allocated through the choice based letting system EdIndex. In 2022/23, 2018 houses were allocated to new tenants through this system, with almost 200 bids being made for each property.

Through this partnership there are ambitious plans to build 9,500 new affordable homes over the next five years.

Despite this, homelessness presentations are rising, with around 3500 received in 2022/23, and a similar amount expected in 2023/24. In Edinburgh there are around 5000 households in temporary accommodation each night, accounting for around 7000 individuals including children and young people. Around 1300 of these households are in unsuitable accommodation. To support these households, the Council has more than doubled its budget for homelessness services from £28m in 2018/19 to £64.5m in 2023/24.

Recent research showed that the average house price in Edinburgh is 78% higher than the Scottish average. In the private rented sector, the average 3 bed rental price is around £1450 per month, £300 higher than the Scottish average.

The Scottish Housing regulator has stated that the housing system in Edinburgh is in systemic failure, and there are further projected pressures related to asylum and refugee arrivals in the city over the coming years.

Seventeen workshops and engagement sessions were held to inform the actions in this plan, with a range of key stakeholders including social landlords, elected members, local and national 3<sup>rd</sup> sector partners, tenant organisations and human rights organisations offering their time and expertise to develop the actions required. From these workshops, six key priorities have been identified and are set out in the following pages.



## 3. Priorities

### 3.1 Simplifying access to housing

A range of actions were developed out of the engagement sessions that relate to how easy it is for people to access housing.

Actions include:

- Reviewing the Allocation Policy for Council Homes to ensure it continues to enable fair access to housing, including consideration of protected characteristics
- Reviewing all current housing policies and strategies to maximise the availability of housing across Edinburgh
- Continue the delivery of the Housing 1<sup>st</sup> model across Edinburgh
- Work with partners to map the homeless support available across Edinburgh to remove duplication and improve access
- Utilising modern technology to reduce the time taken to bring properties to lettable standard and allocate them
- Work with partners to enable independent living and reduce delayed discharge rates
- Reduce the number of void Council homes
- Reduce the use of unsuitable accommodation for homeless households
- Work with the Edinburgh Affordable Housing Partnership, EdIndex Board and 3<sup>rd</sup> sector partners to reduce number of homeless households across Edinburgh



### 3.2 Quality housing

The quality of housing in Edinburgh was an issue that came up regularly in the engagement sessions. This related to the quality of housing across all tenures including new build, existing Council homes and the Private Rented Sector with a focus on housing accessibility.

Actions include:

- Review the suitability and accessibility of housing for households with multiple disabilities
- Improve the standard of repairs and repairs response for Council housing
- Continue to resolve damp and mould issues in Council housing
- Review the lettable standard of Council housing
- Improve tenancy management in Council housing to reduce the level of repairs required once a tenancy is terminated
- Work with partners to deliver the level of quality homes projected in the Strategic Housing Investment Plan agreed in December 2023



### 3.3 Data and partnerships

The availability and use of data to develop a targeted response to the Housing Emergency was a key discussion point throughout the engagement sessions, and using this to inform and strengthen our partnerships is vital.

Actions include:

- Ensure all relevant and appropriate partners are included and supported in resolving the housing emergency
- Improve data analysis and insight across homelessness and housing services
- Prepare and publish accessible data on housing allocations and completions, and homelessness including demographics of those accessing housing
- Investigate how many households are currently living in under-occupied tenancies to explore potential for freeing up larger homes
- Investigate system wide adoption of a default consent model for data sharing
- Investigate how the Edinburgh Partnership model can be used to enhance data sharing to reduce homelessness
- Promote a systems thinking culture across all providers and stakeholders involved in tackling and preventing homelessness
- Investigate how we partner most effectively with external partners such as the Data Foundry, Prevention Hub and SSEN to identify demands and prevention activities
- Ensure we are sharing sufficient information between health services and homelessness / housing services to support rapid transition into new tenancies

### 3.4 Customer experience

It is recognised that the relationship between tenant and Housing Officer is fundamental to customer satisfaction, and how this is supported and developed is a key focus of this plan.

Actions include:

- Improve the relationship between housing officer and tenant, ensuring local housing staff are visible in their localities and available to meet tenants where and when this is required
- Improve engagement between housing officers and tenants through annual visits and local area inspections
- Ensure the range of supports that are available to tenants are publicised and accessible
- Ensure online and digital interfaces are customer friendly and efficient and do not create barriers to accessing housing
- Ensure asylum seekers and refugees have appropriate support to access housing
- Ensure the housing access system is accessible for people for whom English is a second language
- Investigate digitalisation of Housing & Homelessness systems and customer access, identifying a priority list to improve performance and tenant satisfaction



### 3.5 Specialised support

Current and potential customers whose housing needs require additional consideration, including Care Experienced Young People, those living with disabilities, and those with multiple vulnerabilities, should be able to access housing with the right level of support for them to live independently.

Actions include:

- Reassess what criteria is used to define vulnerability when assessing housing needs
- Ensure future plans include an assessment of housing need for marginalised groups
- Work with partners to enhance occupational therapy assessments and enable allocation of suitable housing more quickly
- Use data and insights to project Edinburgh's future housing needs
- Develop a plan to reduce the number of families with children living in temporary accommodation, including targeted approaches to prioritise permanent housing for those in unsuitable accommodation
- Identify a dedicated resource to work across housing and children and justice services to prevent homelessness, ensuring the principles of The Promise are incorporated into the emergency response
- Recognise the discreet needs of families, individual adults and young people, including access to the exceptional housing award for Care Leavers
- Work to improve quality of support provided to people presenting as homeless while experiencing addiction
- Explore intermediate care options for those living with addictions, for example Milestone House, LEAP





### 3.6 Finance and funding

Maximising funding of new homes and ensuring best value for revenue and capital budgets emerged as a key enabling outcome.

Actions include:

- Work with partners to identify and deliver accommodation funded by social investment
- Investigate models of housing co-operatives, including for different characteristics; the funding models and advantages available and the possibility of introducing these in Edinburgh
- Increase the return rate of void Council property to lettable standard and allocate them, bringing a significant number of Council homes back in to use
- Ensure Key Performance Indicators for void property work are reviewed, enabling assessment of the end to end process of reletting to identify any blockages in the system
- Increase accessibility of money, benefit and debt advice services to support households across the city
- Increase the number of empty homes brought into use and allocated to homeless people through the Empty Homes Partnership
- Work with partners to develop innovative finance models to finance housing delivery, utilising all powers available to the Council
- Investigate innovative rent models for Council housing
- Investigate how we prevent demand on services and partners
- Ensure a robust commissioning model is introduced to increase investment in preventative services and ensure commissioning is aligned with these principles
- Ensure a sustainable reduction in General Fund expenditure is achieved, with a corresponding increase in HRA rental income



## 4. Assessment and prioritisation criteria

In developing this action plan, key assessment criteria and weighting for suggested projects were identified. These are:

Criteria	Weighting
Success Probability	10%
Prevention	20%
Reduced use of unsuitable accommodation	20%
Tenant Satisfaction	10%
Increase Funding / Housing supply	20%
Care & Support	10%
Cost Benefit	10%

Impact	Impact Score
No Impact	0
Very Low	1
Low	2
Moderate	3
High	4
Very High	5

### Prevention:

The need to prevent homelessness where possible featured in all engagement sessions, with strong sentiment that this action plan should reflect and promote preventative approaches. Harm in this context is primarily focused on harm to individuals – those presenting as homeless, those at risk of homelessness, those whose specific characteristics and life experience may mean they are more vulnerable to negative outcomes.

Prevention is also important in considering how the Council acting as a Landlord operates and the financial, compliance and reputational risks faced across the services provided.

In assessing how harm can be prevented, the definitions adopted are:

**Prevention** - Taking action to prevent the occurrence of harm through universal measures.

**Harm** - A negative impact on humans, the organisation or resources available.

## 5. Priority categorisation

The projects identified in this plan have been categorised into high, moderate and low priority through the criteria identified, as shown below:

Priority categorisation	Number of projects
High	27
Moderate	19
Low	29

## 6. Project commencement and completion timeline

The initial projects identified have varied start dates, as set out below:

Priority categorisation	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
High	26	1	0	0	0	0
Moderate	14	5	0	0	0	0
Low	19	10	0	0	0	0

The initial projected completion dates are set out below:

<b>Priority categorisation</b>	<b>2023/24</b>	<b>2024/25</b>	<b>2025/26</b>	<b>2026/27</b>	<b>2027/28</b>	<b>2028/29</b>
High	3	18	3	0	0	3
Moderate	1	15	3	0	0	0
Low	4	23	1	1	0	0

## **7. Other supporting activities and monitoring**

An Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) is available for this action plan.

Monitoring of this action plan will be through the City of Edinburgh Council's Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work on a cyclical exception reporting basis.