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Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and Wheatley Group

Still waiting for a home: Stories of people waiting for social housing

Altair

Contents

Content warning

This report contains stories that some readers may find upsetting, including mental and physical harm. If you are affected by any of what we share, you may wish to seek support from the helpful resources we've listed at the end of the report.

1. Executive summary

About this report

Scotland is not able to provide a social home to all those who need one. There are around a quarter of a million applicants waiting for a social home, including existing tenants on a transfer list.

There is currently very little research on what waiting for social housing means for people's lives, and the impact on local authority and housing association staff managing demand for social housing.

To enable us to hear these stories, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA) and Wheatley Group commissioned research from Altair Consultancy and Advisory Services Ltd (Altair).

The research has explored what it's like for households waiting, for staff managing demand from those waiting, and what affect this has on people. This report explores the stories of households waiting.

Who took part in the research

We spoke to 30 people waiting for social housing in Scotland aged from their 20s to their 60s, who had joined one or more housing lists. This included 10 people recently allocated a home. There was a range of household types, including lone parents, two parent families, lone occupants, and couples with no dependents. Length of waits varied from two months to 14 years. Just over half were transfers from within social housing (18) with the remaining households new to social housing (12). The majority were Scottish, with a small number of other nationalities.

We also interviewed and surveyed staff managing applications and allocations for social housing, the results of which will be published separately.

Interviews were with individuals, though family members may have contributed in the background. All were undertaken by phone before being transcribed and analysed for thematic narrative to build case studies and themes. The interviews took place over spring and summer 2024.

Access to social housing

Social housing is allocated according to need. Anyone aged 16 or over has a right to apply for social housing, as long as they meet eligibility criteria. Available homes are allocated to households in need through either a needs-based approach or choice-based letting. Under a needs-based approach, landlords offer suitable homes to the household with the greatest need. For choice-based lettings, applicants note interest on suitable homes, the landlord makes an offer to the household which has noted interest and has the greatest need. Both systems are based on prioritising housing need, as set out in allocations policies. If more than one applicant has equivalent priority, waiting time is usually considered when deciding who is to be offered a home.

Social housing is owned and managed by not-for-profit social landlords. These are public authorities (mainly councils) and housing associations (registered social landlords or RSLs). Social landlords can be large or small, rural or urban, and provide housing for general or very specific needs. They are regulated by the Scottish Housing Regulator.

Reasons for wanting social housing

People's housing needs change over their life course. Sometimes these changes are anticipated, such as ageing, an expanding family, or a degenerative health condition, and sometimes they are not predicted or planned for, such as homelessness, an unexpected pregnancy, family breakdown, becoming a victim of anti-social behaviour, or changes in physical or mental health. People in our research talked about things happening to them that they had no control over, which then affected their housing need.

The Scottish Household Survey gives details on the main reasons for being on a housing list. Data from 2022 says the most common primary reason was wanting a bigger or smaller property, followed by needing ground floor access and anti-social behaviour or safety concerns in the current area. These reasons differed by tenure of the respondent's current home. We used these reasons to select our sample.

We spoke to people who were experiencing homelessness, living in unaffordable private rented accommodation, living in unsuitable housing due to the condition of the property or their health, overcrowded, under occupying, needing to move out of family homes due to the ending of a marriage, were victims of anti-social behaviour, or who had new caring responsibilities. There might have been one reason for needing to move, or there might have been several.

People wanted social housing to resolve their housing need as it was more affordable and secure, allowing them to feel safe and to build a life. It may have been their tenure of choice, or they may have had no other choice.

Current housing situation

People who were waiting were experiencing the following:

- **Living in non-decent conditions**, such as properties in a poor state of repair, properties that were cold, damp, mouldy, dark, had damage from previous tenants, unsuitable kitchens, and/or were in need of decoration: "*I'm not coming back to a nice home, I'm coming back to a home that no matter how I clean it, it feels dirty.*"
- **Feeling insecure** because they didn't have a home, or a home that was suitable for their needs, or didn't know where they were going to be living: "*If you have that stability, everything else becomes stable. But when you have the foundation get rocked, you're going to rock, and everything else around you.*"
- **Having issues with space**, with no room to move or a home that was too large: "*I've got nowhere to put a Christmas tree this year for my kids because we physically don't have the room.*"
- **Feeling unsafe** in their neighbourhood due to anti-social behaviour or traumatic experiences: "*I was in fear of things happening.*"

- **Experiencing unaffordable rent or high bills**: "*The energy, to keep it warm in the winter is just an absolute nightmare… we're £500 in debt with our electric and gas company.*"

Housing may have been one issue amongst many, some of which might relate to the reason for needing to move. People often spoke about how they were trapped, stuck, frustrated and had no choice or control over their housing situation.

The impact of the wait

The circumstances people were living in impacted on mental health, physical health, finances, social ties, employment, and family:

- **Mental health**, including mental strain and risk of bodily harm: "*It's affecting my kids' mental health. It's affecting my mental health. It's affecting my partner's. It's horrendous.*"
- **Physical health**, with existing conditions made worse and new conditions linked to housing, as well as loss of sleep: "*I said to the wifey on the phone the other day, it's either going to be my baby or it's going to be me that ends up in hospital.*"
- **Children**, of whom parents might feel couldn't "be children" as they were affected in all the ways their parents were, with the risk they might come to physical harm: "*[This toy] is having to sit outside because there's nowhere to put it in the house.*"
- **Financial**, from unaffordable rent, high bills, the cost of fuel, or activities to be outside of the home: "*Last month, by the time everything was paid, all the bills and I had done a food shop, I had about £30 left to my name.*"
- **Social**, from people isolating themselves and being isolated by their housing situation: "*I was always a very bubbly person, but I've become very quiet.*"
- **Employment**, with problems concentrating, or having to take time off, due to stress and/or loss of sleep: "*I was making very basic mistakes at work.*"

The wait itself had an impact on most people's mental health, from waiting for the phone to ring (if it was a direct offer through a needs-based housing allocation system) to regular cycles of hope and deflation (if a choice-based letting allocation system). People described feeling desperate and their life being "on hold." The stress of their situation might trigger physical health conditions.

There was a sense of a broken social contract, that people had been good tenants, worked, paid taxes, but had no help with their housing when they needed it. The idea of fairness came up repeatedly.

What happens when people are allocated social housing

People allocated social housing described how they felt that they could "start a life." They went from stress and hopelessness to feelings of freedom, normality and that life was going to get better.

The main impacts of being allocated a home were a reversal of some of the impacts of the circumstances they were living in and the uncertainty of waiting:

- **Improved mental health and wellbeing** as people felt relieved, happier, or restored to their old self: "*That's one less thing for me to be anxious and stressed about.*"

- **Having space** for themselves, more storage, and a home of the right size for their needs: "*There's not stuff everywhere.*"
- **Feelings of security and stability**, including independence and a home for life: "*You know where you're going to be in a year rather than not knowing where you're going to be in a month.*"
- **More social ties**, through community events, positive experiences with neighbours and feeling able to have friends and family over: "*You feel part of a community.*"
- **Better finances**, particularly from cheaper bills and sometimes cheaper rent, as well as welfare advice from their landlord to maximise income: "*It doesn't feel like you're just working to keep your house with the electricity on.*"

Conclusion

Scotland is facing a housing emergency. Housing need is being felt through increased pressures around affordability, rising homelessness, and numbers of homes requiring adaptations or repairs, as well as people living with parents or others who cannot move into their own home.

The stories of those waiting for social housing show the reality of this housing emergency. They will be familiar to those working in local authorities and housing associations. People waiting are living in homes of poor condition, homeless, overcrowded or under occupying, feeling unsafe, and/or having affordability issues.

Home is widely felt to be important to the formation of community, social ties, employment, education and family life. The absence of a home, or a suitable home, can act as a strain on all these parts of a person's life. We found the uncertainty of the wait while living in unsuitable housing affected mental and physical health, socialisation, children, finances, and employment. People we spoke to do not always feel listened to. The wait can make people lose hope, feel shame and embarrassment, and wonder what they have done wrong. It creates tensions around equity and fairness.

But it doesn't have to be this way. We can invest in homes for those who need them.

Social landlords are building, with nearly 30,000 affordable homes completed in the last three years. Yet there is a limit to what can be done without adequate government support. To minimise harm and provide people with strong foundations for life, we must ensure that everyone in Scotland has a home that needs one. We need the Scottish Government to invest in social housing, including providing consistent long-term funding to the Affordable Housing Supply Programme budget and the Registered Social Landlord Adaptations programme, as well as increased investment in the Social Housing Net Zero Heat Fund.

Despite the housing emergency, there is hope. Things can change with the right political support, so that people no longer have experiences like these:

- "We can't do much longer in that house." Mark - Highlands, Islands and West – living with wife and children in temporary accommodation, waiting for 15 months.
- "It makes me feel secure. So, all of that panic and that stress that I went through, it was gone. It's brought me back to life again almost." Alex – West Central - lives alone, waited six months.

- “I feel like the flat is now never clean, no matter how much I clean it because I know that there’s mould and there's been bugs as well.” Mhairi – West Central – lives alone, waiting five years.
- “It’s back to normal family life.” Isla – Tayside and North East - lives with partner and child, waited six months.
- “There’s very little security in life.” Shirley – Capital - single mother, waiting six months.
- “I think I jumped into [my new home] too quickly because I wanted out of my mum’s house.” Lisa - Tayside and North East – single mother, waited three years.
- “I feel for families waiting for large homes who are overcrowded, it doesn't make sense that we’re trying to move out of this one when they are waiting.” Emma – Tayside and North East – lives with dad, waiting years.
- “It’s just good to have my own space.” Jenna - Tayside and North East – single mother, waited five years.
- “I dread coming home because I never know what's gonna happen and the anxiety levels go through the roof because of it.” Maureen – Central - lives alone, waiting seven years.
- “I thought I misheard him, semi-detached bungalow, I could nae believe it, I'm getting offered a semi-detached bungalow, it was just beyond.” Silvia – Central – lives alone, waited for eight months.

Thank you

We would like to thank all 30 people who spoke to us for this research, for being open, honest and wanting to share your stories. Some told us that the research was therapy, others that you were sharing so other people didn’t have to experience the same thing. We hope this report does justice to your stories. We would also like to thank the many more who contacted us about participating who we weren’t able to interview, we hope the research helps you to feel seen and heard.

We wouldn’t have been able to speak to people without help from staff at local housing authorities and housing associations, who shared the research and invited those waiting or allocated to take part. We would also like to thank the following for their advice, input and help with recruitment:

- Tony Cain, Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers (ALACHO).
- Margaret-Ann Brünjes, Homeless Network Scotland.
- Grant Campbell, Homeless Network Scotland.
- Jules Oldham, Policy Scotland.
- Tim Pogson, Scotland’s Housing Network.

2. Introduction

About the research

Altair Consultancy and Advisory Services Ltd (Altair) was commissioned to conduct this research by the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA) and Wheatley Group.

The aims of the research were to explore the stories of people on waiting lists for social housing in Scotland and the staff managing these lists, and the impact these experiences have. This is to better understand the circumstances of those needing and waiting for social homes, and the pressures faced by staff when allocating. These experiences are needed to talk about the impact of housing scarcity and influence efforts to increase the supply of social homes.

The research started in spring 2024 and comprised:

- A background literature review to understand more about demand for social housing in Scotland, the allocation of housing in Scotland, how housing impacts on households, and impact of managing housing on staff within social housing landlords, published in a separate report.
- Interviews with 20 households from across the country who were waiting for social housing.
- Interviews with 10 households who had been allocated social housing in the last few months.
- Interviews with staff from 20 organisations who were managing applications to housing lists and the allocation of homes to those on lists.
- A survey of local authority and housing association staff managing applications and allocations for social housing. The findings from the staff interviews and survey will be published at a later date.

About SFHA and Wheatley Group

The SFHA and Wheatley Group believe that housing is fundamental to the needs of Scotland and its people.

SFHA is the voice of Scotland's housing associations and co-operatives and work to strengthen the social housing sector in Scotland by influencing change and supporting members. They do this in a number of ways: by gathering evidence, influencing policy, working with politicians and parliaments, providing guidance and connecting their members.

SFHA believe that everyone has a right to a safe, warm and affordable home and that social homes make lives and places better. They believe that Scotland urgently needs more social homes and that it's important that housing associations and co-operatives are supported and heard.

Wheatley Group is a leading housing, care, and property management group in Scotland and the UK's biggest developer of social rented homes.

Report contents

This report presents the stories of the 30 households we interviewed as part of the wait, 20 who were waiting and 10 who had recently moved into social housing. All names of participants have been changed, and some stories have been combined to preserve anonymity.

The report is structured as follows:

- Background – setting out statistics on housing need, concepts of home and housing aspirations. We then move on to the main findings of our research.
- Why do people want social housing? – summarising what our research found about why people join housing lists.
- What circumstances are households waiting in? – structured around Shelter's Living Home Standard, this sets out the housing situations of households we interviewed, including conditions, stability, space, neighbourhood and affordability. It also touches on how housing might be one issue of many in people's lives and feelings of a lack of choice and control.
- What impact does the wait have? – the main impacts of the wait, including on mental health, physical health, children, finances, social ties, employment, and reflections on looking for a home, including the cycle of hope and despair, a sense of a broken social contract, the desperation of those looking, and fairness and equity in accessing housing.
- Discussion – a brief discussion of the implications of our findings.
- Conclusion – a summary of the stories of those waiting and reflections on these.
- Case studies – the stories of those waiting, which we consider to be the most important and powerful part of this report.
- Methods – an overview of the research, methods, sample composition, and limitations.

3. Background

The following background is taken from our separately published literature review, which discusses research and data on the challenges in terms of social housing supply and demand, how housing impacts on households, including health, education, and feelings of community, and what is known about the impact on social landlord staff.

Access to social housing

Social housing is allocated according to need, with the following different routes to access or move between social rented homes:[1]

- Applicants making a direct application to the landlord.
  - Some areas may operate a Common Housing Register in an area, where applicants fill in one application form and join one common housing list that a number of social landlords use to allocate their housing (though the allocation policy may not be shared across all landlords).
- Transfer between properties owned by the same landlord.
- Nominations of a household from one landlord to another, or a local authority to a landlord.
- Section 5 referrals (statutorily homeless households).
- Mutual exchange, where two social rented households swap homes.
- Referral schemes, where households are referred by a supporting agency.
- Exceptional circumstances to allow a household's critical housing need to be met.
- Management transfer, where landlords have a critical need to move a household, such as repairs or demolition.

Available homes will be allocated to households in need through either a needs-based approach or choice-based letting. Under a needs-based approach, landlords offer suitable homes to the household with the greatest need. For choice-based lettings, applicants bid for suitable homes and the landlord makes an offer to a household who has noted interest and has the greatest need.[2] Both systems are based on prioritising housing need, as set out in allocations policies. If more than one applicant has equivalent priority, landlords usually consider waiting time when deciding who is to be offered a home.

Allocations policies must give a reasonable level of priority to applicants who fall within one of three reasonable preference groups, as set out in The Housing (Scotland) Act 2014:

[1] Scottish Government (2019) Social housing allocations in Scotland: practice guide.
[2] See a more detailed description of both approaches in Scottish Government (2019) Social housing allocations in Scotland: practice guide.

- Homeless persons and persons threatened with homelessness[3] and who have unmet housing needs;
- People who are living under unsatisfactory housing conditions and who have unmet housing needs; and
- Tenants of houses which are held by a social landlord, which the social landlord selecting its tenants considers to be under-occupied.

The 2014 Act states that landlords can take the needs of other groups into account as well as the reasonable preference groups, but such groups must not dominate at the expense of reasonable preference groups.

Allocation policies will also need to comply with homelessness rules set out in relevant legislation (Part II of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, as amended by the 2001 Act and the Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003). The focus should be on prevention of homelessness, through social housing allocation, rather than homelessness being the main way in which people access a social rented home.[4] These include rules on Section 5 referrals of statutorily homeless households by local authorities to housing associations.

Social landlords will account for legislation when developing their allocations policies but there is still a degree of discretion. This means policies may differ by landlord, even within the same geographic area (unless there is a Common Allocations Policy shared as part of a Common Housing Register). Examples of this include how applications are handled (e.g. needs-based on choice-based), certain priority categories, and bedroom need.

Anyone aged 16 or over has a right to be admitted to a housing list. This ensures lists are fully inclusive of housing need and aspirations and give an accurate understanding of housing demand in an area. Being admitted to a list does not, however, mean that a household is eligible for housing. Eligibility is limited by specific factors, including immigration status and entitlement to public funds, though housing associations are not subject to immigration exclusions.[5]

Access is monitored through the Scottish Social Housing Charter,[6] which sets out, under outcome 10, that registered social landlords ensure:

> *People looking for housing find it easy to apply for the widest choice of social housing available and get the information they need on how the landlord allocates homes and on their prospects of being housed.*

[3] With homelessness defined by the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 as including those with accommodation that it is not reasonable for them to continue to occupy – see Shelter Scotland
[4] Scottish Government (2019) Social housing allocations in Scotland: practice guide.
[5] Scottish Government (2019) Social housing allocations in Scotland: practice guide.
[6] Scottish Government (2022) Scottish Social Housing Charter.

When it comes to managing a housing list, social landlords must treat applications fairly, consistently and within suitable timescales.[7] They must make it as easy as possible to join their housing list. Good practice guidance from the Scottish Government also states that landlords should review their housing list regularly to make sure that they have up-to-date information about their applicants. This might include annual rolling reviews, contacting applicants on the anniversary of their application, to check whether their housing needs have changed along with their desired property type/area.

Statistics on numbers on housing lists

It is difficult to accurately identify the number of households on housing lists for social housing. This is mainly because households may be on more than one list, leading to double counting in national statistics.

The latest Scottish Government's data shows that, for stock owning local authorities in 2023, there were 175,092 applications on local authority or common housing registers (74% of which are on the waiting list, or 129,900 applicants).[8] These figures do not include households waiting on housing associations' own waiting lists. They may also include double counting as households may have applied and be counted on more than one local authority housing list.

Recent research by Solace Scotland puts the number on waiting lists much higher. While Scottish Government statistics collect data for local authorities, Solace Scotland collected data from housing associations within non-stock owning local authorities and found 243,603 applications for social housing in Scotland (including on transfer lists).[9]

Alternatively, the Scottish Household Survey, uses survey data to estimate national figures. The SHS estimated 100,000 households (4% of all households) were on a housing list in 2022.[10] Those living in social rented housing were most likely of all tenures to be on a housing waiting list – 11% of households compared to 7% of private renters and 1% of owner occupiers.[11]

[7] Scottish Government (2019) Social housing allocations in Scotland: practice guide.
[8] Scottish Government (2024) Housing Lists. Note that at the time of writing there was a discrepancy between transfer list figures in the Housing statistics: Management of local authority housing and the Housing Lists webtool. The Scottish Government advised using the Housing Lists webtool data, which is lower than the Housing Lists download on the Housing statistics: Management of local authority housing webpage and means the waiting list and transfer list figures do not equal the total number of applicants.
[9] Solace Scotland (2023) Housing in Scotland: Current Context and Preparing for the Future.
[10] https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-household-survey-2022-key-findings/pages/3/
[11] Scottish Government (2023) Scottish Household Survey 2022, Table 1.50 Whether household is on a housing list by tenure, 2022.

Main reasons for joining

The Scottish Household Survey gives details on the main reasons for being on a housing list. For latest available data, the most common primary reason identified was wanting a bigger or smaller property, followed by needing ground floor access and anti-social behaviour or safety concerns in current area.[12]

The reasons for being on a housing list differed by tenure. For nearly a third of social renters (32% of households), they were on a housing list to move to a larger or smaller property, the most common reason for this tenure. It is highly likely that many of these households need to move to a larger property due to overcrowding, with overcrowding more prevalent in the social rented sector. Overcrowding was also identified as the main reason for moving into social housing in recent research from Shelter Scotland.[13] For private renters, the main driver was not being able to afford their current home, or that they would like cheaper housing (24% of households).[14] The extent to which underrepresentation of renters in the 2022 sample affected these results is unclear.

Private renters were also more likely than social renters to be on a housing list due to being threatened with homelessness (12% private rented households compared to 5% of social renters). Social renters were more likely than private renters to be on housing lists due to wanting ground floor access (10% vs 5%) or having anti-social behaviour/safety concerns (11% vs 4%).[15]

Length of wait

Most households in 2022 had been waiting one to three years, though this differed by tenure. Private renters were most likely, at 34%, to say they had been waiting less than a year, which may reflect their reason for waiting. Of all households, 11% reported waiting more than 10 years.[16]

Home and housing aspirations

Home can be considered, first and foremost, a physical place of shelter but it is also where social lives and privacy can be found, and has been linked to self-identify and social status.[17] It

[12] Scottish Government (2023) Scottish Household Survey 2022, Table 1.59, The main reason for household being on a housing list, 2022.
[13] Shelter Scotland and HACT (2024) The social value of moving into social housing in Scotland: Year 2 interim research report.
[14] Scottish Government (2023) Scottish Household Survey 2022, Table 1.60, The main reason for household being on a housing list by tenure, 2022.
[15] Scottish Government (2023) Scottish Household Survey 2022, Table 1.60, The main reason for household being on a housing list by tenure, 2022.
[16] https://statistics.gov.scot/data/housing-lists
[17] Després C. (1991) The meaning of home: literature review and directions for future research and theoretical development. J Architectural Plan Res. 8(2):96–115.

is widely felt to be important to the formation of community, social ties, employment, education and family life. Clapham (2010) states it is "a setting for family and community life, an element of and a springboard for a desired and valued lifestyle, a key constituent of self-esteem and status, and an important arena for autonomy and control."[18]

There is no right to a home in UK or (currently) Scottish law,[19] even if the right to adequate and safe housing is recognised in international law and through treaties signed by the UK government.[20]

Housing aspirations may not always be realistic, meaning trade-offs may be required, while people affected by deprivation may feel they have no control or choice when it comes to housing. People facing material or other deprivation may accept a housing outcome because their expectations are "stymied by powerful interests."[21] Social housing tenants, in recent government research on housing affordability, talked about how high demand for social housing meant they "lacked choice and felt obliged to accept whatever property they were offered."[22]

Research commissioned by the Scottish Government indicates social housing is an aspirational tenure for certain groups of people due to its stability and is also seen as more affordable and less stressful than owning or renting privately.[23] While stigma can affect the desirability of social renting, the housing experiences of social renters have been found to be more positive than private renters in relation to affordability, security, and relationships with landlords.[24]

When it comes to the impact of housing on people's lives, research clearly shows that housing quality and stability, and having choice and control over a home, affects a household's physical health, mental health, social ties, and education, and their ability to create a stable home. It stands to reason, therefore, that having choice in a good quality, secure social home with a responsive landlord will have a positive impact on a tenant's

[18] Clapham, D. (2010) Happiness, well-being and housing policy. Policy & Politics 38.2 (2010): 253-267. p.258
[19] Though the Scottish Government consulted on the Human Rights Bill in 2023, which could include a right to adequate housing.
[20] Equality and Human Rights Commission (2018) Following Grenfell: the right to adequate and safe housing.
[21] Foye, C. (2021). Ethically-speaking, what is the most reasonable way of evaluating housing outcomes? Housing, Theory and Society, 38(1), 115–131.
[22] Scottish Government (2024) Housing affordability study: Findings report.
[23] McKee, K., Moore, T. and Crawford, J. (2015) Understanding the Housing Aspirations of People in Scotland. Scottish Government.
[24] Scottish Government (2024) Housing affordability study: Findings report.

wellbeing and social ties, which has been drawn out in research on the impact of moving to social housing.[25]

[25] Shelter Scotland and HACT (2024) The social value of moving into social housing in Scotland: Year 2 interim research report; Gregory, J., Tian, L., Lymer, A., Espenlaub, S. (2021) 'Tenant's Journey' – Social Housing and Subjective Wellbeing Research work with EDDC and LiveWest – Final Report. University of Birmingham, Centre on Household Assets and Savings Management.

4. Why do people want social housing?

In the literature review, we explored what the Scottish Household Survey says about why people are on housing lists. These reasons, overcrowding, affordability, homelessness, and unsuitable housing due to conditions or size, were deliberately reflected in the sample of people we chose to speak to through our research. The reason may have been driven by an unexpected change in their life, such as being made homeless, family breakdown, or having an unplanned child.

People wanted or needed social housing because they couldn't afford to rent privately or buy and, particularly if they had bad experiences of renting privately, they wanted the stability of social housing, including not having to move again. Most of the people we spoke to were actively considering their housing options, which created stress in itself when they felt they had no choice due to needing social housing and having to wait for homes to become available.

Why people need social housing: "There's very little security in life."

People's housing needs change over their lifetime. Many of the reasons for needing social housing were due to (sometimes unexpected) changes in people's circumstances. Changes included homelessness, becoming overcrowded (sometimes due to unplanned pregnancies), family breakdowns or deaths in the family, affordability concerns, property conditions, becoming a victim of anti-social behaviour, or changes in their physical or mental health. There might be one reason for needing to move, or there might be several. While people may have only joined a waiting list recently, they could have experienced years of unhappiness with their current home.

If the situation was unexpected, people might have discussed feeling a lack of control or security, or failure or shame through feeling they personally had done something wrong despite no evidence of this. There were also some very unique reasons for needing to move, which might mean that social landlords were (initially) unsure of how to address the housing need created by this.

Affordability: "I'm not going to be able to go private, just due to the price."

Many of the households we spoke to said they needed social housing because they couldn't afford any other option. Private rent was unaffordable and getting a mortgage was difficult. Age also affected people's ability to get a mortgage. Affordability affected people who were working, people who couldn't work due to health or caring responsibilities, and people who were retired.

Safety and security: "But you don't have the security there when it's private rent. And there seems to always be something with a private rent property."

People also chose social rented over other options due to feeling private rented was insecure. This might be based on their previous experience of being given notice to leave

private rented homes, or their perception of the security it provided. Social rented was felt to be more secure than private rented. People wanted a "forever home."

Private landlords were also perceived as riskier as it was down to the individual landlord as to how the property and tenancy were managed.

A life, a home: "It was more to have my own space with my child and have a house that we could call home."

Another aspect of why people wanted social housing was the opportunity to create a home of their own. This could be to decorate as they wanted, in contrast to restrictions on decorating a private rented home, keep pets, or to have their own space or gain independence. People felt a home would mean they could "start building a life." Another expressed wanting a community, a "little village within a city."

In terms of what kind of homes people wanted, this depended on individual circumstances, particularly their reason for wanting to move. Condition of the property was very important (such as no damp or mould); ground floor access and accessibility were needed due to medical conditions, age or for children's needs; gardens for children and dogs or privacy; energy efficiency for warmth and affordability, and larger homes for those who were overcrowded. Area was important, particularly if there were anti-social behaviour issues, or a need to stay close to school, family, healthcare, or support networks. Some people said they would consider locations "anywhere" so long as it met their needs in other ways (such as space). Where a home had become unsuitable, people might feel sad about the prospect of moving because it was their long-term family home, or they were unsettled because they had been forced to move.

5. What circumstances are households waiting in?

Experiences of waiting were determined by the reason people were waiting for a home and their wider situation. We have structured these circumstances broadly round the five main attributes of Shelter's Living Home Standard; affordability, decent conditions, space, stability, and neighbourhood.[26]

Decent conditions: "I'm not coming back to a nice home, I'm coming back to a home that no matter how I clean it, it feels dirty."

We spoke to people waiting for social housing who were living in properties in a poor state of repair, properties that were cold, damp, mouldy, dark and gloomy, had rotten windows, damage from previous tenants, unsuitable kitchens, and/or in need of decoration. One family living in temporary accommodation described their house as a "hovel."

People described it as a fight to get the conditions sorted. The condition of their home might be the primary reason, or one of many reasons, they wanted to move. Decorating might be difficult due to medical conditions or age, or because they expected to move soon. Decent conditions might also relate to the suitability of the home for their medical conditions, such as struggling with stairs to get into, or around, their existing home.

Poor conditions affected mental health, physical health, feelings of home, finances and social ties. Mould was directly linked by participants to health conditions in them or their family (including children). This included allergies, epilepsy, asthma, and other breathing difficulties. It affected mental health, creating stress around inability to control and/or not being able to keep the property clean, and fear around health issues. People didn't want to invite people into their home due to the conditions, including children not having friends over. Financial impacts were from furniture and belongings ruined by mould and expensive energy bills from cold homes. The cold also affected comfort. While people attempted to make a home, there were limits to what they could or wanted to do, especially if it was temporary accommodation.

Stability: "If you have that stability, everything else becomes stable. But when you have the foundation get rocked, you're going to rock, and everything else around you."

Stability was connected not only to the uncertainty of not knowing where they were going to be living due to the need to move, but also of "living in limbo," of being stuck in their situation with no choice or means to change it, no goal to work towards. This created stress, anxiety, tension and frustration, affecting mental health, triggering health conditions, and impacting

[26] Shelter (2016) Living Home Standard.

on work. The stress affected sleep. Not knowing where they were going to be or when they might move meant people struggled to plan for the future or sometimes to motivate themselves to act on things that needed doing in the present. People talked about their life being on hold.

For parents and carers, the lack of stability made them worry for the future of their children; they didn't know what was going to happen, how their child was going to live and how they were going to grow up.

Space: "I've got nowhere to put a Christmas tree this year for my kids because we physically don't have the room."

Social renters in Scotland are more likely than any other tenure to be overcrowded, likely reflecting the lack of social housing to available.[27]

Whether over or under occupying, space was a real issue.

Overcrowded households talked about having "no room to move," with no privacy, no storage, and no room for a Christmas tree or new children's toys (such as birthday presents) as homes were "jam packed with stuff." One person cried about having to sell their belongings to make space. Children having to share bedrooms affected family sleep and created conditions for fights.

The main impact from this was on mental health, family life and social ties. There was no space for children to have sleepovers, people were reluctant to invite people into their home and described feeling overwhelmed from having belongings everywhere.

For those who were under occupying, they had too much space and, due to age or health conditions, found it harder to maintain their property and any garden. They might also find it harder to heat all rooms in their home due to affordability.

Neighbourhood: "I was in fear of things happening."

Where anti-social behaviour was one of the drivers of moving, then people described "living in fear," experiencing "mental torture" from noise, broken sleep, and being "constantly on edge." The anti-social behaviour could be from neighbours or people known to the victim. It might involve noise, verbal or physical threats, damage to property, door knocking or accusations to the police or social services. As might be expected, this affected people's mental health, including panic attacks, and also led to financial impacts from having to buy security cameras. Maureen reported taking sleeping tablets and wearing ear plugs to try to

[27] Scottish Government (2023) Scottish House Condition Survey, 2022. A household is considered to be overcrowded if there are insufficient bedrooms to meet the occupants' requirements under the bedroom standard definition - the bedroom standard is defined in the Housing (Overcrowding) Bill 2003 based on the number of bedrooms in a dwelling and the people in a household who can share a bedroom.

sleep, as well as spending as much time out of the house as possible. Others were afraid to leave the house. Anti-social behaviour, mental health and traumatic experiences in their home or area also affected people's ability to leave their home. Nicola, for example, following experiences of abuse and mental ill health, described her home as like a prison.

Affordability: "The energy, to keep it warm in the winter, is just an absolute nightmare...we're £500 in debt with our electric and gas company."

Financial issues were created from unaffordable rent in the private rented sector, costly energy bills from inefficient homes, changes in households' circumstances (such as having to stop working or partners moving out), and/or under occupation. John and his family, who live in a poorly insulated private rented home that is "really, really cold" in winter, were £500 in debt to their energy company.

Housing, one issue amongst many: "And I'm dealing with all that. And then there's the house situation."

Housing might be one of several challenges being faced by the people we spoke to, making it one issue on top of (many) others. Issues might include family breakdown, abuse, children or family members with additional needs or health conditions that required time and care to address. Sometimes the difficulty was connected with the reason they needed to move, and other times they felt an existing issue (such as physical or mental health conditions) was being made worse by their housing situation. We heard of some issues people had that weren't connected with housing, and it may be that there were other issues that were not raised.

Choice and control: "When you don't have a choice, it's difficult."

People repeatedly raised how limited their choice and control was. They described feeling trapped, stuck, frustrated, lost, in limbo, and in the twilight zone. People's ability to make changes to their circumstances was limited due to wanting or needing social housing but no social housing being available. They sometimes felt the system was inflexible, not accounting for individual circumstances, and they were being forced into waiting longer, such as for larger homes when they were not able to express interest in a home smaller than their bedroom need identified by an allocation policy.

6. What impact does the wait have?

The circumstances people were living in impacted on mental health, physical health, finances, social ties, employment, and family. This indicates how housing influences all aspects of people's lives.

Alongside the impacts of people's living circumstances, the wait itself had an impact on most people's mental health, whether this be the frustration of having to wait, stress and tension over not knowing where they were going to live, or the ups and downs from the hope and despair of unsuccessfully bidding for homes. People said they were unfairly treated. Some considered making their circumstances worse to increase their chances of being allocated a home. It also affected people's view of society and the social contract.

Mental health and wellbeing: "It's affecting my kids' mental health. It's affecting my mental health. It's affecting my partner's. It's horrendous."

During interviews, people cried when talking about their circumstances with some sharing that they had contemplated suicide. They described the mental strain of their situation and how, because it was their home, there was no getting away from it. Waking up and getting out of bed each day was hard. The sometimes-all-consuming mental strain affected relationships, creating arguments and tension with family or leading to isolation or irritability with friends. Silvia, who was suffering from anti-social behaviour, had the prescription for her existing mental health condition increased and started additional treatment.

The mental health impact then might also affect their feelings of capability and motivation in addressing their housing situation or other needs. In certain cases, the stress of the situation acted as a trigger, worsening existing physical health conditions and leading to hospitalisations.

Physical health: "I said to the wifey on the phone the other day, it's either going to be my baby or it's going to be me that ends up in hospital."

People reported that their health was being negatively affected by the conditions they were waiting in. This included existing health conditions being made worse, mostly due to stress triggers, but also from unsuitable housing. Emma's father had had to call an ambulance due to the impact stress related to anti-social behaviour had on his health. Mhairi was hospitalised when her health condition worsened from the stress of living in a home with mould. The presence of mould was linked to breathing difficulties, worsening allergies, and diagnoses of new conditions. Stairs restricted people's use of their home or, if external, their area, causing pain from physical conditions. Other impacts on physical health included loss of sleep (either due to stress from the uncertainty or from noise-related anti-social behaviour) and feeling cold. These health impacts could be on the research participant and/or any family member who lived with them.

Children: "[This toy] is having to sit outside because there's nowhere to put it in the house."

Children were affected in all the ways that their parents or carers were, from physical health to mental health, but also their education, and ability to "be children." Financial impacts included less money for family activities. One mother, Louise, shared that she thought the wait in an overcrowded home was more harmful for her children than her as they kept asking when they would be moving, when they would get their own bedroom and a "proper house." Overcrowded children had no space to play or change clothes. They couldn't have friends over to play or for sleepovers and there was no space for new toys. Parents reported not having space to do family activities in the home, such as movie nights. They said children sharing bedrooms led to broken sleep, which affected their education.

Children living in homes affected by mould were reported to have poorer health, such as breathing difficulties, and a limited social life, as they couldn't have friends over. One parent, Samantha, was concerned that her kids might get picked on if other children saw the mould in their home, or that her children might smell of mould. Mhairi said she wouldn't start a family until she could move out of her flat, which had problems with mould.

For those who were homeless, parents reported being removed from support networks, including family, friends, clubs and schools.

For parents of neurodiverse children, such as those with autism spectrum disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder diagnoses, impacts of housing were acutely felt. One parent, who needed to move for medical reasons, reported that their autistic child had outbursts when overwhelmed or overstimulated, resulting in the child threatening to jump from the flat balcony or third-floor windows. Another said that their autistic child hadn't left the house in over a year, following a move to temporary accommodation. Parents reported that their autistic children found change very hard. This might affect the family's ability to move if their child needed familiarity and stable support networks, or they had previously had to fight to get the support needed and didn't want to do so again. Neurodiverse children might also be affected by communal settings, such as shared gardens, as they created social anxiety.

Financial impacts also affected children as it left less money for family activities or treats.

It is highly likely, given the levels of stress reported, that the stress parents were feeling over their housing situation would be transmitted to children. This could potentially affect their development, mental wellbeing, and health.[28] Parents talked about the difficulties of keeping

[28] Perkins SC, Finegood ED, Swain JE. (2013) Poverty and language development: roles of parenting and stress. Innov Clin Neurosci. Apr;10(4):10-9.; Pesonen A, Raikkonen K, Heinonen K, et al. (2008) A transactional model of temperamental development: evidence of a relationship between child temperament and maternal stress over five years. Soc Dev. 2008;17:326; Clair, A. (2019) Housing: an Under-Explored Influence on Children's Well-Being and Becoming. Child Ind Res 12, 609–626.

"a lid on everything" and staying "strong." They reported that their mental health, linked to their housing situation, affected their ability to do activities with their children. Poor housing also meant parents might feel they weren't providing for their children, which, again, affected parental mental health.

Financial: "Last month, by the time everything was paid, all the bills and I had done a food shop, I had about £30 left to my name."

Alongside needing to move for affordability reasons, housing circumstances affected people's finances. This could be replacing belongings or furniture damaged by mould, paying energy bills or spending money on activities outside of the home to avoid being in it (perhaps due to overcrowding, anti-social behaviour, or mould). The cost of fuel and transport was also raised by those who were living in temporary accommodation outside of an area they were previously settled or raised in. Stephanie talked about scams and people who asked for money to find homes for people in need and thereby "leach off the housing crisis."

Social: "I was always a very bubbly person, but I've become very quiet."

Our interviews revealed that people were being isolated by their housing or were isolating themselves. This included being placed in temporary accommodation far from their long-term home, family and support networks; retreating from social situations due to the housing difficulties they were facing; not inviting people to their home because they didn't want them to see the condition; and, in one case, the break-up of a long-term relationship due to the stress of unsuitable housing. People described how their personality had changed due to their housing circumstances, becoming quiet, putting off social events, and withdrawing from family and friends.

Employment: "I was making very basic mistakes at work."

People spoke of having to take time off work due to stress, having to make up time due to having to sort housing issues during work, or making basic mistakes at work due to problems concentrating as they were stressed or losing sleep due to their housing situation. Not knowing where to live or being moved into temporary accommodation affected commutes to existing work, plans for work, and arranging childcare to enable work. Employers were also a source of support for people, including one employer providing a loan to help with moving costs.

Hope and hopelessness: "And to go through that cycle constantly, it really does take a toll on you."

The wait itself had a mental health impact. People described the hope and disappointment of bidding for homes and, for those on direct let systems, the anxiety of waiting for an offer when they didn't know when it might come or where it might be, of "waiting for the phone to ring." For those on choice-based lettings systems, they might have a cycle of hope and deflation or depression. They were hopeful when the bidding cycle opened (if there were homes they could bid for), and then deflated and depressed in expectation of/when there were no homes (or no suitable homes) to bid on, or when they saw their final position in the

queue, which might be in the hundreds. The "toll" this took mentally meant that people might stop bidding for homes or reduce their frequency of checking, while others continued bidding even though they felt it was a "lost cause." People described housing as constantly on their mind, being frustrated at being told different things about their priority, availability of homes, or how long they might be waiting. We heard that if they knew roughly how long the wait was then people felt they could cope, but not knowing left them in limbo. But being given a length of time and then it being longer than the time given was also a source of negativity, which shows that there is no one-size-fits-all system that can cater for individuals.

Broken social contract: "I'm starting to be felt letdown."

In interviews, people discussed feeling let down by the system, "even the Scottish Government." There was a sense of a broken social contract, with people paying their rent, looking after their home, being a good tenant, paying taxes or working all their life, but this making no difference to their housing situation. In their time of need, there was no home.

Being listened to: "Their own Charter says we will listen to you, we will respect you, and that, frankly, is not happening."

As we wanted to understand through the research the stories of people waiting, we did not specifically ask about processes around finding a home. This did, however, come up, and we want to share what people told us should it make a difference to how housing lists are managed and how housing is allocated and managed.

People talked about individuals who supported them throughout the process, going "above and beyond," explained everything, helped with options, and contacted them when they said they would.

Others felt there was no communication, letters and guidance were confusing or there were no guidelines or support, they weren't listened to, it took a long time to gather the evidence needed, they didn't understand the criteria or how decisions were made, they were forgotten or lost in the system, they were ignored, they were "banging their head against a brick wall," they felt they were belittled, they experienced computer system "glitches" that cancelled applications, they struggled with the online applications as they weren't used to computers, they had to fill in paper forms and couldn't copy across information to online forms when joining more than one list, they wanted more understanding and compassion, or they simply wanted someone to fight for them. People we spoke to might be waiting in silence or they might be in regular contact about their housing list applications. People spoke of shame or looking impatient from "bothering" staff or having to have things explained, but equally felt if they didn't contact then nothing happened.

Desperation: "If we go and give up our wages, would [they] be able to house us quicker?"

People talked about being so desperate and frustrated that they had considered the advantages of making their circumstances worse. For example, they thought they might get greater priority from a disability or if they stopped working and moved on to benefits.

Equity: "How did it get in this state? I had no idea that it was in such a bad way."

The idea of fairness came up repeatedly. This led to people either blaming the system for not being fair or feeling they had done something wrong because the system was not working for them. This was also tied up with the idea of hope, and that the hope given around expectations in finding a home was not fair.

In the main, people understood there are not enough homes for everyone, and that, generally, people waiting had a housing need. Nevertheless, being told there were no homes or there was a housing crisis could be frustrating for those experiencing the sharp end of this. They knew there was a crisis because they were "in a housing crisis." Even if there were no homes, people wanted support for their situation, either advice on their chances or issues in their current home fixed.

People participating raised concerns that available homes were going to people who weren't from an area, including immigrants and refugees, or people who weren't working or who weren't in need were being prioritised. The recent UK Housing Review discusses the impact that migration has on housing, with many migrants "initially dependent on the private rented sector, where they are likely to find difficulties of access, and greater problems than UK nationals in finding good-quality and affordable accommodation."[29] Recent homelessness data indicates that the work of the UK Home Office to clear a backlog in asylum applications[30] has led to rising levels of homelessness applications in Glasgow from those granted refugee status or leave to remain.[31] There are enormous pressures on housing and, as we write this following riots in England in 2024 that were fuelled by misinformation and concerns over migration, there is a risk that tensions about even access to services, such as housing, are an increasing source of community stress.

[29] 'The growth in migration to the UK and its effects on housing by John Perry' in Stephens, M., Perry, J., Williams, P. and Young, G. (2024) UK Housing Review 2024. Chartered Institute of Housing and University of Glasgow.
[30] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/legacy-backlog-cleared-as-plan-to-stop-the-boats-delivers
[31] Scottish Government (2024) Homelessness in Scotland: 2023-24.

7. What is the impact of being allocated a home?

We spoke to ten households who had been allocated a home recently, within less than a year of the interview.

As people shared how waiting for social housing meant they lacked control and their lives were on hold, people who had been allocated felt that a new life had started, or they were able to restart a normal life. They went from stress and hopelessness to feelings of freedom, normality and "better days are coming." There was a lot of joy in what people shared.

The main impacts of being allocated a home were a reversal of some of the impacts of the circumstances they were living in, such as more suitable housing, security, stability, and/or a quieter life, as well as mental health and wellbeing improvements from less anxiety and stress from the wait.

Mental health and wellbeing: "That's one less thing for me to be anxious and stressed about."

As discussed in the section on hope and hopelessness, the stress and anxiety caused by the wait for housing affected mental health and wellbeing. As can be expected, therefore, being allocated a home stopped this source of stress and anxiety. People talked about feeling relieved, having one less thing to be anxious or stressed about, and being restored, with former panic and stress gone.

A new home, because it was away from any issues with the old one, improved wellbeing, including sleep and feeling happier. People described that life had "picked back up," they were back to their "old self," and able to live a "normal" life.

It may be that a move did not mean an overnight recovery from traumatic experiences, however, such as in Silvia's situation who, when describing her experience of anti-social behaviour and her move away from it, said "I keep telling myself I'm away from it now, but it's still there."

Space: "There's not stuff everywhere."

For those who had been overcrowded or waiting to move into their own home, there was a positive impact from having their own space, that they could decorate and that didn't have stuff everywhere. This was also important for privacy and wellbeing. For example, Jenna reported feeling less angry after leaving her overcrowded home for a more spacious flat.

Security and stability: "You know where you're going to be in a year rather than not knowing where you're going to be in a month."

Running through our interviews with people who were waiting was the problems caused by the uncertainty and/or precarity of their housing situation. People were looking for social housing for security and stability. This also came out through the impact of moving to social

housing. This was, again, connected to being able to live life and settle for the long-term as well as freedom, independence, safety, peace and quiet, and control over their future, with "better days coming."

Social: "You feel part of a community."

Those who had moved described feeling part of a community, positive experiences with neighbours, even if to say they were quiet or kept themselves to themselves. Participants also described during interviews how they now have friends round to their home, which they didn't before, and have space for family to visit.

Financial: "It doesn't feel like you're just working to keep your house with electricity on."

Those who had moved may have been paying more or less in rent. For those paying more, they accepted this situation, and, in some cases, this was covered by their benefits. Jenna said the service charge she paid was more than her last place, but now she could tell what she was paying for as she could see the maintenance of landscaping and cleaning of communal areas. Those paying less, or who had moved to more energy efficient homes, found the saving useful and the changed finances made them happier. Isla also reported that their housing association had helped them access benefit entitlements she wasn't aware of.

The unexpected: "I thought it would come with carpets or flooring because I've always rented."

We also asked people whether they would like to change anything about their home. In the main, people described their homes as of good quality, but one interviewee, Lisa, said she had "nothing but problems since I moved" and wondering if the move was worth it or she should have waited longer for somewhere nearer her family. Another participant, Claire, said that the home was in a very poor decorative condition when they moved in with "every room needed decorating, every room needed flooring" and it would have been more of a help if their landlord had stripped the walls back to plasterboard, ready for them to decorate.

In general, people didn't want to change anything about their new home, but they did discuss the cost of moving and how they had expected it would come with carpets[32] and white goods, the condition of the home not being what they expected, and the speed of the move after waiting for so long. People said their housing association had given them decorating vouchers, or helped access grants for white goods or flooring, but one participant, Claire, felt that she and her partner would have had more help accessing these if they had not been

[32] See discussion of impacts of providing floor coverings in Altair (2024) Final report: Provision of floor coverings in social housing. Longleigh Foundation.

working ("I don't think there's a lot of support for people that are full time workers getting a house").

The best: "I couldn't have asked for more."

People described their delight with being offered their home. We asked people about what they liked best about it. Most of the responses related to the situation they had left (such as not having their own home, being overcrowded, or suffering from noise-related anti-social behaviour), so best things were feelings of home, safety, quiet, or storage/space. Other responses were specific to the property, such as the location (including being close to nature), energy efficiency, accessibility, or number of electrical sockets. Sense of community and friendly neighbours were also raised.

8. Discussion

The purpose of this report has been to draw out the stories of people waiting for social housing in Scotland, the circumstances they are living in and the impact that the wait has on them and, subsequently, being allocated a home.

We are not making formal recommendations as a result of this report but bringing to life the experiences of those who are waiting – their hope, despair, frustration, anger, bitterness, and suffering – as we want their stories to be heard by government and the public who vote for them. However, there are some lessons that we can draw from what we heard.

The Scottish Government's latest statistics show the government is not on track to meet its goals on affordable house building, with 29,737 Affordable Housing Supply completions in financial years 2021/22-2023/24.[33] Scotland needs 53,000 affordable homes over the current Parliament (2021–2026), at a total cost of £3.4 billion, to meet affordable housing need in the country.[34] Development of social housing is more challenging following the Scottish Government's decision to cut its affordable housebuilding programme budget by £200m for 2024-25, a reduction of 26%.[35]

We heard that the uncertainty of the wait for social housing, and the circumstances people are waiting in, contributes to mental ill health. The availability of decent, secure, affordable homes supports mental health and wellbeing. Being supported in this means people have the resilience to focus on other issues, including work, family and health. It allows people, as Isla said, "to live life again." We believe this shows how social housing contributes to society and the economy, with suitable housing relieving pressure on the National Health Service. With the pressures on supply of social housing, people can be left with little choice in where and how to live. At a time when homelessness and housing affordability are worsening, the government should invest more in developing new social housing to ensure people have access to strong foundations for a decent life.

From what people told us, there are also improvements that could be made to experiences of renting (both social and private rent) and the allocation of social housing. People waiting are living the housing crisis. Those we interviewed wanted social housing staff to listen to their housing need and show they are listening by acting on what they tell them, as a tenant or a housing list applicant. There is also recognition of the pressure that staff in local authorities and housing associations may face from a lack of homes to meet need (which will be explored in our next report). Any system to address housing need can only be effective if there are homes available to meet need. Similarly, for those we interviewed, reforms to the

[33] Scottish Government (2024) Affordable Housing Supply Programme Summary Tables.
[34] Dunning, R., Ferrari, E., Hoolachan, J., Keskin, B. Moore, T., O'Brien, P. and Powell, R. (2020) Affordable Housing Need in Scotland Post-2021. Published by Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA), Shelter Scotland and the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) Scotland.
[35] https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/scotland-cuts-affordable-homes-budget-by-26-84495

private rented sector in Scotland have not been sufficient to resolve affordability issues or perceptions and experiences around security and quality of the tenure.

There is also very little understanding of where to go for advice or services for those who are housed in unsuitable accommodation. Advocacy groups around homelessness are well known, but people who are housed but have problems with their housing did not know where to turn for advice. Many reported the support they had received from doctors, schools, Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs), and Members of Parliament (MPs). Support from these places was not always effective, given the lack of housing, and may not change the lived reality of people in housing need beyond getting them greater priority on the housing list, which has limited effect when there are no homes.

There are instances where improvements to existing housing situations might be sufficient to meet people's needs. For example, resolving anti-social behaviour issues or adaptations to existing homes to make them more accessible. There were also references to living in damp and mouldy homes where it appeared landlords' operatives were blaming this on the lifestyle of the tenant, and it was unclear if there had been thorough investigation of issues with the property itself.

Another area is around overcrowding and under occupation. Greater flexibility around the bedroom standard might provide some (temporary) relief to those living in extremely crowded, underoccupied or otherwise unsuitable housing. People we spoke to who were overcrowded wanted this. While this is not allowed under law, and is certainly not a permanent solution as will likely mean that these people will continue to be on the housing list, it has the potential to improve the conditions in which they wait. Similarly, for those under occupying, allowing a spare room might free up larger properties.

If not done already, mental health training and support needs to be provided for all staff working with people waiting for social housing. We will explore this in more detail in our interviews and survey of staff, but it is clear people waiting want the system to acknowledge the mental strain and impact from needing a home and not getting one. This included a suggestion that priority be awarded for mental health issues, bringing parity with priority awarded around physical health.

Finally, the needs of people on housing lists should be considered when funding and designing new developments. As have been found in other studies, trade-offs of housing expectations may be accepted by individuals, perhaps as part of achieving housing aspirations (however limited).[36] There was an acknowledgement from those interviewed for our research that everyone might want their own front and back door and garden, yet people who didn't get this were still happy in their new home if it met their needs in other ways.

[36] Preece, J., Crawford, J., McKee, K., Flint, J. & Robinson, D. (2020) Understanding changing housing aspirations: A review of the evidence, Housing Studies, 35, pp. 87–106; Preece, J., McKee, K., Flint, J., & Robinson, D. (2021) Living in a small home: Expectations, impression management, and compensatory practices, Housing Studies, 1–21.

There is a challenge in trying to work out what acceptable trade-offs are in relation to any homes available, to avoid people having to rejoin the housing list when they move into a home they are unhappy with.

9. Conclusion

Scotland is facing a national housing emergency. These stories show the real-life impact of this crisis and our moral duty to ensure everyone in Scotland is adequately housed and can live a decent life. A secure, decent, affordable home is a foundation for life.

When home is lost or threatened then it can affect all aspects of a person's life from their mental and physical health to their social and family life and work. People we spoke to for this research had found themselves in very limiting housing situations, feeling lost, stuck and as if they had done something wrong because they were not getting the home they needed.

The uncertainty of not knowing when they would get a home left some feeling stressed, exacerbating poor mental and physical health and affecting wellbeing, and at times leaving them unable to plan for the future. The circumstances they were living in isolated them at a time when they needed support. It affected their employment. It is also potentially acting to drive inequality by affecting the health, education and wellbeing of children.

By not providing enough homes for those in need, we are failing in our most basic responsibilities of preventing harm to others. It doesn't have to be this way. Housing associations are building, but we need the Scottish Government to provide consistent, long-term funding for the development of new affordable housing. We need social homes of different types and tenures across the country to address severe housing need and ensure that those in need can access the stability and affordability that social housing can provide. We also need greater investment in our existing homes to make them accessible, energy efficient and fit for the needs of our changing population.

The households we spoke to wanted to share their story, for their experiences to be heard. Please consider them when you think about the housing emergency facing our country. Consider what is within your power to change so that people no longer have such stories to share.

Case studies

A note on composition of case studies

Case studies are made up of direct quotes only and may draw from more than one interview. Note that all names have been changed to protect identities.

Where people's situation was considered a risk to indirectly identifying them, we have included quotes from their interviews in composite case studies, bringing together similar situations and experiences. Quotes were only included where people were experiencing similar issues (i.e. we have not made situations of people in case studies look worse than those told to us by people participating).

Doing this does not mean that people's experiences were the same. We hope those participating appreciate this was done to protect identities and for brevity. It is in no way intended to minimise their unique situations or experiences.

“We can't do much longer in that house.”

Mark - Highlands, Islands and West – living with wife and children in temporary accommodation, waiting for 15 months

It was very stressful going homeless. When we lost our house, that we thought we were going to have for many, many years, it was very, very stressful. The whole thing was horrible on everybody.

We were on a private let with a lovely home. We loved it. We got on very well with the neighbours. And the landlord, due to the increase in interest rates and stuff like that, the landlord approached us and said, “Look, I'm really sorry, but I’m going to have to sell the property. I'm struggling financially since COVID.”

We think we were maybe like three days off the notice for when we had to leave and the Homeless Officer phoned us, said “We've got a property for you, but it's not in [Place A], it's in [Place B], 15 miles away.” And at that point, my heart just raced and the wife broke down. I had to go meet the Homeless Officer at the property. And as soon as we got there I knew, this is no gonna do us. But, the Officer explained, “we don't have anything else. If you don't take this then I don’t know what else there is.”

I hit the market trying to find another three-bed. But I'll be honest with you, I could not afford it even if I tried, they’re just a crazy price.

So I got home, and I says to my wife, “Look, if we don't take this, we're gonna end up in a hotel or something, and things could get worse here, we just need to get in here, on the list, then in six months, seven months, eight months, we'll get our forever home. We need to go through some pain.”

But no, it doesn’t work like that.

People have come and got properties before us and, 15 months later, we're in that house, in a place we don't know. Are we stuck in this hovel for forever more?

The Council Homeless team always said three-beds are very hard to come up, so it's gonna be looking at the new builds, unless something comes up beforehand, and it's always been like that. So Phase One [of a new build estate] came and gone and then we say to the Homeless Officer, “So Phase Two?” And she went “Oh yeah, that's yours now, yous top of the list.” Phase Two, came and gone. “Ohh you must be getting Phase Three.” Phase Three, come and gone. Phase Four, come and gone. It just angers me so much. Like you know, I know everybody's in need of a home. I know that, I understand the list and there's a lot of homelessness going around, but I drive around that scheme and I'm seeing people not from this country in those houses. How is that fair?

It's horrible when you get yourself psyched up, it’s only going to be a few months with the new build phases coming in, then, when that comes and goes, it puts you back to the start. Then you think you did something wrong, you know, you just feel like they're against you and they're just overlooking you. It’s making us all feel upset, unwanted, low, you just want to burst into tears. We’ve always had good references or been good tenants, never missed a

rent in our life, never left the house in a condition that you couldn't sell from, and we just keep thinking, what did we do wrong? It's the uncertainty, if we've got to this stage now, we might not get anything, because if we've been overlooked this far, how many more times are we gonna be overlooked?

Now we've, we've got to be in [Place A] because my child goes to college there. They were going to an autism support group, which they no longer can because you've got to be in that area. So us needing to be in [Place A], it's not just for hospital appointments and being near the family, it's for our child as well. My child hasn't left the house in over a year because they don't know where we are.

The wife and me sleep in the living room because it's only a two-bed and we need a three-bed. It's only like one double room and a single. My older child's in the single room and you can't swing a cat and they're always banging their knees off the radiator and it's just, it's horrible. It shouldn't even be a room, it's more like a cupboard.

The back garden's a disgrace, it's full of water. You can't actually go in the back garden, it's that bad. It's like one of the old houses where, because it's homeless [accommodation], the Council haven't maintained it. So the kitchen's probably about 40 years old, it's really, really bad. The laminate has come off one of the units. We've cut our fingers on one, it's dangerous. They've still got the coal bunkers around the back. We try our best, but the house is run down, it's horrible. There is writing on the walls, wallpaper ripped off and three colours of paint in each room. The carpet is wavy and warped, and you can see the floorboards through it. We had to go out and buy blinds. We've had issues with mice and rats coming in. They wrecked all our stuff in one of the cupboards, we kept a lot of our wedding photos and other photos, and they went in there and chewed them all up.

We're spending more on fuel to get to the shops and work, but driving back and forth, it's added a lot of miles on. I can't drive that far due to my health, so it's just a nightmare, to be honest, I wouldn't have a car if we stayed in [Place A]. Our child is spending £170 a month on taxis to get from their work to the bus stop. They can't take on more hours because there's no way of getting to work. My wife's problems are the same, the bus times mean she has to wait outside for over an hour for her work to open, and she gets a bit scared waiting as it's quiet. The shop in the village shuts early and if you run out of milk you're screwed. My children are away from their friends, they get upset. My oldest child's lost touch with their friends because we're nowhere near them.

The neighbours who have bought their houses don't really speak [to us], They don't like having a homeless house there. I wouldn't like to be living next to a homeless house either, if I'm honest.

The wife doesn't like having visitors because it doesn't feel homely, there's nowhere to sit. It's not a visiting house. With a homeless house, you're not allowed to paint or adapt, not that we would anyway, it's short-term. But it's not home. We don't say we're going home, or home sweet home, we just say that it's a house.

We miss having movie nights as a family. We used to sit and have dinner together, share the day that we'd had, chat, have a laugh, sit in the garden, kick a ball. It doesn't happen anymore. My youngest will no come down and sit on our bed, to them that's weird. It's had a

very big impact. I just hope we get offered something soon, so we can build getting our child better, getting them out the house.

My wife breaks down probably every day over it. She's not the same person she was. She's considered suicide because of what is happening, she said "If I had the guts I would do it, but I've not got the guts, but I'm slowly finding them." I am scared, waking up each day, is this the day she's had enough, is this the day she does it? I don't want to leave her side. It's usually the other way about, cos I have several medical conditions she won't leave me alone for too long.

I've told my youngest and my wife we've got one more move to do, then we'll settle forever... I wouldn't do a private let ever again, for the sheer fact you're not safe. Moving to a forever home would take a lot of stress off, help my younger child, turn the family round. Everything really.

We're just holding off everything because where we're at, we're just not ourselves. We can't do much longer in that house, it's breaking us, I'll be honest with you, it's breaking us. We've lost all hope.

“It makes me feel secure. So, all of that panic and that stress that I went through, it was gone. It's brought me back to life again almost.”

Alex – West Central - lives alone, waited six months

The first private let [when I moved here] was a lovely building, but it was like a lot of tenements, it was so old. It was a traditional build, on the top floor, completely self-contained. I rented that for five years but then the landlady wanted the property back. The reason she gave was that she wanted to move into it herself, but what she actually did was moved in for three months to put a new bathroom and kitchen in, and then sold it.

And so I moved to another one, in a similar area in a similar type of building and I lived there for just over nine years and then the same thing happened again, my landlord wanted the property back to move into himself, which was difficult then because a private rented property was very much more expensive from the end of the lockdown, really. That [cost] wasn't really a problem in itself. I'm not in a position where I can buy a property, but I’m not struggling for money. But the problem was, it created a terrible feeling of insecurity. Because if I were to take another private let, apart from it being more expensive, the problem of insecurity would still be there. You know the private landlord can ask you to leave at any time, as long as they conform with the legal requirements. And I didn't fancy trying to find somewhere else to live when I was in my 70s.

So the only option left open was social housing, so I applied to join the local authority list. After a while I was referred to the homelessness service because, technically, I was going to be homeless. I had nowhere to go.

The effect of that, it was a surprise to me, I was surprised it had such a profound effect on me mentally. The tension that built up in the time between being made homeless and getting the offer, it was about six months, which in the grand scheme of things I don't suppose it's that long really compared to some people who have been on the housing list for years. But by the same token, being homeless for six months, it doesn't feel good at all. You know? It feels terrible. The pressure is terrible, and especially being on your own. Not having anyone to talk to in the sense of someone to kind of commiserate with you or sympathise with you. It was a real pressure.

The anxiety was unbearable. I couldn't sleep some nights. I was walking, pacing the floors at night, wondering what to do, and basically just chewing my fingernails to the bone. I actually experienced physical symptoms. I started to feel, obviously anxiety is the term that you would apply to that, I actually had dizzy spells. I started to feel dizzy, and I had to stop myself thinking about the circumstances because my mind tended to run away with what happens if nothing comes up and I've got to leave this property.

I was so good as a tenant, you know, I mean, I was very diligent to make sure that I didn't misuse the property. I looked after it. I paid rent on time, every month for nine years. And I think that makes you feel worse. It makes you feel as if the world's conspiring against you, sort of thing, and makes you paranoid, have I done something to upset the karma of the universe or something, you know? It was the sense of hopelessness, the sense of having no option, the sense of being trapped in this situation, which was not of my own contrivance.

The local housing office [at the Council], they were great. The guy who was the Housing Officer that I was allocated to was very keen to keep you apprised of things, contact me regularly, told me when he was going to contact me, and he did. He was very concerned about my welfare 'cause he knew my circumstances, but he wasn't able to do anything about the priority at that stage. My landlord issued me with paperwork, a notice to quit, and [this Officer] asked me to send that on to him and he checked it and said that it wasn't correct. So he contacted my landlord on my behalf and said "This paperwork's not right, you're gonna have to change it," and that led to my landlord having to extend the notice period that he gave me.

The Officer had already explained to me [the system], he said "You could be looking at summertime before he gives you an eviction notice, but" he said "when he gives you an eviction notice, you've got to go. There's nothing anybody can do to stop that," he said. You know, he could literally come in while you're out at work, change the locks and that's it. You know, put your stuff out in the garden. You're out on your ear. Well, you know, even thinking about that was so, so much pressure. I was making very basic mistakes at work, and it was causing periods of panic where I literally couldn't think straight.

I put bids on one-bedroom flats 'cause that's what I was entitled to bid for, and there were one of them there was 250 applicants for it, and I came sort of 54 or something like that, which was, you know, better than being at the bottom of the list, but nowhere near the top of the list. There was a development that was for people 60 and over, and I applied for 18 of them and didn't get a single offer. I didn't even come near the top of the list. There was no indication whether I would be successful or not, if I was going to be offered anything or not. And that kind of played on my mind. I thought, well, what chance have I got, if there's all these dozens and dozens of people applying for properties.

The demand for social housing, it's just horrendous. I don't know how the housing associations cope with so many people with such valid reasons for wanting [housing]. There's something like 1,700 people on the homeless list in one local authority area alone, you know? And I just can't imagine how they [the local authority] must feel when they're trying to deal with that. So my sympathies go out to people with that responsibility. By the same token, when you're on the other end of it, you're trying to get somewhere to live, it's very discouraging to think that there are literally thousands of people seeking accommodation.

Mid-month the contact came from the housing association, "Would you be prepared to view this property?" And so I viewed it a week later. It felt an enormous relief when I got to view the place. They offered it to me when I said it was suitable and I got the keys on the end of the month and paid my first month's rent on the 1st of the next month, so it all sort of fell into place quickly and that brought an enormous sense of relief. It's funny, the six months wait doesn't seem as long now, looking back on it, it was worth the struggle and the anxiety and the difficulties with the situation, it's worth going through that because I think I probably appreciate it more. If I got it straight away, I might have been inclined to take it for granted a little bit more. It's still a lot better, though. I'm very, very happy with it.

You should see this place. It's worked out to be brilliant, so I'm very happy with that. The windows are double and triple glazed, it's on a main road with a bus stop, there's a train

station. I've even got a place to store my cardboard before I take it to the recycling centre, you know it's all planned, everything's in its proper place.

Council tax is lower, the rent is a lot less. I'm paying less, nearly £100 a month less, than I was paying when I first moved up here 15 years ago. And, granted, I've only got a one-bedroom and I had two then. But you know, the saving has been so useful.

My old flat was big, but it was very costly to heat. It was a ground floor flat. It had a cellar underneath it, suspended floors and a very ill-fitting door at the back. It really got cold in the cold weather, which meant I had to have the central heating on all the time. So that was costing an arm and a leg. I haven't actually had the central heating on in this building yet.

I'll tell you what makes the big difference, this is a development where everybody's close together and the neighbours talk to each other, and it makes you feel part of a community. When I was buying furniture or looking at furniture, I realised if I got a sofa bed in the living room then I'd have an extra bedroom for when my family come up.

It makes me feel secure. So, all of that panic and that stress that I went through, it was gone. It's brought me back to life again, almost. You know, it's made me feel positive again. Having this place has now restored me to the kind of person that I was before. It's worked out really well, but it's the challenge of getting somewhere, that's the hard part.

You just wouldn't believe the sense of relief. It's palpable. Just to have somewhere secure, because the beauty of a social tenancy is it's a secure tenancy and the only reason you would ever lose that tenancy is if you did something like not pay the rent for a period of time.

This is now my home and I'm here until they carry me out in a box.

“I feel like the flat is now never clean, no matter how much I clean it because I know that there’s mould and there's been bugs as well.”

Mhairi – West Central – lives alone, waiting five years

I’ve been here for four years now, not of my own accord. Basically, the first property I was in was a private rent, because the Council wouldn't rent out to me, and then I became severely unwell, so I moved back to this area to be closer to family. Hence how I ended up moving into this property.

When I first moved in, the property was completely in ruin. There was like holes in the walls and stuff and there was already mould in the property, but they told me “Oh, we’ll fix it’ which they never did. Once I eventually sorted out the whole property, I felt good.

But then I started to notice that there was mould growing on the back of my furniture, in the flooring. I've had to replace my bed four times now. I've had to change my flooring in my bedroom. I've had to actually tile the floor in my living room, it’s just got mould coming through it.

I joined the housing list five years ago, cos when I went with the private, I had my name on the list because it was cheaper than private renting. I actually have had an offer or two, but they've been unsuitable because I also have chronic illness and disability, and basically the last one I was shown like had loads and loads of mould, so I had to say no to that one. One of the lists, I was not a great priority, and then I got an MP involved and then that boosted up my priority quite a lot.

The only thing they seem to do, the repair team, is to come out, wipe it down and then paint over it. A lot of the time, workmen don’t show up. They were maybe meant to come between, say, 12:00 and 1:00, and they wouldn't show up and then they’d say it’s another time. Another time, it’d be like 9:00 o'clock, and nobody showed up. It's gotten to the point that I now can't actually take any more unpaid days off of work to be in for workmen.

I live by myself. I was in a relationship and then we separated. My ex-partner and I were together for 10 years and the stress of this, and with the damage and stuff, I honestly think that that was like the final thing that separated us. I just felt completely alone in that experience. I really kind of withdrew from my friends and family about it because it felt like no one could understand being in this predicament. Like one of my coping mechanisms is kind of isolating. And then I'm isolating in the place that’s causing me distress. I see my flat as my sanctuary and for it to be the kind of thing that is falling apart, it's very difficult.

Everything is happening to me, like against my control. My biggest fear is to kind of be unsettled or ungrounded in any way, and that fear has been at the epicentre of these last few years. Because it's completely ungrounding, to not have somewhere to call your own, to then be subject to family or friends who are putting you up for a couple of nights. None of them have massive flats. I wouldn’t feel comfortable taking up space in their flat with a dog. Or the prospect of having to separate from my dog, that I can't even fathom.

I also have asthma, and I’ve noticed that’s going into a bit of a decline. At certain points I've had constant infections and just a lot of difficulty breathing and wheezing. with my health

condition, one of the main things was stress would trigger it really badly, to cause flare ups. So at certain points, because of the amount of stress the property was actually causing me, I was just flare up, after flare up, after flare up and I'd be hospitalised a lot of the time.

Affordability has become a bit harder now. Last month, by the time everything was paid, all the bills, and I had done a food shop, I had about £30 left to my name and then I don't get paid for weeks. The rent has increased from £310 to £375, all my bills are increasing but the money coming in is roughly the same. After COVID, one-bedroom flats around here doubled in price, so completely out of my budget to move into another one-bed, and I have a dog and stuff, so I didn't really want to be moving into a flat share, and, you know, not a lot of landlords accept pets as well. I do not see myself moving out of here in a flat that isn't social housing, because I just can't afford it and, with the circumstances that I have, I don't think it would be a possibility. And I think it kind of puts down all my eggs into one basket, I guess, which isn't a great feeling to have.

It's just leads to all this stress. You've got stress about the money of having to replace things or the stress of having to fight the housing to get the compensation back. You can submit the forms and then it feels like it takes forever. It's as if they kind of drag their feet. They don't handover the money. And you're sitting there going, "it's not my fault this stuff is ruined."

I think if I didn't have medical needs they would allow me flats, all the way up a tenement, so I could be up on the fourth floor. And that doesn't really bother me. But with the housing associations that I'm with, as soon as you mention you have medical needs or you have like any sort of disability or chronic illness, they only allocate you to ground or first floor, which is really annoying because I'm like well, my disability doesn't impact that, and I could have a second or third floor flat, but they just see it as a blanket thing and that's why I think it's taken as long as it's taken with the priority I have. I spoke to them [the housing associations] and they said "No, that's our policy. We can't have you get medical points and then be looking for like a third floor flat." So I'd have to delete the medical priority and then be kind of put in the general pile, I guess. I feel very unheard and like it's another thing in the system that's actively going against somebody.

I don't feel hopeful of finding a home as your whole ability to move is based on your priority, which isn't very good as your circumstances can change constantly, but then it takes them forever to review it [your priority]. I submitted stuff to review my priority over 28 days ago and it should have been assessed, but they've not assessed it.

I speak to my Housing Officer once every two weeks now. Just 'cause I'm constantly having to try and find out if they've actually updated or reviewed my application yet, everything's still live. I feel ignored, as if they don't want to give an answer. They just repeat and repeat "They don't know when properties are going to come up. They don't know when it's going to be available." I think it's just kind of a waiting game still.

I'm in the area I want to be in terms of getting to my family and then also, in terms of like my health, just trying to move GPs and doctors is not particularly great. My chances of getting a home are very, very slim. I've been fighting with this housing for four years and I still don't seem to have gotten anywhere. I have involved my local councillor, but that hasn't gotten me anywhere either.

After a long day at work, you're meant to look forward to coming home and then I just sit and think, I'm not coming back to a nice home, I'm coming back to a home that no matter how I clean it, it feels dirty. Every time I turn around and I can either see a bug or something that's been damaged. I don't invite people outside of family into my flat usually. It's one of those ones that becomes stuck in my head, I feel like the flat is now never clean, no matter how much I clean it because I know that there's mould and there's been bugs as well.

If I ever wanted to start a family, I wouldn't start it any time soon, just because of this flat. I'm at a point where I'm just trying to save as much money as I can. Unless someone comes out of the woodwork and hands me a private let that's within my budget, I think social housing is the only possibility for me. I've been trying to keep positive, like the next one will be it, but there's no guarantee.

If I got a home, it would remove a lot of stress and take a lot of pressure off. It would feel like a massive weight off my shoulders, essentially. I think I would actually start living my life again. Like, I don't think I've even realised how much my life's been on hold these last few years and how it's just taken up so much brain space in the back of my head. That I can just live normally again, knowing that I have a safe place to live. I can have friends over. I think all my relationships will improve because I won't be so annoyed or irritable all the time. I'll be able to have people round. I think it would impact every single part of my life. I think even health-wise I would improve, mental health wise it would improve.

People maybe know how important a home is to someone, but I don't think they really know how it affects literally every single aspect of your life when the possibility of it is taken away from you, or you're in a dangerous living situation.

“It’s back to normal family life.”

Isla – Tayside and North East - lives with partner and child, waited six months

We went private rent, but it turned out to be really quite bad. The flat wasn't expensive. it was actually cheap, which now I look back I can see why it was. They had old style heating, there was no gas, it was all electric heating, but it had an old style meter in there which was costing us nearly £70 a week just to have like a halogen heater on. It was so damp and it was just really quite bad condition up there. In the winter months, you couldn't heat the home at all, you had condensation running down the walls. There was mould growing places and stuff. It was just really bad.

Both me and my partner were at our wit’s end with it to be honest. It took a toll on most things to be honest, everything when we lived up there. It was like, we just didn’t see the point. My partner, he had to take some time off work as well with stress last year. I think we were all feeling a bit helpless and hopeless with our previous flat. And then I think my child had quite a bad allergy. I had to take them to the doctors at one point because their breathing, got so bad with the mould that was growing on the walls. [The old flat had a] really bad impact, it’s actually lasted quite a while, even into this year. Getting this house obviously helped a little bit but it set me back.

I was in that house for maybe about a year and a half, but I waited about six months before I applied for social housing. I didn’t really get told much about the chances of it because I don't think I really spoke to anybody. It was all online.

You had to go on and any house that was like, suitable for your circumstances, you were able to bid on them. And to be honest, at first I thought it was going to be a lost cause because there was 200 odd bids for houses, before I'd even got a chance. But I kept on bidding anyway.

When you would go on there would sometimes be like no houses in the area that you could bid on. And sometimes you would see ones, I knew I wasn't gonna get like a garden and stuff like that. I knew that that would probably be more prioritised to people with like younger families because my child’s a bit older, so I didn’t think I was going to get some of the houses that came on.

And then I got an e-mail saying that I'd been shortlisted, which is when I got this one. It was one of the highlights of last year when I got the e-mail. I wasn't expecting that, so it was more a surprise as I hadn't been shortlisted for any of the houses, so I was quite excited.

Now that we’re settled down and we've got everything away and getting it the way we want it, we can decorate and stuff, it feels more like home. It's a million times better. It's quiet and the neighbours just keep themselves to themselves and the house is much different.

It's warm, it's not got any mould growing and it's more suitable for the three of us, to be honest. It’s gas central heating here, so we’re warm, never freezing, and it's much cheaper. I think I hardly ever need to put electricity in and when I do it's not too much, it will last a while and stuff. It doesn't feel like you’re just working to keep your house with electricity on. That's the way we felt in our previous house, you would sometimes be putting up to £100 a week

just to keep the lights on. And it wasn't getting any warmer. Whereas now that's not the case. Someone who works within the housing they came out and told us, like, some of the stuff that I didn't know was available for some of the welfare we've been able to get. So that changed a few things financially for us as well.

Mental health, everyone's back to their old self. My partner is now working full time again. I just feel happier, now that we're here, everything has evened itself out again, we're happier.

It's made a massive difference to everyone. We can live life again rather than we were all quite stressed before in more than one way. It definitely feels like life picked back up, that you can just carry on with a normal life again. I go to work, my partner goes to work and my child goes to school and it's back to normal family life. It's not every day: stress.

“There’s very little security in life.”

Shirley – Capital - single mother, waiting six months

A year and a half ago, my husband walked out on us. We're still in the house. I can't afford to pay what’s left on the mortgage. I have to put the house on the market. I have to sell the house and, while there is some equity in the house, it's not enough for me to buy another property. So I've been to the Council and they've basically said you're not homeless.

I can't afford private rent. Private rent, the minimum I found for a two-bedroom flat is £800 a month. That's a mortgage. I think, do I rent for a year? But that rent money is eating into whatever money I have to buy a place. The thing with renting as well, it's not secure, the landlord could say, “Oh, I'm selling the place. You need to find somewhere else.” They can put the rent up anytime they want, you know, and if the boiler doesn't work or there's a leak or something, are they gonna come and fix it?

I joined the housing list about six months ago. When I joined, the officer said “I'm not going to mince my words, it's a long waiting list” and she advised not to make myself homeless because we would be put in some kind of halfway thing until a house came up, and the list was very long.

Yesterday, somebody came to see the house and they're putting an offer in so that, to me, that is, I'm getting closer to being homeless. I don't worry for myself, but I worry for my child. I worry that they'll actually be taken away from me.

I’m trying to keep my child in the area, for their clubs and schooling. Any change to them is really, it's so hard for them to cope with change. I have to do something, and I'm trying so hard to be proactive about it, but everything’s like a barrier. When you don't have a choice, it's difficult.

It affects my medical condition, too. Stress, it can be a bit of a trigger for me, which then causes me intense pain. There's other triggers, but if I get stressed over certain things it doesn't help.

It's really difficult for me to decide what to do. It really is. Do I go away or do I stay here. I need to stay here because my child has got another year at school and I need to keep them in school, for education, for as long as possible. So the next steps are, I think, trying to find something either a one-bedroom that I can afford, but the rent is ridiculously expensive and it just eats into whatever savings I've got, which I can't afford to do. I could go between my dad’s tiny flat, over an hour from here, and my friend, although she hasn't got the room for me to sleep. I could sleep in my car rather than going backwards and forwards to my dad’s and my child’s school. And so the third option is I, see I'm looking at the housing market, is if I can find a decent doer upper, that's on a nice little street or something like that, then maybe I'll go down that route and just slowly do it up. It's a roof over the head.

The life of my mum and dad, the dream was always to own your own home, but even that is not always a good thing now. Nobody has a job for life. Your job isn't secure.

It doesn't make sense, I have money. I can pay the rent. I've worked all my life, paid my taxes, and they're going to make me, you know, a sofa surfer or something with my child, who needs

stability. I'm trying to keep my head above water with what I have, you know. How do they expect people to support their country when they can't support the people with simple things like housing?

When I was told there were thousands of people waiting for a house I thought “Surely not?” I’ve always been fortunate to have a mortgage, how can thousands of people be waiting, how did it get in this state? Like I say, I, I don't know it, because I've only recently come on to the social housing kind of platform and I had no idea that it was in such a bad way. The beat on the street, if you like, and I'm not saying this is me because I don't know enough about it, but they’re saying they let the immigrants in, and the immigrants are taking the houses.

And I never thought I’d be in this situation, I never ever imagined it. When I got into this situation, it was genuinely because I had no control over it. I've never felt so helpless.

Because your house is your base, it affects your whole life. It affects your work. It affects your children's mental health. It affects your mental health. It affects everything physically. Home is where the heart is for me. If you have that stability, everything else becomes stable. But when you have the foundation get rocked, you're going to rock and everything else around you, my kid, the school, the mental health, everything. But I'm trying to keep a lid on everything all the time, it's a hard juggling act, there's no goal to work towards. With the housing list, there's no stages. There’s thousands of people in front of you, that can take 10 years, that can take forever.

You do want to move on and meet new people, but I don't feel I've got any grounds or scope to do so.

To sum up the impact of the situation that I'm in, there is the mental strain. There's no getting away from it. You can't run away from the fact that you might be homeless. You can't run away from the fact that you need to find somewhere to stay.

There's very little security in life. Some people get it, but then look at my situation. I've never had a Council house, never had a housing association house, always fended for myself and paid for my own accommodation and been married for 20 years and he's left me, and this is the situation I'm in. I was secure, and now I’m not.

“I think I jumped into it too quickly because I wanted out of my mum’s house.”

Lisa - Tayside and North East - single mother, waited three years

It's just me and my child. I found out I was pregnant at six months. Everything came at once and I had to apply for my own house. I used to stay, before I moved here, with my mum and dad in their house. [I’ve gone from] being with them [my parents] all the time to seeing them twice a week. But there just wasn't really enough space for us all in the house. It's only a short drive, but it's a fair distance when you'd rather be closer to family, and my child’s still at nursery beside my mum. I’m up and down to take him to nursery and that's obviously taking an effect because the price of fuel’s ridiculous at the moment. I'm hoping to move back, for convenience. I think I would have been better waiting for something closer. I’d had enough waiting; I think I jumped into it too quickly because I wanted out of my mum’s house.

I did try and go private but the prices that people were wanting for rent were ridiculous. So then I had to wait for social housing, and I was pushed back again because there was no housing. To have your own space, your own way, completely different because it's your own taste, like decorating and stuff like that. It is a big relief when you first get some place. The wait it does end, but it’s more the frustration of waiting so long.

I was classed as having no priority to start with because I was housed with my mum and her house is bought, so really she could choose how many people live there. But that doesn’t help my situation, so then I had to get a doctor's note and stuff to explain that it wasn't healthy, something needed to be done, so my priority did change, [but] it took a while for anything to be done about it. it was obviously quicker, but it still felt like a lifetime to wait.

It was more just the arguments, [that took a] detrimental effect on both of our mental health. My mum suffers long-term from medical problems, so the stress on her wasn't great, but it was just more, I felt like I had no space to breathe because you're living under somebody else's roof. My wee child, if I got them in trouble for something, grandparents don't get them in trouble. That then caused more issues than what was necessary, but then you feel like you're all stuck together all the time, so you don't have the ability to just walk away. My little one also has health problems, they were constantly unwell, which you then felt was making my mum unwell, so I didn’t want that, but there was nothing more we can do other than wait. I ended up staying with my friend two days a week, but we argue at the best of times.

And my wee one needed more space to be able to play and grow, they needed their own room. They always had to spend time in the same room with me. And every time I went to bed, it woke them up.

When I spoke to the Council, I was told I was high priority because I was pregnant and that it would be within the next few months, and then I was told that there was no housing available. I just kept getting pushed back and pushed back. Years later, and still no further forward. And then every time you spoke to somebody new, it was a different answer you got. So at one point they told me I was first in line and then the next time I spoke to somebody, I was 15th in line. I understand other people, if you have a higher priority, but they can't tell you like a rough time of how long it'll be till you get a house and then that changes, but drastically

by another year. Every time you thought you were getting somewhere, you were pushed back again.

It was just the stress that put you under. You can think you're getting somewhere, and then it's another set back. I think I phoned up every month or so just to find out and used to get told "You could add on more areas." But then you add on more areas and it's no different, because there's still no houses available.

If I could take my house and move it closer, I would be more than happy, but that can't happen. I was really happy when I first took the house, didn't think anything of the distance. Everything was fine, but feeling like you're not listening to, like when you phone and report a repair and it's not dealt with. I've had nothing but problems since I moved. And then being away from your family. I feel like it really does take a toll on you and it's just me and my little one, so there's nobody for me to turn to up here. I've never stayed on my own with my wee one until now. It was a very big change. I always had my mum and dad to turn to. Whereas now you just you've got to stay on your own. I think that's a big change, a big shock to your system. And then, because my wee one was so unexpected as well, I think that took a toll, it changes everything.

I've been trying to get swaps back down but because my house wouldn't be suitable for any more than like a couple and one child, that would put people off and then a lot of people don't want stairs, they want something that's all on one level. It's difficult trying to get a swap. I will keep trying, I will figure something out, but how long is that then going to take.

I know like every housing association, every Council will be the same. They don't have enough houses for the amount of people on their waiting lists, but the better management would be to not give people hope, that it's not gonna be that long, and then you're waiting, as I did. I know people wait much longer but as a single parent being confined, to feeling like you don't have your own space, you can't have your own life because you do stay with your parents still, and then you get this like glimmer of hope that it's not going to be that long and you'll have your own space and be able to just build that life of your own. And then you're waiting again. It's just the frustration, really.

“I feel for families waiting for large homes who are overcrowded, it doesn't make sense that we’re trying to move out of this one when they are waiting.”

Emma – Tayside and North East – lives with dad, waiting years

We're looking for like a small house, that’s, easy to keep clean and stuff, a bungalow with space for our pets. The stairs here are hard to manage for my dad. There’re so many stairs, he might fall down them. We’re also having a bunch of issues with the neighbours at the moment, so it’s too frightening to get out the house at the moment. Every time I try to get out, I keep getting panic attacks. Then my dad can't get out, 'cause I have to go out with my dad outside. I had anxiety before but it’s got worse. It gets worse with the neighbour. It makes me feel stressed and depressed, depressed and sometimes maybe suicidal. So it's really bad. And my dad gets that stressed out that it gets bad, he has to get an ambulance out.

We can’t decorate, we’ve not got time, when people come to the house and it's not decorated, you get “Oh, why is it not decorated” and stuff like that. With some of the repairs that’s needing done, we need plaster boarding and stuff fixed before we could decorate. We can’t afford to buy fancy new carpets like everybody else. There’s just so little time and you can't get everything done overnight. And I've just thought to myself, well, if I'm gonna move in the future, what's the point. We both don’t like people coming into the house and stuff for repairs.

I’ve been on the council [housing list] for years and the other one [a housing association] for maybe a year, or year and a half. I'm not quite sure how long that was. We've had support from the council support officer that filled one [form] in online over the phone and she showed us how to apply for one of them online. I’ve bid on four or five [homes], I’ve never gotten any of them. I have a look every week, sometimes every day to have a nosy.

My dad's 55. He can't get a mortgage now due to his age, we've tried all that. We've been to the mortgage adviser to see if we could get a joint mortgage. But because of my dad’s age, it would only be against me. So you know, we've tried all those different beats as well and it's just not happening.

I feel for families waiting for large homes who are overcrowded, it doesn't make sense that we’re trying to move out of this one when they are waiting. We've got a spare room that I just use like a junk room. We’ve got rooms that we don’t use. You know there should be families that are using that house, and it would make it better for the families and a nicer way for a family to live.

It’s a big house and it's dusty and dirty. Moving, the heating cost, that might be a lot cheaper 'cause you won't have to keep topping up your gas quite as much and the electricity bills would be lower.

I've stayed in the same property since I was one-year-old. We don't have a garden area. It's all shared between nine blocks in the street, so you know any areas all get shared. There's nothing that you know you can class as your own. I just think, well, why shouldn't we be for us as well, because our mental health has been very affected recently as well. So why shouldn't

we be able to just open the door, go out into our own garden and not have to worry about who's maybe going to come to your door?

You hear somebody say, “Oh, you know, such and such social worker fought for them and they got this.” And I'm like, so how does it not happen for us? Do you know what I mean? You think of all these things that goes around your head and you think so why can that happen for them but not happen for us?

Recently there's been quite a few people that I know personally have gotten flats and the houses up in the new bit but I see where the criteria meets, 'cause I seem to be the only one that works. I can see where the divide is there, but I don't think you know it's not fair, just because we're working class people, doesn't mean to say that we shouldn't be entitled to a social housing property.

I did ask at one point, what about if we both just gave up for a job? We've actually contemplated it. That's how serious we were about it. If we gave up our job and got benefits, would that help us? And they just laughed. And I said no, I'm being serious. Like, this is how much it is impacting us, if we go and give up our wages, would you be able to house us quicker? And they just couldn’t answer that question.

I understand that if you're downsizing, you're not gonna maybe get the best property. But you know, I'm willing to understand that. It's just been a lost cause, the twilight zone. But other times a relief because this is the family home and I’d be sad to leave it. I feel very let down.

A move would, well, it would free up money, you know, financially it would help. For somebody with mental health and physical health problems, that could be over the counter medications. So it would free up finances, which would be a big help. Maybe a quieter life, because the neighbours would be more respectful.

“It’s just good to have my own space.”

Jenna – Tayside and North East – single mother, waited five years

I was in a two-bedroom flat before, so my child obviously needed their own room, being a teenager, and me and my younger child were sharing a room, so it just wasn't ideal really, to have in one bedroom. Dogs, me and my son at nighttime.

I applied five years ago. I expected the wait. It was more when you see houses being built and stuff and you thought, “Oh, great, maybe I'll have a chance of this,” the disappointment of that every time.

My room, as you can imagine was jam packed with stuff. All my child’s toys, their clothes, my clothes, was just everything. It was just chaos, to be honest. It's overwhelming. I just hate it. I've actually got, like, depression, anxiety that I take medication for everyday that makes me even worse. That makes me just want to go and sleep rather than deal with any of this. If there's too much going on, I don't like it.

I had things that I had to try and sell and get rid of. I did a car boot sale because I needed to get rid of stuff because I needed the extra storage space. I didn’t really want to get rid of it, but I had to because I needed the storage space.

So I was in [place] before, so there was lots of brand new like semis and flats all got built just on my doorstep. And I was like, “Oh, I hope I get one of them.” When I applied for them all, I was a bit disappointed when I got the e-mail to say like, “No, you're not getting one.” It's my own fault for building myself up to something. It was quite horrible. But it is what it is, eh. I tried not to get too disappointed about it because it was like, well, I'll get something eventually.

When I got accepted for this flat, I didn't expect to get a yes on this either. So I was quite surprised. I was really hoping that I got a semi you know with my own garden for the dog and the kids and for myself to sit out in the sun and stuff, I mean, that's just what everybody wants, isn't it? But I didn't expect that as such. Like, I was happy to get whatever. So when I applied for this, I was like, do I really want to live in there 'cause I don't know what they look like inside. But then when I seen it, I was like, this is just as good as if not even better than having a semi.

To start off, I was a bit like “Oh wow, this is massive compared to what I had,” but it's so much better. The only thing that would make this house like 100% perfect would be having my own garden, you know. It's got so much storage space.

I know it's actually daft cause I've only been in it really for a short time, but I feel like I'm a lot less stressed. Like I went into the kitchen this morning and it's tidy. You know, there's not stuff everywhere, like because everything's got a place now there. There's loads of cupboards for everything to go in. I've not got unnecessary crap lying everywhere.

Everybody is just a lot more happier, I think, in this house already. My child said this morning that they’re really happy and this is the best house ever.

My child is so excited because they got given a present for their birthday and it's still in the box because there was nowhere to actually set it up for them but their dad's going to set it up for them today, stuff that there was no room for before.

Even if I'm having a bad day, I can go into my room and get myself 5 minutes. Whereas before, it's me and my child's room, you know, so they could be in there, it's just good to have my own space. Last night, I was up a bit later because I've got a nice living room that I could chill, there's just my sofa and the TV, just stuff that needs to be in a living room, not loads of toys piled up and loads of other stuff. So I already feel that I am a lot happier. Obviously I've got tablets and stuff, so that helps too, but I do feel like I'm not as angry all the time as what I was before.

My child has had friends over as well, whereas in the old place, well, I say they could have had friends, but they didn't really have people over. But they've already had a couple of their friends over here.

The service charge before was £8, but it wasn't really a good service...Whereas when I come over to this one, it is £40 extra. However, there is a guy going about cleaning every day, cutting the grass, and everything's all like up-to-date. You can tell what you're paying for, you can tell the difference.

It's great. I love it.

“I dread coming home because I never know what's gonna happen and the anxiety levels go through the roof because of it.”

Maureen – Central - lives alone, waiting seven years

I moved here when I became homeless, due to divorce. I accepted the first property I was given because I didn't understand my actual choices. If I had known, I would have said no to my current property. I was naive and thinking that my local society would have my interests at heart.

When I stepped in the house, my heart sank when I saw the look of it. I've never seen a Council house in such poor condition. I moved from a lovely, decorated house, decorated by the previous tenant, and I've never seen a Council house in such bad repair. I grew up in a Council house and it was in a reasonable state of repair, not like this. There is a lack of light within the flat. It also doesn't have any garden space, which means that you don't really have anywhere to go out to actually get some sun, and when you don’t get a bit of sun, you do get a bit down and depressed.

There’s a major problem with the windows, the windows are all rotted and they're not going to be replaced for years. I don't know how many years. It will be eventually replaced, we've been told they're going to replace all the high rise blocks and we don't know where in that pecking order we are. The seals have gone, and it lets air in. It got to the stage where I wasn't able to close my windows. They were open in winter and summer, which was not good, I mean, even my washing up liquid was freezing. I had them closed by a joiner, so now I can't open them at all, but at least I'm not freezing.

I cycled through despair for years. I thought “I'm never gonna be able to move from here,” and then I thought, “Well, yes, I'm gonna move to another area.” And that’s the stage I’m in now.

I have been phoning back and forth over the last few years, but it was actually due to circumstances beyond my control that I have been now in contact with the Council and it was due to upstairs harassment. I mean, even having this phone call, they may be able to hear me, and it could get worse. We, my neighbours and I, went to the police with photographic evidence, 'cause my child installed a camera for me, and the police did nothing. The environmental health team will not touch it with a bargepole because they think it's me that's the problem.

Putting up with it for over a year would test anybody's tenacity and willingness to be alive. I dread coming home because I never know what's gonna happen and the anxiety levels go through the roof because of it. I have to go out to the shopping mall to get peace and quiet. I do not complain about anything, I get on with it. It's what I've always done but there comes a point where you need help and when you don't get it, you suffer. It's not of my making. That's what I'm saying. This is not of my making. I know I can't cope much longer.

There isn’t a lot of information about allocations for tenants. You’re literally just told to fill out a form, and you then send it back and they grade it. They sent a letter saying “You’re on the list, if anything changes, we’re let you know.” They do not keep you informed at all. Trying to speak to somebody on the phone is a pointless task. It’s as quick as they can get you off the

phone. It seems to be that there is a stereotype [of people] that live in Council houses and I was being treated according to that stereotype, and discriminated against. Their own Charter says we will listen to you, we will respect you, and that, frankly, is not happening. What I wanted to hear was "You are being taken seriously. We are listening to you. We will put those points down."

It's not as if I haven't tried every strategy in the book. I don't have a choice. That's the issue. That makes me feel inadequate, the fact that I don't have a choice. Helpless. Not worth anything. And when you do not have a choice, you then realise how stuck you are and you are stuck and that nobody will listen, nobody's prepared to listen.

I've been told you have to have a certain level of priority to get a bungalow. I have to get a wheelchair before I can go up [in priority], and I go "Actually, you know what? I could jump in front of a bus. I could knock my legs out, then they'll have to give me [a bungalow]." It is ridiculous. But that's the scenario at the end of the day. I'm not stupid enough to do that, but that would be an option, which is more than what I have just now. But how do they create that criteria, that's what I would want to know, how do you create that criteria?

I have extreme anxiety and depression, my physical health has deteriorated because of that as well. So I am struggling and I am aware I'm struggling, I'm just hanging on basically. That has been noticed by my friends, because I was always a very bubbly person, outdoorsy, but they've said I've become very quiet, and I don't come out as often either. They've said you're ill more often now, which is absolutely true. I take sleeping tablets and have to wear ear plugs, just to try and sleep. I'm ready to jump off the nearest bridge.

My life is on hold. I don't feel like I'm part of society.

"I thought I misheard him, semi-detached bungalow, I could nae believe it, I'm getting offered a semi-detached bungalow, it was just beyond."

Silvia – Central – lives alone, waited for eight months

I lived in my flat for three and a half years. I was very happy for two years until a couple moved in. They were fighting constantly. They were on the top floor, and the woman that was on the ground floor was being woken with them during the night. That's how loud their arguments and fights were. One day they actually went and walked around the whole building outside, screaming and shouting at each other, so the entire street heard them. It was awful. You just, you, to be honest, God, you do just want to cry all the time because of it.

I had weekends where I got very little sleep because of the two of them. You were constantly on edge. You couldn't relax because you didn't know what was going to happen next with them. Because it was every single day. There was doors being slammed, windows being slammed. And because of the layout of the building, when they were slamming the doors, the effect that it had, it actually felt as though my couch was moving. I was getting my kitchen window banged, my car had the screen smashed. Going out, I was in fear of things happening. I keep telling myself I'm away from it now, but it's still there, if you know what I mean.

I was so tired and drained that I couldn't focus properly [at work]. I suppose I'm really lucky that I've got an employer that was very understanding of it all. Everything's just a blur because I was just in a state of fear and uptight. It affected my mental health. I had to get my medication put up. I started Cognitive Behaviour Therapy. I just felt trapped.

I applied to one list, they offered me a house and it was so built up, so boxed in and it was just concrete, and I thought, well, I'd go backwards if I took this. So they said I couldn't reapply if I refused that. So that's when I applied to more housing lists.

It was constantly on my mind, I was constantly checking, daily, the housing associations' websites for availability and I just had to hold on. I just lived in hope, but I didn't think I would get it as quick as I did.

I didn't realise the housing association was nationwide, so when I jumped in daily or whatever to check I thought, "Oh, there's a semi-detached bungalow, oh, single [applicant]," it never registered, "I'll just bid for it." And then I get the phone call the next month saying "Are you still interested?" I thought I misheard him, semi-detached bungalow, I could nae believe it, I'm getting offered a semi-detached bungalow, it was just beyond. I felt it was beyond my reach ever to have. I was delighted, absolutely delighted. I signed the next day and moved in the following Tuesday. I was numb, it happened so quickly. Even now, it still doesn't feel real.

The day that I actually got the keys, that was, well, I'm getting away from it. Life's going to get better. And the first night I've been here and just getting a really good night's sleep. With no noise waking me in the middle of the night, no doors slamming, dogs barking, it was just great. Just being happy again, being relaxed, being able to smile. Just like to come home at the end of the day, knowing that I can come in and just sit down and watch TV and relax and it's mine.

I was shocked at the size of it. It's so much bigger than I've ever had. And I've got a kitchen on its own instead of it being a kitchen and living room, and I still I can't get my head round that one. I've now got a garden that me and the dog can go and sit in, for one. I couldn't have asked for more. Never in my wildest dreams, I never, ever thought I'd get the garden for the dog. So I'm delighted.

Home has meant getting my independence and my freedom back, not having the fear of leaving my house. See when you've got something taken away from you, and it's other people that have caused that, and now I'm free.

Methods

Overview

The research consisted of three main parts:

1. Background research.
2. Interviews and focus groups with people waiting and staff.
3. A survey of local authority or housing association staff.

1. Background research

This consisted of:

- A literature review of key research around experiences of waiting for social housing, staff working within housing associations and local authorities and the impact of not having social housing (i.e. the counterfactual, such as living in temporary accommodation, private rented housing, or being overcrowded).
- Descriptive analytics of national statistics on housing demand, supply, and need, such as data on overcrowding and disrepair from the Scottish House Condition Survey.
- The legal, regulatory and policy framework around allocation of social housing in Scotland, to thoroughly frame the context of the research.

This background was used to develop our sample criteria for the primary research and draft research tools (topic guides for interviews and diary survey).

2. Interviews and focus groups with those waiting and housing staff

To provide the depth of insight needed into what it is like waiting for social housing and how staff find managing allocations, we undertook interviews with people waiting, interviews and focus groups with staff, and a survey of local authority and housing association staff.

We interviewed:

- 20 people waiting for social housing,
- 10 people who have been allocated social housing within the last year, which included exploration of what it was like waiting, and
- 20 housing associations or local authorities managing housing demand, speaking to staff directly employed in managing housing lists, allocations, or with operational oversight of this. In total, 31 people took part in these interviews or focus groups.

3. National survey of staff working on applications and allocations for housing

Once the interviews were completed, we conducted a survey of housing association and local authority staff, which received 274 responses, the findings of which will be published alongside the interview/focus group findings at a later date. We felt the survey was important, given the lack of research on staff experiences.

Sample composition for households waiting

We identified the key criteria for those waiting for social housing from national statistics and used purposive sampling to ensure our sample broadly reflects the population and geography. This included:

- Local authority cluster area (based on Dunning et al., 2020)[37].
- Type of housing need (reasonable preference groups - homeless households, unsatisfactory housing conditions, under-occupiers – and those groups in housing need that are not in a reasonable preference group, such as those living in unsuitable accommodation).
- Key demographics – such as age, ethnicity, household composition.
- Whether a transfer or new household, and
- Length of time on waiting list.

We recruited for the research through open recruitment via social landlords, through direct emails and social media adverts, and adverts on choice-based lettings systems. People who were interested in taking part in an interview were screened using the following questions:

- Is the home for you alone or do you have a family?
- Which local authority area are you looking in?
- Why are you on the housing list? How long have you been on there for?

Interviews were undertaken over the phone and people taking part were offered a gift voucher to thank them for their time.

We spoke to 30 people from across Scotland, aged from their 20s to their 60s, who had been waiting from two months minimum to 14 years maximum. The final sample achieved is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1 Details of sample achieved for household interviews

Sample criteria	Category	Count
Location	Capital	5
	Central	3
	Highlands, Islands and West	2
	Tayside and North East	12
	West Central	8

[37] Dunning, R., Ferrari, E., Hoolachan, J., Keskin, B. Moore, T., O'Brien, P. and Powell, R. (2020) Affordable Housing Need in Scotland Post-2021. Published by Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA), Shelter Scotland and the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) Scotland

Sample criteria	Category	Count
Sex	Female	24
	Male	6
Living situation	Family (dependent and non-dependent child/ren)	20
	Lives alone	9
	Partner	1
Type of allocation (more than one type per household if on housing lists with different systems)	Choice-based letting	19
	Direct let	13
Nationality	Scottish	26
	Other	4
Previous living situation	Transfer from social housing	18
	New to social housing	12

The research was conducted ethically, using information sheets, informed consent, and safeguarding measures to ensure that people knew what they were participating in, and preventing harm from participation. We also published a bespoke privacy notice for the research, outlining how Altair would handle data. We checked safeguarding concerns with participants and followed up with some on information or support that might help.

Data was analysed for thematic narratives, using Framework Method in Excel.[38] This included reordering transcripts from the sequence of the interviews to check for data saturation and identifying key themes and suitable, composite case studies. To limit direct and indirect identification of participants, case studies removed references to locations, sex of children, numbers of children, and age. To protect identity and for brevity, case studies may be made up of quotes from more than one interview.

Limitations

Recruitment and interviews were done in English, which may have affected participation of those who don't speak English as a first language.

[38] Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J. (2003) Qualitative research practice: a guide for social science students and researchers. London: Sage.

Adverts through choice-based lettings systems would have only been seen by those who were actively bidding.

The open recruitment and offer of a gift voucher led to a lot of false enquiries about participating in the research, which were responded to with the screening questions above. The level of email spamming around participation enquiries may have meant that genuine participants were not responded to.

Helpful resources

If you are experiencing something similar to the stories we have shared in this report, then you may find help from some of the resources below.

If you are suffering mental ill health

Contact your local doctor, or you can access support, including confidential, online wellbeing support and community-based support from SAMH (Scottish Action for Mental Health).

If you are facing homelessness

If you are facing homelessness, contact your local council for advice and support. You can also access help and advice through Shelter Scotland and Crisis.

Problems with your current home (social housing)

In the first instance, contact your Housing Officer or landlord to try to resolve the issue(s). If this does not resolve the issue(s), then there are further steps you can take:

1. Make a formal complaint by letter or email.
2. If this doesn't resolve the problem, or you are unhappy with their response, then you can ask for their final response.
3. Once you have completed these steps, if the situation is ongoing or you are still unhappy with the resolution, contact the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. If the problem affects more than one tenant, you can make a group complaint to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

You can find more information, including more sources of help and template letters, on Shelter Scotland's website.

Problems with your current home (private renting)

In the first instance, contact your landlord to try to resolve the issue(s). If this does not resolve the issue(s), then there are further steps you can take:

1. Make a formal complaint by letter or email.
2. If this doesn't resolve the problem, or you are unhappy with their response, then you can report them to your local council or the First-tier Tribunal (Housing and Property Chamber).

You can find more information, including more sources of help and template letters, on Shelter Scotland's website.

Problems with your neighbours

Should the problem relate to anti-social behaviour, Citizen's Advice have more detail on steps to resolve anti-social behaviour on their website, including mediation services, talking

to your landlord, and complaining to the council and the police. If the problem relates to noise, you can find more information on the website for Environmental Protection Scotland.

Speak to your local councillor, Member of Parliament and/or Member of Scottish Parliament

Sharing your story with politicians helps them to understand the scale of the housing emergency facing their area, and how citizens are affected.

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