

Scottish Centre for Research on
SOCIAL JUSTICE

**Housing and Social Justice:
the case of Scottish homelessness
policy**

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Housing Futures

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Scottish homelessness policy – best in Europe?



On 6 November 2003 the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions awarded the Housing Rights Protector Award to the Scottish Executive (government) for its homelessness legislation in recognition of its contribution to protecting human rights and safeguarding human dignity. CHRE is an international human rights NGO devoted to economic, social and cultural rights.

Outline



- Introduction
- Homelessness policy 2003
- How to evaluate policy?
 - Achieving social justice?
- Conclusions
 - Scottish homelessness policy
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Introduction 1

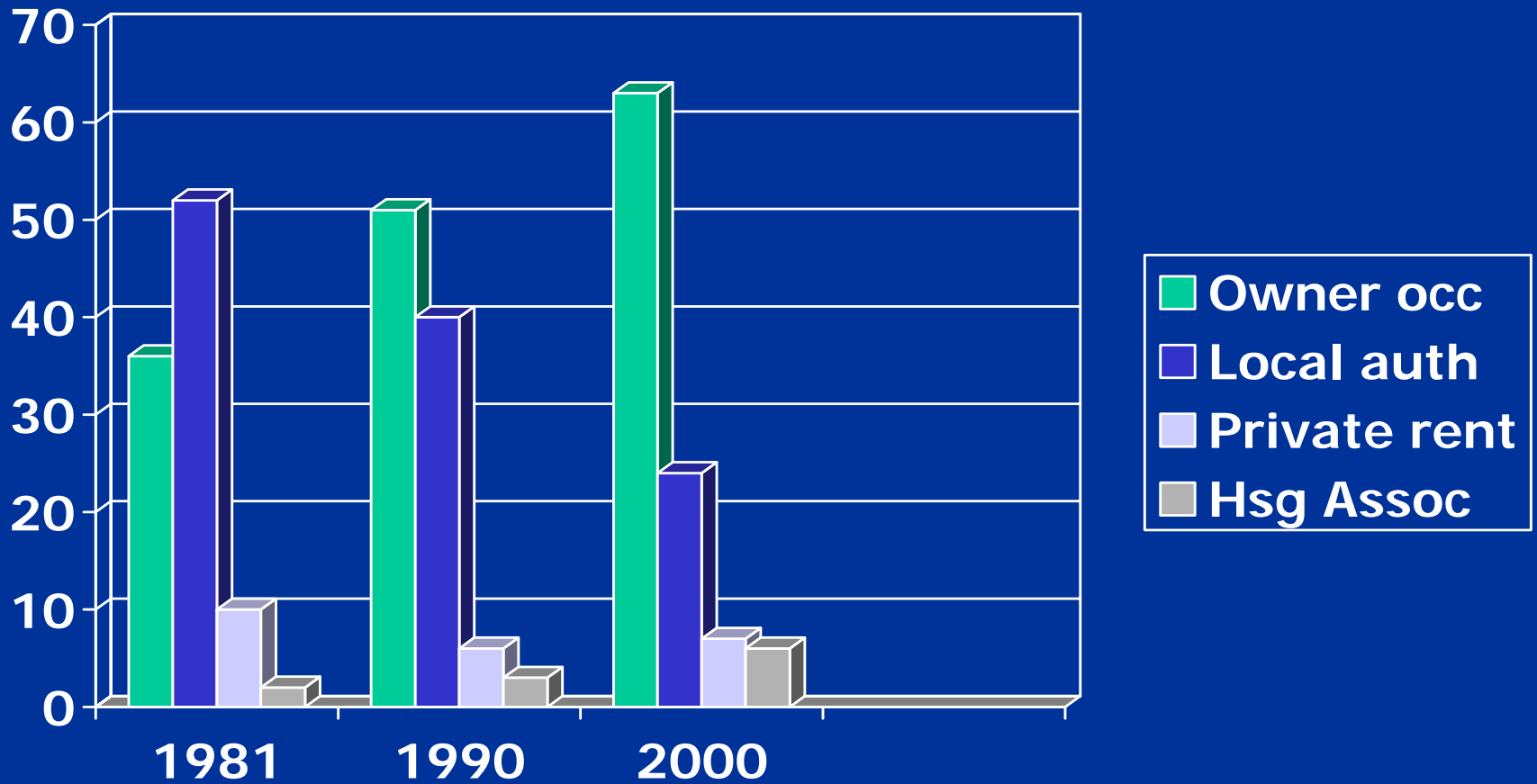


- Homelessness policy in Scotland today: 'best' in Europe?
- 1977 legislation: Code of Guidance elaborates
- Local authorities responsible for rehousing
- Right to rehousing qualified in 3 ways:
 1. Certain people (families, vulnerable only)
 2. Certain geography ('local')
 3. Certain circumstances (intentionality)
- Divergence with UK after 1996

Introduction 2 – Wider housing context

'.. homelessness and rough sleeping; cold and damp housing for many vulnerable people; increasing disrepair; the paradox of housing shortages despite abandoned and empty housing; and, perhaps most important, the need to regenerate whole communities and neighbourhoods' (Minister, 1st stage 2001 Bill)

Tenure structure and change Scotland, 1981-2000



Homelessness policy 2003: key features



- Acts in 2001 and 2003: new roles, rights
- New Code of Guidance
- Policy and service developments:
 - housing investment, support, allocations, financial assistance, welfare benefits, Rough Sleepers Initiative, Glasgow hostel programme, new statistics to monitor

Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 & Homelessness Etc (S) Act 2003



- Local authorities:
 - Rehousing, advice & information
 - Strategies
- Housing association allocation duties
- New regulatory regime for homeless services
- New rights:
 - Interim accommodation
 - Eliminates 1977 Act qualifications
 - ‘priority need’
 - local connection
 - intention: at least temporary accommodation

Policy development since 1997: key features of process

- New Scottish Parliament and Executive
- Strong political leadership
- Consensus through Task Force & research
- £127 million earmarked for 2003/04-2005/06
- Nesting within 'social justice strategy': 29 'milestones' include
 - Reduce the number of households,.. particularly .. with children, living in temporary accommodation
 - No one has to sleep rough

How evaluate homelessness policy?



- After longer than this ... 2012
- Social justice provides a rationale for 'how the good and bad things in life should be distributed among the members of a human society' (Miller, 1999, p. 1)
- Fairness and unfairness, processes and outcomes
- Distribution of good and bad things between *all*: not just what poor people have

Socially just policy?



What would key features of a socially just homelessness policy be?

1. Recognises connections between different forms of disadvantage
2. Acknowledges low status, powerlessness
3. Uses socially just principles in service delivery
4. Defines who is responsible, provides resources and means

Connections between different forms of disadvantage 1



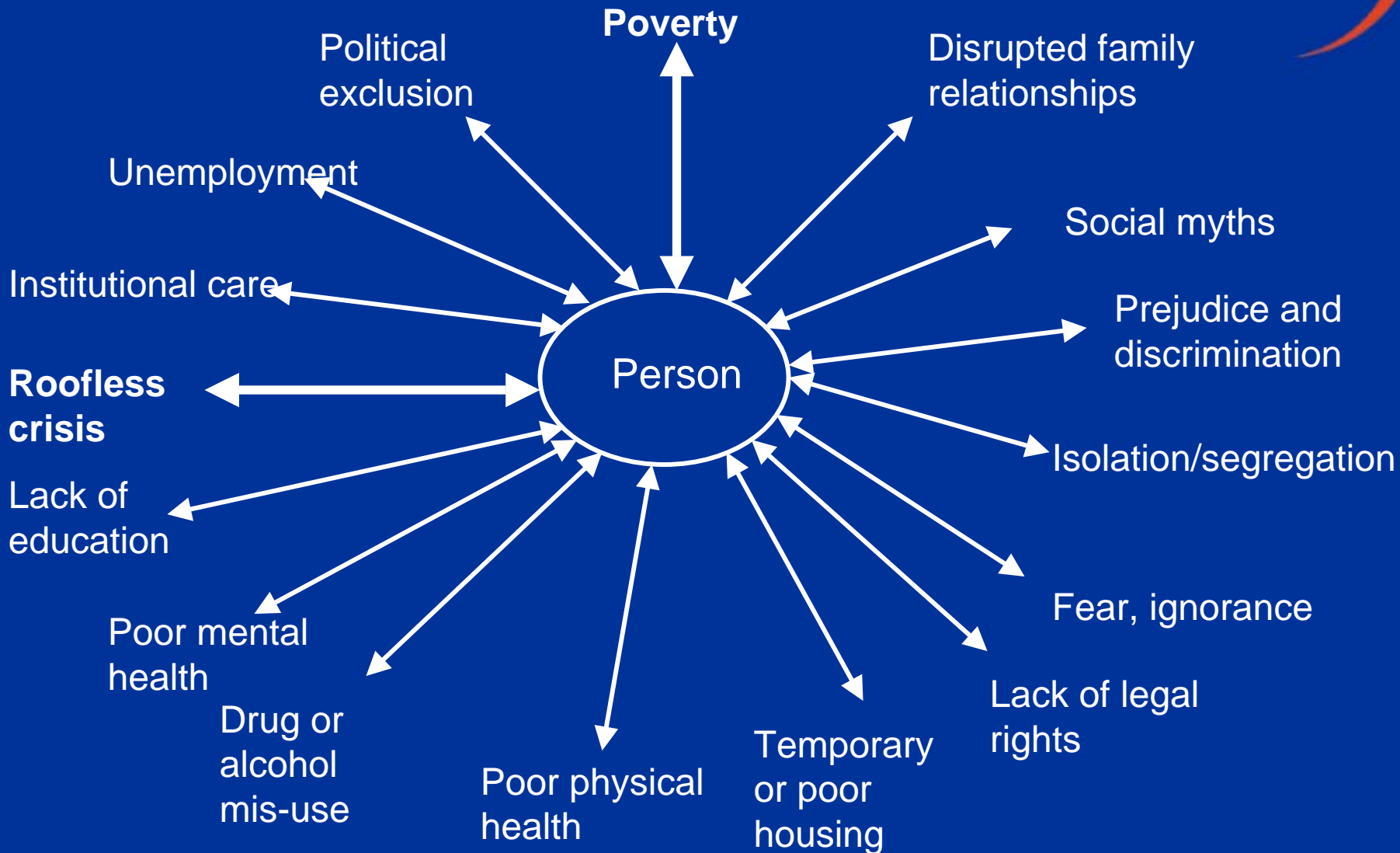
'Unemployment, and to a lesser extent housing affordability and de-institutionalisation, appear to be powerful forces affecting the incidence of homelessness ... Thus, while behavioural factors may be important in explaining individual cases ... structural trends do affect the aggregate level of homelessness' (Kemp, Lynch and Mackay, 2001, p. 4)

Connections between different forms of disadvantage 2



- Links to/from homelessness to
 - 61% older people: alcohol addiction
 - 41% young single: drug problems
 - 50% physical health; high mental health problems
 - Almost all unemployed
- '...not being motivated enough to get your benefits sorted out, not being able to budget, having poor social skills, not being able to work because you can't present yourself well enough ... very low confidence, poor self-esteem, poor life skills ...' (Agency worker)

The causes and consequences of homelessness



Does policy address disadvantages that carry over? Examples



- Tackling child poverty: tax credits
- Educational reforms to improve standards
- Employment and training: tax credits
- Drugs misuse policy
- Health Improvement
- 'Health and Homelessness Action Plans'
- 'Supporting People'
- Housing supply and conditions

Low status, powerlessness 1



1. Women in refuges

'If I went to my mother's, he would only turn up there and shout abuse at her, I couldn't put her through it ... If he knew where we were, we'd get no peace' (Joan)

'... you try to hide a lot from your family. They judge you, or try to tell you what to do' (Sally)

Low status, powerlessness 2



2. John, hostel resident

'It's really going to be my first time of having the responsibility of having a house. I have to take responsibility and I've never had responsibility since the day I was born. Mother, father, 1st wife, 2nd wife's done it and when it came to me to do it, I was like "I'm away out onto the street"' (Scottish man in London)

Does policy address low status, powerlessness? Examples 1



- Statutory rights
- Policy on domestic violence – and refuges
- Health and homelessness action plans
- ‘Rough sleepers initiative’
- Glasgow hostel replacement programme
- Staff training and development
- Regulation of homelessness services and housing management

Does policy address low status, powerlessness? Examples 2



Homelessness Task Force, 1st recommendation:

- increase homeless people's control
- extend their choices, and
- achieve their effective participation in the development of future policy, practice and service delivery –
in all activities directed at tackling homelessness ...

Uses socially just principles in service delivery? Examples



- Need and equality not discrimination, 'merit' or prejudice
- Allocations policies by housing associations
- Abolition of priority need, local connection and intentionality conditions

Defines who is responsible, provides resources and means



- Implementation led by multi-agency Monitoring Group
- Big role for local authorities: 32, also 3 tiers of government, many agencies inc. voluntary & private, housing associations
- £127m. to 2005/06, timetable to 2012

Conclusions – Scottish homelessness policy



- About as good as it could be on paper: it addresses all four of the recurring themes in social injustice
- But can it be implemented?
 - Structural disadvantages?
 - Culture change?
 - Public attitudes?
 - Finance after 2005/06?
 - Necessary reliance on 32 local authorities with mixed records

Housing policy and social justice



- Unacceptable housing conditions are a cause and consequence of social injustice but some inequalities are not unjust
- Socially just housing policy will address:
 - Disadvantages that carry over to create others
 - Low status and powerlessness
 - Socially just principles in service delivery
 - Responsibility, resources and means
- State action is necessary but not sufficient