Better support key to preventing homelessness and improving life chances

1. The Housing Bill presents Scottish Ministers with a final opportunity to put homelessness prevention and equal access to support central to achieving the 2012 homelessness commitment. Enshrining access to housing support in legislation will allow those facing the spectre of homelessness to access the right support to keep their home.

2. We know the Scottish Government has been absolute in its support for the 2012 homelessness commitment. Now we are asking for your commitment to Better Access to Support to make 2012 a reality for all.

3. Across Scotland, over 41000 households - including approximately 10,200 lone parent families, 3,400 veterans, 9,600 single young people and 22,000 children — became homeless last year. Homelessness and bad housing are at the root of Scotland’s social problems; housing deprivation is as bad a risk to health as smoking and homeless children are twice as likely to leave school without qualifications. We know that disabled people, lone parents, young people and veterans are all over represented in the homeless population.

4. Solutions do exist to break the cycle of repeat homelessness by identifying and tackling the range of issues a family or single person faces to keep a home, but these are not available to everyone. Many people are simply handed the keys to a house with little prospect of being able to keep the tenancy for the long term. Even where services exist and can help, these are not always taken up because time is not invested to understand the real reasons for a person’s problems and to point them in the direction of those that can help.

5. Addressing the need for a house in exclusion from an individual’s other needs too often simply sets people up to fail when they are eventually granted a tenancy. The lack of integration between housing departments and other agencies brings a high cost to the taxpayer and the individual alike. Last year it cost at least £30 million to re-house people who were homeless more than once in a year. In comparison, Fab Pad, a project to help young homeless people to settle and keep their home, found that for every £1 invested in the project, a social return of more than £8 was realised. Better Access to Support, will reduce the numbers of people finding themselves in a revolving door of homelessness, as well as allowing councils to make efficiency savings.

6. The Housing Bill offers the opportunity to connect the needs of homeless people to the support services that are there to help. A straightforward amendment that provides anyone who registers as homeless with a simple assessment of support needs, offers the best solution to this problem.
Following this assessment people would be helped to engage with support and advice services to meet support needs where appropriate.

7. Preventing homelessness and driving up the supply of affordable homes to rent that are accessible to all are the twin pillars of solving Scotland’s housing crisis. In these constrained financial times, better access to housing support can have a greater and quicker impact on homelessness in Scotland than almost any other solution.

8. That is why we have come together to ask you to enshrine Better Access to Support in the Housing Bill.

Graeme Brown, Director, Shelter Scotland
Alan Dickson, Chief Executive, Capability Scotland
Martin Crewe, Director, Barnardos Scotland
Alastair Cameron, Chief Executive, Scottish Churches Housing Action
Phil Robinson, Chief Executive, Quarriers and Quarriers VIP group
Bill Watson, Chief Executive, SAMH
Sure Robertson, Director, One Parent Families Scotland
Derek Couper, MSYP, Chair, Scottish Youth Parliament
Susan Aktemel, Director, Impact Arts
Ian Ballantyne, Chief Executive, Scottish Veterans’ Residences on behalf of Veterans Scotland
Tam Baillie, Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young People
Ilene Campbell, Director, Tenants Information Service