Why is there still homelessness in Glasgow?

Suzanne Fitzpatrick,
University of Glasgow,
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The starting point

"With all the advantages that Glasgow enjoys as compared with most other UK (and indeed Global North) cities, it is somewhat puzzling that high levels of homelessness persist in the city.”
The lecture structure

• Definition of ‘homelessness’
• Sources drawn upon
• Glasgow’s advantages
• Homelessness levels in the city
• The explanation(s)
• The impact of COVID-19
• Conclusions
Definition of homelessness

1. **Rough sleeping** - and other forms of ‘core’ homelessness

2. **Statutory homelessness** – no ‘reasonable’ accommodation in which they can live, together with their family

3. **Hidden homelessness** – homelessness that is not ‘visible’ on the streets or in official statistics
Sources

• The Homelessness Monitor (Scotland) (Crisis)
• Evaluation of the Institute of Global Homelessness’s “A Place to Call Home” Initiative to end street homelessness in 13 ‘Vanguard Cities’, including Glasgow (Oak Foundation)
• Prevention Review Group (Crisis/Scottish Government)
The UK’s advantages

- **The unique statutory homelessness system**: certain groups of homeless people are entitled to settled housing secured by local authorities.
- **Relatively large social housing sector**: allocated mainly on the basis of housing need.
- **Welfare protection**: housing benefit (entitlement based) + income maintenance benefits.
- **The state plays a leading role**: displacing the dominant role played by the faith sector elsewhere.
Dependence on faith groups elsewhere

Churches...do some evangelical outreach and pray for people, they give out food. All they do is they come in our neighbourhoods, they litter the place and then they move out and they think they did good... Churches quickly, when you speak to them and ask can they participate in addressing homelessness, the first thing they do is open up a soup kitchen. (Tshwane, South Africa)

We are looking at homelessness as charity. It could be a community getting together and providing food on some particular days. The religious groups especially. All these are not sustained. People need food all the time, not particular days. (Bengaluru, India)

Oh, shelters are, have a religious overtone that some people reject very much and I think until the last few years, there were a number of shelters that were not particularly adept at understanding about individuals who are Indigenous. (Edmonton, Canada)

We look at housing last after you're sober; after your soul's been saved - you've been washed in the blood; and all this bullshit. We do all this to people when really their presenting reason for homelessness is poverty... providers would have to switch their mindset from programming to housing.” (Little Rock, US)
Glasgow’s advantages within UK context

• Nested within a favourable national (Scottish) policy context
• Statutory homelessness system more generous than elsewhere in UK (esp towards single homeless people)
• Social housing supply is stronger than in many other UK cities
• Welfare restrictions (on housing benefit) cut less deeply than elsewhere in the UK
• No (more) reliance on undignified shelters
• Yet homelessness persists…
Rough sleeping

Homeless Applicants Slept Rough in 3 months prior to application

- 2018/19
- 2019/20
- 2020/21

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Statutory homelessness applications

Number of Homeless Applications by Financial Year, Glasgow and Scotland

- 2018/19
- 2019/20
- 2020/21

Scotland
Glasgow
Temporary accommodation placements

Households in Temporary Accommodation at end of financial year, Glasgow and Scotland

- 2018/19
- 2019/20
- 2020/21

Scotland and Glasgow

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Institute for Social Policy Housing and Equality Research
High rates of poverty

The most important driver of homelessness in all its forms is poverty… Other drivers include, availability and affordability of accommodation, the extent to which prevention measures are used, and the demographics of people experiencing homelessness.”. [emphasis in original]

Glen Bramley, Homelessness Projections, Crisis, 10 August 2017
Blocks on access to settled accommodation

...we just don't have housing market pressure in the same way for example that Edinburgh or London [has]. It's embarrassing that we have homelessness at all because there is sufficient accommodation; social housing at the right turnover to accommodate everyone and that's even before you start tapping into the private rental sector, you know? (Voluntary sector representative, Glasgow)

...the things that get in the way really are process issues... referrals, how people are engaged, supported, how assessments are undertaken...the difference in risk appetite between local authorities and third sector providers and things that just really stall individual pathways through this. (Voluntary sector representative, Glasgow)

...this local approach really did just bring everything a bit more out into the open, so it's been absolutely brilliant. Since the pandemic there's been an [agreement]... in Glasgow... that 60 per cent of housing association lets will go to homeless households and again so far so good that that has been agreed first of all and is continuing to be progressed. Some give more than that so it was a minimum so that feels absolutely spot on. (Voluntary sector representative, Glasgow)
Failure to provide temporary accommodation

...there's been a dramatic change in the emphasis to make sure that every client is accommodated as and when is required....Up until [pre COVID] it was fairly normal ...numerous times a day, to have to say to a client that, unfortunately, you weren't able to source them any kind of emergency accommodation because obviously demand far outstripped supply ...I would say in the last year or so, that the emphasis has changed. There has been a lot more accommodation available’. (Frontline worker, Glasgow)

...the number of temporary flats that we've got now compared to pre-COVID is dramatically more. I remember, it used to be quite hard, difficult to get your client into a TFF but now, it's definitely a lot faster. I think that's made quite a big difference. (Frontline worker, Glasgow)
Inadequate attention to prevention

• Scotland has a much stronger safety net for people (especially single people) who are already homeless than elsewhere in the UK
• But lags behind England & Wales on homelessness prevention
• Prevention Review Group recommended:
  – introduction of range of new prevention duties on public bodies
  – clarify, strengthen and extend local authority duty to prevent homelessness
Complex support needs

- Affect a substantial minority of homeless people (especially single homeless people)
- National ‘Housing First’ Pathfinder Programme – strongly evidence-based model; roll-out relatively recent and still incomplete
- 579 Housing First tenancies started under Pathfinder Programme nationally, 84% tenancy sustainment to date; 40% (231) in Glasgow
No Recourse to Public Funds

• Concerns about refused asylum seekers, EEA and other migrants with ‘no recourse to public funds’
• Accommodated for the duration of the COVID emergency, but concerns about longer-term
• ‘Fair Way Scotland’ intended to provide a route-map to end homelessness and destitution amongst this group
Impact of COVID response

• Immediate focus on accommodating people sleeping rough and decanting night shelter accommodation (inclusive of people with NRPF)

• Reconfiguring of outreach services; multi-agency hub; boost in lettings to homeless people

• Infection rates kept to a minimum
COVID impacts

..you've put a bunch of addicts under the one roof. They're all in each other's rooms...It was really, really bad and people's mental health was off the wall, and then what we're hearing, obviously, are the deaths and stuff like that... It wasn't a safe environment; it wasn't a healthy environment...At the early stages, at the beginning, it was quite frightening. (Frontline worker, Glasgow)

you think to yourself God, if we hadn't had COVID, where would we be? We'd quite clearly still have issues around about failure to accommodate... (Frontline worker, Glasgow)

...what that meant is that there was no night shelter or shared communal sleeping in Glasgow across the pandemic... and, fingers crossed, I don't think we'll see the return of that in Glasgow. (Voluntary sector representative, Glasgow)

I think the way that we respond to people with complex needs in particular will be sustained in the longer term. I think the level of multi-agency collaboration and inter-agency working - that was already there...but it's completely ramped up during the time of COVID. (Voluntary sector representative, Glasgow)
Conclusions

• Less ‘excuse’ for homelessness in Glasgow than almost any other city in the Global North (or in UK)

• Plenty of advantages, but we haven’t fully exploited them all as yet

• Array of promising initiatives, and COVID responses brought substantial benefits

• But much left to be done to end homelessness in Glasgow – the role of the Glasgow Alliance is pivotal