# Sustainable Solutions to Homelessness : the Scottish Case

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❯ **Abstract_** *In the post-1997 period of devolved government to Scotland, both housing and homelessness have been high on the policy agenda. A Homelessness Task Force reviewed longstanding homelessness policy and legislation. The Scottish Executive fully accepted the recommendations of the Task Force and instigated an implementation programme to 2012, by which time there would be a duty on local authorities to ensure housing for all homeless households. This target, and the broader strategy for tackling and preventing homelessness, was held up as an exemplar for the rest of Europe. Five years into a ten year programme, this paper will examine progress on implementation and consider the potential for policy transfer with reference to other European countries. The paper will summarise the process of policy review and the key recommendations of the Homelessness Task Force which reported in 2002. It will then examine the legislative and other policy instruments adopted to ensure implementation, prior to assessing progress and the mechanisms in place to monitor and evaluate outcomes. Finally, the paper will raise some questions with regard to possible lessons for other countries seeking to tackle homelessness. Conclusions will reflect on the sustainability and transferability of the Scottish approach to homelessness and whether Scotland might also learn from its European neighbours[1].*

❯ **Key Words_** *homelessness, policy review, policy transfer*

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## Introduction

The post-2000 framework for tackling homelessness in Scotland attracted national and international attention from an early stage. Fitzpatrick (2004) provided a comprehensive analysis of the process of policy review (1999-2002) and early implementation (2000-2003/4) concluding that the distinctively Scottish agenda was both 'very ambitious' and 'radically different' from that of its English neighbour. A range of factors, including consensus across political parties and housing interest groups, as well as a high degree of commitment from Ministers and government in a recently created Scottish Parliament resulted in a significant overhaul of a framework which had been largely unchanged since its introduction in 1977. Goodlad (2005, p.86) examined the new framework in terms of its contribution to social justice in Scotland, noting that:

> 'On 6 November 2003 the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions
> (COHRE, an international Human Rights NGO) awarded the Housing Rights
> Protector Award to the Scottish Executive for its homelessness legislation
> in recognition of its contribution to protecting human rights and safe-
> guarding human dignity'.

Such an accolade, along with wider dissemination through European housing research and practice networks, undoubtedly contributed to the elevation of the new Scottish homelessness framework as some kind of exemplar for the rest of the European Union. However, only time would tell if the implementation of the new framework could live up to these high expectations. After summarising the evolution and approach of the Scottish framework, this paper seeks to provide an updated assessment of progress at the half-way stage of a ten year implementation programme. It then raises some questions about the possibilities for policy transfer and cross-national policy learning from the Scottish experience.

## Policy Review and Recommendations:
## The Homelessness Task Force (1999-2002)

This analysis covers the period 1999-2007, during which the Labour/Liberal Democrat coalition of the newly created Scottish Parliament undertook a major review of homelessness legislation which had been in place, largely unchanged, since 1977. Established in 1999, the Scottish Parliament was a creation of the UK Parliament at Westminster as part of the New Labour devolution programme. It has jurisdiction over all policy areas except for those 'reserved' as UK level matters: for example defence, immigration, the national economy and taxation/benefits.

Consequently, the Scottish Parliament has powers over policy and legislation in housing as well as social work, health, education and social justice. The first two administrations of the Scottish Parliament were New Labour/Liberal democrat coalitions. Arguably, however, the policy programme which developed on housing and homelessness, up to the elections in May 2007, was very much a New Labour initiative, with all relevant Ministers coming from the New Labour part of the coalition (see Kintrea, 2006, for a full discussion of housing policy review in Scotland post-devolution). The May 2007 election was narrowly won by the Scottish National Party which subsequently formed a minority Scottish Government and the implications of this political change are considered towards the end of this paper.

The legal and policy framework for homelessness which existed prior to devolution had been in place across England and Scotland since 1977 and was the focus of considerable research and debate over the subsequent decades (e.g. Drake, 1989; Evans, 1999). Designed at the peak of mass local authority housing in Britain, the framework placed a legal duty on local *housing* authorities to take action where individuals or households presented themselves as homeless or threatened with homelessness. The legislation did not, however, treat all homeless households equally. From its inception, local housing authorities were required to apply four 'tests' to those in housing crisis:

1.  Is the household 'homeless' as defined in the legislation? It should be empha-sised that the UK legislation incorporated a very wide definition of homeless-ness. Besides rooflessness, it included anyone who does not have housing which it is reasonable for them and their family to occupy and embraces almost all of the categories in the ETHOS framework (Edgar and Meert, 2005).

2.  Is at least one member of the household in 'priority need' of accommoda-tion, defined as:

    a)  Household with dependent children or an expectant mother?

    b)  Households 'vulnerable' due to old age, health, disability or other 'special reason'?

    c)  Household homeless because of an emergency such as a fire or flood?

3.  Has the household become homeless 'intentionally' (by deliberate act or omission which led to homelessness)?

4.  Does the household have a 'connection' with the local authority to which they have presented (for example through residence or employment)? If the household does not have such a connection with the local authority to which it applies, it may be referred to another area for long-term housing (but the duty to provide 'interim' accommodation pending a decision and

'temporary' accommodation until long-term rehousing can be secured, remains with the local authority to which the household applied).

Where homeless households met all four of the above criteria, the local authority had a duty to secure long-term accommodation and the most straightforward solution was the allocation of council housing from local authorities' own stock or referral to an independent housing association. For many years, UK homelessness statistics indicated that the criterion which had the most substantial bearing on access to social housing through the homelessness route was the question of whether a household was considered to be in 'priority need'. Despite guidance requiring local authorities to look closely at the interpretation of 'vulnerability' most single people or couples of working age, who did not have evident and serious physical or mental health problems, were deemed to be 'non-priority' and entitled only to advice and assistance, not to access to council housing. This division between priority and non-priority need became increasingly entrenched in the UK homelessness system. The economic restructuring of the 1980s precipitated a crisis of street homelessness among the 'non-priority' households to which the statutory legal system was not designed to respond. This resulted in the development of separate 'Rough Sleeper Initiatives' during the 1990s, which were separately funded to deal with single homelessness, but which found that a high proportion of clients were vulnerable in all sorts of ways not fully covered by the existing legislation, or at least, not covered in ways always recognised by local authorities (Yanetta *et al* 1999; Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2005: Anderson, 2007).

By 1999 then, the new Scottish Executive was convinced that the 1977 framework was out of date and that Scotland needed a new homelessness framework for the 21st century. Simultaneously, the relative proportions of 'family' and 'single' homelessness had been changing in Scotland with single people eventually constituting a majority of those accepted as homeless. This was not the case in England, suggesting that the Scottish system had already become 'more generous' towards 'non-priority' homeless households.

As a first step to change, the Executive commissioned a Task Force to conduct a 'root and branch' review of the nature of the homelessness problem in Scotland and the effectiveness of current responses, as well as to make recommendations for change. The Task Force was made up of representatives from central and local government, housing and support service providers, voluntary sector and campaign agencies which worked with/for homeless people and an academic (Fitzpatrick, 2004). The Task Force had access to administrative support from the Civil Service and a budget for research and evidence gathering visits. Indeed it commissioned and published 13 research studies to inform its deliberations (Fitzpatrick, 2001). The

HTF published an interim report in 2000 and its final report and action plan in 2002 (Homelessness Task Force, 2000, 2002).

Key recommendations from the interim report were incorporated into the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, a wide ranging Act which set out the broad framework for the Scottish Executive's new housing policy and legislative programme (Office of Public Sector Information, 2001). The 2001 Act required local authorities to produce comprehensive strategies to assess the level of homelessness in their areas and develop appropriate multi-agency responses, with effect from October 2001. The 2001 legislation also placed an expanded duty on Scottish local authorities to provide *temporary* accommodation for *all* homeless households, both during the process when their application is assessed, and for a short period (typically 28 days) after a decision is reached on their application' with effect from 30 September 2002 (Scottish Executive, 2005).

Perhaps the most significant recommendation for legislative change was the phasing out of the longstanding differential treatment of households according to 'priority' or 'non-priority' need status by the target date of 2012. The HTF also recommended suspending the requirement to prove a 'local connection' with the area where households become homeless, and softening the impact of the 'intentionality' test by offering fixed-term (12 month) tenancies and support to deal with what ever 'act or omission' resulted in the decision that the household had become homeless intentionally (for example persistent non-payment of rent or serious breach of tenancy conditions). Essentially, the four tests of the 1977 legislation were reduced to one test – is the household homeless? Although not explicitly announced as a 'right to housing', this combination of measures would mean that by 2012 there would effectively be a duty on local authorities to ensure that all households in Scotland had some form of accommodation.

## Programme implementation : the First Five Years (2002-2007)

The mechanisms adopted for policy implementation included the important tool of legislative change; continuation of a version of 'consensus governance' of the programme; and a raft of non-legislative financial incentives and guidance for practice. Goodlad (2005, p.88) identified 'a sum of £127m for spending in 2003/4-2005/6' on the broad range of homeless policy and service developments.

The HTF final report (2002) recommended the setting up of its own successor governance body, the Homelessness Monitoring Group (HMG), charged with monitoring implementation of the HTF recommendations. The HMG again comprised representatives from central and local government housing, health and social work services as well as key voluntary sector/campaign agencies and an independent

academic. A core group of the personnel from the original Task Force remained on the Monitoring Group, with some new members joining. An important difference from the Task Force was that the HMG was no longer chaired by a Minister, but by a senior civil servant. While this may be appropriate for the differing nature of implementation compared to policy review, it arguably resulted in lower political profile for the successor body. A specialist team of civil servants took the lead on implementation at the national (Scottish) level, reporting activities to the HMG. Together the civil service homelessness team and the HMG group reported annually on progress across all 59 HTF recommendations (Homelessness Monitoring Group, 2004, 2005, 2006).

While the Homelessness Monitoring Group was given national level responsibility for overseeing the programme, implementation at the frontline was largely led by Scotland's local authorities as part of their statutory homelessness and strategic housing functions. Their partners in delivery included local authority social work services, Registered Social Landlords, the National Health Service and non-statutory providers of care and support services for homeless people.

The primary piece of legislation enacted to take forward the HTF programme of change was the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003 (Office of Public Sector Information, 2003). Section 1 of this Act (implemented with effect from January 2004) extended the statutory definition of priority need to include key groups of vulnerable single people whose status was previously the subject of discretionary judgement on the part of local authority officers, but for whom research (Fitzpatrick, 2001) clearly indicated a high risk of homelessness:

• All homeless young people aged 16 or 17 years

• Homeless young people aged 18 to 20 years, at risk of financial or sexual exploitation or substance misuse, or looked after by a local authority on or after school leaving age

• Vulnerable adults with a personality disorder

• Those discharged from prison, hospitals, and the armed forces

• Those at risk of violence or harassment.

The Act also gave Scottish Sheriff Courts the discretion *not* to grant repossession to landlords seeking to evict tenants in cases where rent arrears were due to delays in receiving Housing Benefit payments (effective from July 2004).

The Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 also set out the framework for achieving the long term goals of the HTF, with the ultimate aim of ensuring that by 2012, everyone assessed as being unintentionally homeless in Scotland would be entitled

to permanent accommodation. This would involve gradually removing the priority/non-priority distinction and increasing flexibility regarding the local connection requirement. As recommended by the HTF, the Act made provisions to move to a situation where households found to be intentionally homeless would be provided with accommodation and an appropriate programme of support to deal with the 'intentional' action or behaviour which had resulted in homelessness.

A separate Unsuitable Accommodation Order was passed to prohibit the use of Bed and Breakfast hotels as temporary accommodation for homeless families with Children (Office of Public Sector Information, 2004). A consultation exercise commenced in January 2004 to seek the views of housing providers and other stakeholders on minimising the use of B&Bs to exceptional circumstances and only for a very short period of time (14 days). Local authority homelessness strategies were also to include proposals to eliminate the use of B&Bs for families. The final order was in place by the end of 2004.

In considering policy transfer or lesson learning, it is important to ask whether this is an appropriate approach which can both work in the Scottish context and offer some valuable principles for the international context. The remainder of this section will consider the available evidence on progress and outcomes at the mid-way point towards the 2012 target.

The Homelessness Monitoring Group produced three annual reports on progress (2004, 2005 and 2006) using a 'traffic light' system to summarise progress. At April 2006 only 8 out of 59 recommendations were recorded as Green (fully implemented) (Homelessness Monitoring Group, 2006). Just one recommendation was recorded as red (not started). This related to attempting to change the UK wide rule that tenants sent to prison may only claim housing allowance (Housing Benefit) for the first 13 weeks of their sentence. Thereafter, no assistance is paid, resulting in the likelihood of arrears, loss of the tenancy and homelessness on discharge from prison. The failure to make any real headway with the HTF recommendation to challenge this regulation reflects the limited influence of the Scottish Executive over Westminster reserved matters. The 50 remaining recommendations were at various stages of progress (amber) (Homelessness Monitoring Group, 2006) and some further comment can be made on the most significant aspects of 'the Scottish model'.

The first recommendation of the Task force was that the empowerment of homeless people be widely promoted and given practical effect in all activities, and this remains the area with least real progress. While the Regulation and Inspection regime has incorporated elements of 'customer feedback' at the local level (Communities Scotland, 2005), and the umbrella agency for homelessness NGOs in Scotland has undertaken a study in relation to youth homelessness (SCSH, 2006), there has been no national government-led initiative either to document or

develop meaningful change on homeless people's involvement in policy or practice. Instead, programme implementation has, ultimately, been driven by the powerful national-level stakeholder agencies.

The elimination of the priority need distinction was the recommendation which has caught international attention as approaching a 'right to housing' by 2012. Research was commissioned to model application figures and propose options for implementing this recommendation (Strachan *et al,* 2005a). The report noted that local authorities themselves needed to move to better modelling of the impact of change, which they had not been doing well prior to 2005. Nonetheless, in keeping with Task Force recommendations, a Ministerial Statement on the abolition of Priority Need was published in December 2005, setting a target for local authorities to reduce the proportion of 'non-priority' assessments by 50% by 2009 (Homelessness Monitoring Group (2006). Thereafter there would require to be a further gradual reduction in 'non-priority' assessments to zero by 2012 in order to fully meet the agreed target.

Local authorities argued for and were given discretion on how to implement the reduction in non-priority acceptances in accordance with local needs and supply in their areas (for example in deciding which categories of applicant such as young or vulnerable in some way would be brought into the wider safety net and when). This means that for the first time since 1977, Scotland accepted, for at least an interim period, the differential treatment of homeless people according to the local area in which they apply. While it can be argued that there was already 'de facto' (and de jure) discretion operating in the system, there is an important point of principal in terms of a national strategy seeking to enhance fairness in the system. An alternative strategy would have been to agree a national approach of expanding priority by, for example age and special needs, to ensure the most vulnerable/most at risk of homelessness were brought into the safety net earlier rather than later. That said, it is important to acknowledge the 'real world' pressures and dilemmas which constrained progress.

The Scottish Executive and Homelessness Monitoring Group identified resources to allow two experienced homelessness strategy officers (from local government) to operate at the national level in order to support local authorities in meeting their targets of expanding priority need acceptances to 50% by 2009 and to 100% (thereby abolishing the non-priority distinction) by 2012. A newsletter produced by these officers admitted that progress was slow; that authorities were waiting to see what others did; and that there was a wish for further guidance (Nolan and MacLean, 2007). While this key HTF recommendation probably merited a stronger lead from Central Government and the Homeless Monitoring Group, fundamental problems of housing supply (Bramley *et al*, 2006) will also have constrained the capacity of local authorities to implement the strategy.

Early research commissioned to support implementation of the HTF programme showed that referrals from one local authority area to another (on grounds of *lack of local connection*) accounted for just over 1% of households in priority need (Strachan *et al*, 2005b) and suggested that implementation of the suspension of the local connection requirement could have been relatively straightforward. However, delay in implementation, combined with the potential impact of discretionary criteria for expanding priority need acceptances has resulted in this aspect of the recommended programme becoming more contentious than it might have been. An internal update from the Homelessness Monitoring Group (2007) confirmed that the umbrella group for local authorities (COSLA – Convention of Scottish Local Authorities) had withdrawn support for the suspension of the local connection provisions.

New research was also conducted to identify the causes of intentional homelessness and the support needs of households in these circumstances (Rosengard *et al*, 2006). This study found that only 3.8% of priority need households were considered intentionally homeless (no figure was given for non-priority households, as the intentionality test is only implemented with respect to households found to be in priority need). Moreover, the research identified a downward trend in 'intentionally homeless' decisions, possibly reflecting the overall progressive national strategy. The main reasons for such decisions were eviction for rent arrears and having given up suitable accommodation. Most local authorities were not routinely investigating the support needs of intentionally homeless households, although these were not found to vary significantly from those of other homeless households. Some authorities already offered intentionally homeless households temporary accommodation and support in ordinary housing or specialist/hostel accommodation. The Supporting People programme provided important funding for support, although some households required formal social work support or specialist health care, and some were resistant to accepting support. Models of support for those deemed intentionally homeless needed to be related to the specific needs of households rather than seeking a simplified solution to 'intentionality' which the research indicated did not exist (Rosengard et al, 2006). At the time of writing, no firm timetable for implementation of this recommendation had been agreed.

The Homelessness Monitoring Group (2006) identified a number of key criteria to be monitored as part of the process of assessing progress on programme delivery:

• number of households applying as homeless

• number assessed as homeless

• % households placed directly into permanent accommodation

• number experiencing repeat homelessness

- households/families in B&B

- time taken to deal with cases

- indicators of customer satisfaction.

The Scottish Executive's own statistics (2007a) allow some analysis of changes in outcomes up to 2005/6. Firstly, the number of households applying as homeless increased from around 45,000 per annum in 2000/1 to over 60,000 in 2005-6. However this was likely to reflect improved recording and the widening of the homelessness safety net during that period. Nevertheless, the recorded increase in homelessness represents a significant challenge for the Scottish programme. Similarly, the number of households in temporary accommodation doubled from around 4,000 at March 2001 to 8,500 by March 2006. Only 2,954 of those were households with children. However, most (60%) were offered temporary tenancies in ordinary social housing with only 17% in hostels and 17% in B&Bs. Only 3% of total acceptances were placed in Bed & Breakfast accommodation (as at December 2006, only 93 households with children or a pregnant woman were accommodated in B&Bs).

Besides the legislative change, local authorities were expected to embrace the prevention of homelessness within their strategies. Research by Pawson *et al* (2007), argued that homelessness prevention should become *more* important as Scotland moves towards the 2012 target. So far prevention strategies were limited and largely experimental. Many focused on tenants facing eviction and individuals facing discharge from institutions. Mechanisms in place included early warning procedures/protocols, family mediation and tenancy sustainment schemes. This has been quite different to the approach in England where prevention (rather than widening the safety net) has been a core strategy in reducing statutory homelessness. However, this has raised concerns around possibly undermining the core legislation by attempting to use preventive measures to 'manage' or control the level of homelessness acceptances.

The separate, Supporting People, programme is also an important tool in terms of funding support services for homeless people. In 2005/6 the programme funded support for 170,500 clients across Scotland, or 4% of the adult population (Scottish Executive, 2007b). While the largest client category (49%) was older people, homeless people or rough sleepers made up the second largest category (20%). More than 50% of clients in all categories received support in mainstream housing, and more than 50% received support on a permanent/open-ended basis (ranging from a few hours a week to 24 hour support).

Lipsky (1980) first recognised the extent to which frontline 'street level bureaucrats' can influence policy implementation, and staff in housing agencies have a key role in delivering the 2012 framework. A survey of staff in local authorities, RSLs and

voluntary sector agencies working with homeless people found a high level of general support for the policy/legislative programme (over 90%), but some dissent on the detail (Jardine & Bilton, 2006). More than half of respondents felt the abolition of local connection and non-priority need was unfair. That is to say, key staff still made judgements about the relative merits of different homeless households. This related to views of nearly three quarters of respondents that the new legislation would make it more difficult to 'achieve balanced communities' in lettings policies and demonstrates the complexity of detailed implementation compared to the more idealistic nature of the national strategy and the process of its development.

While significant progress has been made then, there are also some indications that local authorities are struggling to deliver on aspects of what was initially a very high profile policy programme very much reflecting the complex practical challenges of implementation in the real world.

## 2007 – a Year of Change?

The 2007 elections to the Scottish Parliament resulted in The Scottish National Party[2] gaining the highest number of seats in the Parliament (47) but having to form a minority administration, thereby constraining its capacity to implement policies which were not supported by at least some of the opposition parties. This could result in some stability in relation to implementation of policies set in motion by the previous New Labour/Liberal Democrat coalition. The SNP appointed a more streamlined cabinet with the Deputy Leader becoming Secretary for Health and Well-being and the housing/homelessness brief falling to a Minister for 'Communities and Sport'.

Local government councillors in Scotland were also elected by proportional representation for first time in 2007, resulting in dramatic changes in local politics. For example, where Labour had long dominated local government, it controlled only three of the 32 Councils after May 2007. Further, a high proportion of new, less experienced, councillors were elected for the first time. Together, these political changes in the lead agencies for implementation of the homelessness programme may present some challenges for service delivery and central/local government relations over the next four years.

The SNP renamed the Executive or Administration in power, the Scottish Government, and publicly confirmed commitment to the 2012 homelessness target, with a switch of emphasis to service delivery (Scottish Government, 2007a; Chartered Institute of Housing, 2007). At the time of writing, new arrangements to

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[2]  The Scottish National Party campaigns for Scottish independence from the rest of the UK but is broadly a progressive/centrist party in relation to social and economic policy.

reconstitute the Homeless Monitoring Group and its functions were being set up. A Housing Supply Task Force, to be chaired by the Minister, was launched with a remit to look at land supply and planning issues for housing. Other early proposals included a Scottish Housing Support Fund (to provide financial assistance to those struggling to purchase their first home); reform of subsidy to social housing (though recognising an overall need for increased public funding for more affordable housing); improved joint working on housing and health; a review of regeneration, including the role of Communities Scotland; and a commitment to the eradication of fuel poverty. A consultation paper on the Scottish Government's more detailed proposals on housing was published on 31 October (Scottish Government, 2007b) with responses due by 25 January 2008. The paper argued that greater use of the privately rented sector could offer more choice for homeless people, although there was no discussion of affordability or how associated needs for housing support would be met in this tenure.

It is still too early to fully assess what will be the implications of political change for the Scottish homelessness model but the broad framework does not appear to be imminently at risk. What will be important is whether the Scottish housing policy community is able to maintain a sufficiently high policy profile for homelessness with the new administration.

## Some Issues in Considering Policy Transfer/learning from the Scottish Homelessness Model

### The Scottish legislation and the development of national strategies to prevent homelessness

So does the Scottish framework offer a model for other nations? This is a highly complex question but some preliminary comment can be offered at this stage. This section discusses three broad issues which emerge from the Scottish framework in relation to the development of national homelessness strategies.

Firstly, although the HTF can be characterised as a 'rational' (after Simon, 1957) and fundamental review of homelessness policy, it did not in fact start from scratch with a blank sheet of paper. In many ways the process was much more incremental (after Lindblom, 1959) as Scotland (and indeed the whole of the UK) had 30 years of previous policy, practice, research and debate from which to draw for the review process. The key policy change of abolishing the priority/non-priority distinction was one which had been hotly debated in policy and research circles for many years (see for example Anderson & Tulloch, 2000, commissioned for the Homelessness Task Force). Arguably it was the change of government from Conservative to Labour/Liberal Democrat, combined with the additional impetus

given to housing policy as one of the main areas of devolved government which allowed the Scottish campaigners to achieve greater success in achieving policy change than their English counterparts (see, for example, Fitzpatrick, 2004 for a comparative analysis between Scotland and England, and Fitzpatrick & Jones, 2005 for a discussion of the more coercive approaches to street homelessness in England). Two emerging questions then would be whether other European countries had an adequate research base for evidence-based policy change? And the extent to which a similar 'head of steam' could be to generated to provoke similarly momentous policy change if the opportunity arose?

Secondly, the Scottish homelessness programme has been very much a housing-led solution to homelessness, albeit with significant emphasis on multi-agency working to support resettlement. Effective implementation hinges on the power and ability of local authorities to find sustainable housing solutions for homeless households. Traditionally this has been achieved by allocating housing from the pool of social housing. At 26.5% of the total dwelling stock, Scotland still has a higher proportion of social housing than the rest of the UK, although less than, say, the Netherlands. So the second transferability question arises around the capacity of central or local government to (a) ensure a sufficient supply of suitable housing; and (b) ensure a degree of enforcement upon landlords to rehouse homeless/formerly homeless households in their rented stock. For example the Scottish legislation includes provision for official referral of homeless households to other social landlords (Homelessness etc. Scotland Act, 2003). To what extent is this feasible or desirable in other European countries? The case of Austria, for example, suggests that regions such as Vienna which control a good supply of social rented housing may well be able to implement such a strategy but this may not be the case in other regions which take a very different approach. The Netherlands has a high proportion of social rented housing, but appears to give relatively limited priority access to vulnerable homeless households. Of course joint working and sufficient resources to provide adequate support services to vulnerable tenants is also crucial to a sustainable housing-led solution to homelessness. It may also be relevant to note that Scotland (indeed the UK) has a recognised 'housing profession' and a professional body (the Chartered Institute of Housing) which is active in developing and promoting good practice to frontline service providers on housing and homelessness.

Thirdly, the Scottish model is based on a ten year programme which is a relatively long time span in contemporary politics and reflected the early confidence of the post-1997 New Labour UK regime (which subsequently won two further UK-wide general elections and was still in power in 2007). The model was based on *consensus* across the housing policy community (central and local government, housing associations, NGOs and support service providers) for a long term, sustainable approach. At the party political level, with proportional representation a relatively new phenom-

enon in Scotland, the nation should perhaps look to some of its European neighbours to learn about consensus politics and coalition government over the long term. Countries such as the Netherlands may well provide a useful model here. However, the wider question would be to what extent other European countries can build sufficient consensus for a realistic, long term programme which will at least treat all households fairly, and at best minimise the impact of homelessness on the lives of those who experience such a crisis at some point in their housing careers.

## Issues arising from the Scottish homelessness model

Looking at the possible practical application of the Scottish model to other EU countries, a further set of themes emerge. Firstly, the question of what might be meant by a right to housing and how this could be implemented needs to be considered. It must always be remembered that the Scottish Executive/Government has never explicitly described the Scottish model as offering a right to housing for all. Rather, the practical reality of the new framework can be broadly interpreted as coming very close to giving such a right to most Scottish households if they find themselves in the position of being homeless. This is very different to the more recent legal changes in France which explicitly attempt to achieve an enforceable right to housing, albeit that there appear to be very significant constraints with respect to the practical implementation of the new law (see Loison, this volume). In comparison, Italy has no national government involvement in homelessness which is largely seen as a poverty issue rather than a housing-led initiative. In contrast, in Denmark and Norway, strong welfare regimes effectively mean that housing rights are not a key campaigning issue, although homelessness remains a cause for concern amongst the most marginalised groups in Norway. Ireland has completed a review of homeless policies and the revised Government strategy on homelessness has rejected an explicit rights based approach. It aims to ensure that from 2010, long-term homelessness and the need for people to sleep rough will be eliminated. The risk of a person becoming homeless will be minimised through effective preventive policies and services, which include strengthening locally based partnerships between statutory and NGO agencies and the development of rental accommodation schemes and other social and affordable housing options.

The potential difficulties in implementing a housing-led strategy in countries with a limited public housing sector must also be considered. In the German case, for example, there is a need for more effective instruments to control the allocation of private housing, and rights in relation to homelessness only allow for the provision of temporary (not permanent/long term) accommodation. Moving beyond housing there is an increasingly widely recognised need for support as part of ensuring sustainable solutions for some homeless groups. This may be achieved through

the definition of specific vulnerable groups or by funding targeted support as needed, within a broader definition of homelessness/vulnerability. The link between social support and homelessness appears to be still embryonic in places. Mediation approaches are being developed in France and in the UK, homeless households are just one of a number of groups which compete for the finite resources allocated to the Supporting People programme.

In most EU countries local authorities will be the key agencies responsible for implementation of homelessness strategies and it is important to discuss which policy mechanisms may be available for local delivery/implementation, in comparison to the Scottish approach. The notion of a Homelessness Task Force/Homelessness Monitoring Group depends on the recognition of the key roles of different stakeholders (local and national state; interprofessional working across housing, health and social work; involving the NGO sector and potentially private sector providers). Success of such a model also depends on the willingness of this range of agencies to work together towards achieving consensus (and almost inevitably compromise) in order to work towards agreed national and local approaches. The existence of a clear regulatory framework for social housing/homelessness through Communities Scotland provides a separate mechanism for performance monitoring and review. Separate mechanisms exist for regulation of health and social care services and England also has well developed regulatory regimes.

For those countries where central government approval or review of local homelessness strategies is not currently in place, this could only be made effective over the long term by building consensus across both political parties and professional organisations/service providers. Eventually, it may be feasible for most EU countries to evolve towards some kind of phased strategy with targets to reduce or 'end' homelessness in a defined period as has happened in Ireland and Finland. Some degree of consensus on the need to eradicate homelessness at the level of the European Parliament or Commission would strengthen the case of those agencies seeking to raise the profile of homelessness policy and strategy at the national and local level across member states.

## Conclusions

### *Homelessness and the future role of social rented housing*

Ultimately, the Task Force programme is a 'housing-led' solution to homelessness and was never going to be a cheap policy option. Progress continues to be constrained by an overall lack of sufficient affordable, secure, good quality housing and support, irrespective of the latest proposals for increasing use of the private rented sector (Scottish Government, 2007b). The question of adequate resources

for the programme remains and Scottish devolution remains limited by the economic constraints set by the UK treasury (Kintrea, 2006). There also seems to remain some uncertainty over the overall requirement for additional housing in Scotland. In their housing need and affordability model for Scotland, Bramley *et al*'s (2006) approach takes account of new households unable to buy, migration, owner occupiers needing to move into social renting and the existing backlog of unmet need. Indeed, the updated model was designed to better respond to delivery of the 2012 homelessness objectives. Bramley *et al* (2006) estimated a net annual need of 8,045 units of affordable housing for Scotland in 2005 (up from 6,860 in 2003), although there was excess stock in some local authority areas. Looking forward however, net need was projected to fall and surpluses were projected to increase, which in theory would assist delivery of the homelessness programme goals. The SNP Government recognised the overall shortfall in new housing in Scotland and proposed expanding the overall supply of new houses to at least 35,000 per year by 2015 (Scottish Government, 2007b).

Notwithstanding the impact of the Scottish homelessness programme, the future role of the social rented sector has been under review in both Scotland (Newhaven Consultancy, 2006) and England (Hills, 2007). Prior to the 2007 election, the Scottish Executive embarked on an 'internal review' of social housing through a series of workshops with representatives of local authorities, social landlords and other key stakeholders. The discussions revealed complex issues around changes in demand for social housing, perceptions that the sector was increasingly stigmatised, and that the increased proportion of lettings to homeless households constrained any broader housing role, such as implementing renewal and regeneration and helping to nurture balanced/sustainable communities (Scottish Executive, 2007c; see also Busch-Geertsema, this volume). The role of social housing had changed significantly over the previous 30 years, not least due to the impact of sales to sitting tenants and reductions in overall investment. Issues around land pricing and ineffectiveness of affordable housing planning guidance constrained the ability to develop new housing. A key tension emerged between the broad consensus to support homelessness policy but also an awareness of its impact on an already vulnerable and marginalised housing sector.

Fletcher (2007) builds on the findings of research by Newhaven Consultancy (2006) to take forward the views of the Chartered Institute of Housing on current research and issues for future development. Fletcher acknowledges an underlying downward trend in demand for social housing but argues this is dependent on the impact of the homelessness programme. However, looking at the composition of social housing tenants, Fletcher accepts the trend towards housing single adults without children, single pensioners and lone parents – all relatively disadvantaged groups compared to the population as a whole – thus increasing the concentration of the

poorest/most disadvantaged groups in the social rented sector. Key challenges for the sector emerge in delivering sustainable mixed communities and making afford- able rented housing a positive choice for 'ordinary' (working) people. Central government support for the wider role of sector would be a crucial determining factor here. The Hills (2007) review for England also recognised the increasing polarisation between tenures and identified similar trends in the tenant profile within social housing (e.g. high dependency on benefits and low economic activity). An extreme outcome for Scotland could be the prospect that the sector would only house homeless households and become even more highly stigmatised.

Such a fear was reported in Anderson and Thomson's (2005) study of the early impact of legislative change with respect to young people:

> '….the homelessness legislation, when fully in place, will see the end of people in the area being housed from waiting lists. We are already receiving twice the number of homelessness presentations as we get in empty homes each year. As the priority groups extend, we will not be able to cope' (respondent in Scottish local authority survey, p.34).

To counter this possibility of Scottish social housing becoming a sector of the last resort, the Chartered Institute of Housing recommends that the social sector embraces provision of mid-rent and low-cost ownership housing options, collabo- rates better with the private sector, and generally works to improve quality (Fletcher, 2007). It also urges the Scottish Government to commit to a building programme of 30,000 dwellings over the coming 3 years – although an even higher target of 35,000 per year was set in the Scottish Government's own (2007b) discussion paper.

### Future progress and opportunities for policy learning

If review and design was the glamorous element of the policy process, desired outcomes will only be achieved through the hard graft of implementation. Having accepted the Task Force recommendations, the 'rational policy process' would require sufficient ongoing political commitment and resources for effective implementation, as well as ongoing evaluation of outcomes, in order to achieve the 2012 target.

Returning to Scotland in 2007, the new First Minister and the Minister for Communities have an opportunity at the mid-implementation point to take stock of progress and instil any required new momentum into programme delivery. This is an agenda which retains genuine and strong consensus across the Scottish housing and homelessness sector and on which the international housing community is waiting to see if Scotland delivers a model which they can follow.

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