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Proceedings report
ALACHO Master Class
Keeping homeless households safe
Friday 24 January 10.30 am

1. Attending

Tony Cain	ALACHO Policy Manager
Alex Gilbert	Clackmannanshire
Mike Callaghan	COSLA
Andrea Williams	Glasgow
Gill Taylor	Strategic Lead- Dying Homeless Project with the Museum of Homelessness
Wendy McGuire	East Lothian
Paula McDonald	Dumfries and Galloway
Laura Smith	Falkirk
Gavin Smith	Fife
Christine Robertson	Aberdeenshire
Simon Bain	Stirling
Lynsey Rowe	East Dunbartonshire
Brian Cameron	Highland
Sinead Power	Head of Public Protection Unit- Scottish Government
Coreen McNeil	Stirling
Jacqueline Fernie	South Lanarkshire
Rachel Harrison	Aberdeen City
Gordon McCluskey	Moray
Gray, Eddie	East Renfrewshire
Derek McGowan	Edinburgh
Alan Brand	Renfrewshire
Lynne Wilson	South Ayrshire
Lynsey Matheson	Glasgow
Lorraine Graham	Western Isles
Kevin Anderson	Midlothian
Tom Irvine	Renfrewshire
George Martin	Shetland
Murray Sharp	Clackmannanshire
Kate Fleming	Clackmannanshire
Moirra Adamson	Orkney
Louise Feely	Renfrewshire
Lesley Mulraine	Orkney
Zoe Chick	Glasgow
Nicola Sandford	East Lothian
Michelle Harrow	Dundee
Donna Mcilwraith	North Ayrshire

2. Introduction and purpose of the session

Tony Cain introduced the session by noting the background of record numbers of open cases in the homelessness system. Of these just under half are not currently in temporary accommodation and a significant proportion of those that are spend at least some time in unsuitable types of accommodation including bed and breakfast and hotels.

Much of the current policy discussion with the Scottish Government has been focused on how to end the "housing emergency" declared by 13 councils and the Scottish Government during 2023 and 2024. There has been less focus on how we manage during a period of increased and prolonged homelessness across most local authority areas.

Whilst our collective ambition remains that where it occurs, homelessness should be "rare, brief and non-recurring" it is clear that for many this is not the case. The number of people seeking help has risen significantly in most council areas in recent years; on average it takes 277 days to resolve an applicant's homelessness; and around a third of every one that experiences homelessness will make at least one further application in their lifetime.

This session is intended to look at how we understand the risks (physical, emotional and psychological) that homeless people experience and how we ensure that we act to minimise harm to all those that present as homeless.

The context for the discussion includes a growing body of evidence of the long term harm that even a single period of homelessness can cause including:

The "hard edges" series of research reports from Herriot Watt university including the most recent "The reality for women affected by severe and multiple disadvantage" [HardEdges-RealityForWomen_FullReport_logo_.pdf](#) evidence published by the Scottish Government in 2018 (the Waugh Report: [Health and homelessness in Scotland: research - gov.scot](#)) that showed that homeless households suffer significant health impacts from being homeless; The 2023 report from the Museum of Homelessness that estimates that there were 206 deaths in the homelessness system that year: [2023 Museum of Homelessness report of findings on homeless deaths](#); and A National Statistics report estimating that there were 244 homeless deaths in Scotland in 2022: [Homeless Deaths 2022 - National Records of Scotland \(NRS\)](#)

And whilst the session begins with a focus on deaths, the most extreme end of the harm spectrum, and much of the literature has focused on the experiences of the most disadvantaged, the intention is to understand and respond to harm as something experienced by everyone that faces `` homelessness.

3. Deaths in the homelessness system- Gill Taylor- Strategic Lead- Dying Homeless Project, Museum of Homelessness

Gill provided an introduction to Safeguarding & Homelessness from a whole Systems perspective. The slides are included with this note.

She introduced the "Dying Homeless" project and the Museum of Homelessness including evidence that over 204 individuals died whilst homeless in Scotland in 2023.

She also provided details of the legal context, a typology of risks of harm and influencing factors and the process of learning from case reviews.

In setting out a “whole systems approach” she covered:

- Direct Practice
- Organisational Support
- Multi-Agency Coordination
- Governance
- Law and Policy

During a brief discussion contributors noted:

- Varied practice in recording and reviewing deaths locally;
- Weaknesses in the “three-point test” used in statutory safeguarding systems when applied to homeless people; and
- The importance of recognising and responding to signs of stress and trauma in the homelessness workforce.

4. Public protection leadership group- emerging context- Sinéad Power, Head of Public Protection Unit, Office of the Chief Social Work Advisor, Scottish Government.

Sinéad set out the emerging approach to improving Safeguarding through the work of the National Public Protection Leadership Group.

The NPPLG was set up in 2024 to “... drive continuous improvement, share best practices, and provide coherence to public protection policies” with a particular focus on:

- Child Protection;
- Adult Support and Protection;
- Violence against Women and Girls;
- Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements;
- Alcohol and Drug related harms/deaths and
- Suicide Prevention.

Homelessness is recognised in the groups term of reference as an important part of the wider context, but the group has yet to consider how the risks and harms faced by homeless people fit into the wider safeguarding framework.

Sinead acknowledged that the “master class event” and the perspective on homeless deaths provided by the Museum of Homelessness’ work will be an important part of opening up that discussion.

5. Keeping homeless people safe- general discussion

This session explored local experiences and responses in the context of the earlier presentations including the extent to which councils:

- Have an understanding and ability to identify the range of risks that homeless clients face;
- Have clear processes and procedures in place to identify, record and respond to risks;
- other services, including education, health and social work are actively involved in addressing risks of harm; and
- training and development needs.

There was a general consensus that, whilst there is a good understanding of some, but not all, of the risks faced by homeless people in temporary accommodation, there is less understanding of the situations of those opting to provide their own temporary accommodation.

Participants generally reported well-structured approaches to understanding housing support needs and the need for particular health interventions/support around drugs, alcohol and mental health. However, these services weren't always available as quickly as they could be.

It was unclear if other services were actively responding to evidence of harm arising from homelessness.

No one attending was confident enough to say that their council has a fully effective approach to recognising risks and reducing harm.

There was a general recognition that this is an area of practice that needs to be developed further.

6. Next steps

There was general agreement that further work is required to:

- Improve the response to deaths within the homelessness system.
- Develop a proper understanding of the risks and harms that can occur whilst a household is homeless;
- Improve the data available in relation to those households that do not take up temporary accommodation;
- Ensure that work to understand and respond to support needs includes addressing risk of harm; and
- Equip staff with the knowledge and skills required to identify risks, ask the right questions and take appropriate action where there is evidence of harm.

The material from the session will be circulate to all those attending. ALACHO will seek to raise the lessons from the session with the Scottish Government and relevant third sector organisations with a view to establish a sector wide response to issues raised.

Tony Cain
Policy Manager
ALACHO