

What you need to know about Scotland's housing emergency



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Introduction

A number of local authorities, including Argyll and Bute Council, the City of Edinburgh Council, and Glasgow City Council, have politically declared that they are unable to adequately respond to rising levels of homelessness amid a lack of housing supply, with many more likely to follow in 2024. They say they are no longer able to meet their basic housing obligations and need urgent help from both the Scottish and UK governments.

The [Scottish Housing Regulator](#) has also formally and repeatedly highlighted that some local authorities are finding it increasingly difficult to meet their statutory duties on homelessness with systemic failure now present in some councils and others at heightened risk.

CIH Scotland also [set out a call](#) at this year's Scotland's Housing Festival, which took place on 5 - 6 March 2024 in Glasgow, that Scotland has moved past a housing crisis and is now in the midst of a national housing emergency.

Homelessness and housing supply

Our declaration of a national housing emergency comes as the latest Scottish Government [homelessness statistics](#) show a 10 per cent rise in open homelessness cases from 12 months ago to over 30,000 in total, as well as 15,625 households and 9,860 children in temporary accommodation, both up eight per cent on the previous year's figures.


Alongside rising levels of homelessness, the latest [quarterly housing statistics](#) revealed that there were 16,274 new build homes started in the year to the end of September 2023, a reduction of 5,260 homes from the previous year, and the lowest annual figure to end September since 2014. The number of new build completions also fell by six per cent in the same time period.

Local authority responses

Three local authorities have currently declared housing emergencies to highlight the mounting pressures facing their local housing systems:

Argyll and Bute Council: The first local authority to declare a housing emergency, citing a rise in homelessness and an increasing lack of available housing in order to meet demand. The area is also contending with issues around the number of second homes and holiday lets, which has pushed up prices for locals looking to buy or rent a property.





City of Edinburgh Council: In spite of doubling the homelessness budget over the last three years, there are still around 5,000 households living in temporary accommodation in Edinburgh, with the city suffering from a severe shortage of social rented homes and the spiralling cost of private rents. The Council has since published a 25-point [Housing Emergency Action Plan](#) to try to address the crisis, which proposes turning void homes around more quickly and spot purchases of 'off the shelf' homes, and increasing affordable housing supply at pace.

Glasgow City Council: Glasgow became the third local authority to formally declare a housing emergency after it highlighted "unprecedented" pressures in relation to homelessness. The declaration came after the Home Office revealed plans to speed up thousands of asylum claims by the end of the year, with Glasgow Council warning that the decision to send up to 2,500 people to the city could spark a homelessness crisis. It called on the UK Government to pause their asylum-batching decision until they work with the council to put a proper plan in place and commit to fully funding their decision.

More local authorities are expected to follow suit and declare housing emergencies in the coming months; the leader of [Fife Council](#) recently wrote to the Scottish Government calling for urgent action on housing and homelessness to prevent them from becoming the next area to fall into an official emergency.

Budget and financing

Despite these pressures, the Scottish Government confirmed a cut of £196 million from the Affordable Housing Supply Programme in its latest budget, with Deputy First Minister Shona Robison drawing attention to the fact that the block grant for Scotland has fallen by 1.2 per cent in real terms since 2022/23 following the Autumn Statement. The Scottish Government is also facing a shortfall of around £1.5bn due to rising inflation and public sector pay deals.

Following the budget announcement, the Scottish Government confirmed that housing will be its '[number one priority](#)' if extra funding becomes available and that it will also attempt to lever in private sector investment to boost building projects. However, earlier this month, the Scottish Government confirmed that the UK Spring Budget has [delivered no additional capital funding](#) for Scotland, which it says helps to support the delivery of affordable housing.

CIH Scotland key asks

CIH Scotland is calling for a political response to the housing emergency and for the Scottish Government to urgently review the viability of its 110,000 affordable homes by 2032 target and consider what funding and support is needed to increase sector capacity immediately to deliver the affordable homes Scotland needs.

The Scottish Government is expected to introduce a new Housing Bill later this year, which is likely to cover some of the commitments set out in [Housing to 2040](#) and the draft rented sector strategy, [A New Deal for Tenants](#). Earlier this year, CIH Scotland published a series of '[key asks](#)' based on engagement with members, which notes other priority areas where we want to see the Government make a policy response in 2024, including a greater focus on housing professionalism, the development of a national strategy on workforce planning and more financial support for the Affordable Housing Supply Programme.

Our [latest report](#) on Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans, in partnership with Fife Council, also calls for the Scottish Government to adopt a more strategic, evidence-based approach to the private rented sector (PRS), highlighting the vital role that the PRS plays in addressing Scotland's housing needs.

The Scottish Government must also continue to engage closely with local authorities and landlords to provide strategic national leadership to address Scotland's housing emergency and deliver the ambitions of Housing to 2040.

