



A System Wide Approach to Prevention (SWAP)

APSE Online Summer Series of Housing Seminars - Breaking New Ground: Innovative Local Authority Solutions for Homelessness – 3rd June 2026

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Prevention Legislation

- The Housing (Scotland) Act gained Royal Assent in November 2025. It will be brought into effect gradually, in stages, from 2026 onwards.
- The Act will bring significant changes for the Scottish housing and homelessness sectors.
- Amongst other things, it will introduce rent control areas, enhance the rights of tenants, make it easier for households to have pets in temporary accommodation and change the rules around joint tenancies.
- However, one of the biggest changes is in relation to the *Prevention Duties* that this Act will bring into force. These duties are also referred to as “Ask and Act”.
- To help inform the secondary legislation for these duties, in November last year, the Scottish Government announced funding of £4 million which would be used to fund pilot projects. Edinburgh and partners were successful in a bid to deliver a pilot in ‘testing’ these duties through a System Wide Approach to Prevention (SWAP).

What is a System Wide Approach to Prevention?

The SWAP pilot includes all named public bodies within the legislation. The pilot is operating in a small geographical area (Wester Hailes) initially, to test a whole system, place and primary health-based approach to delivering the 'Ask and Act' duties. This pilot seeks to deliver and implement systems change across the wider system, to support those at risk of homelessness to access relevant supports and services to prevent homelessness in the first place.

The pilot focuses on the value of a quality conversation. A quality conversation asks services across the system to explore a range of areas within a person's life. This person-centred conversation covers

- Health
- Housing
- Income, debt, employability and money advice
- Community, family and social supports

SWAP – An Overview

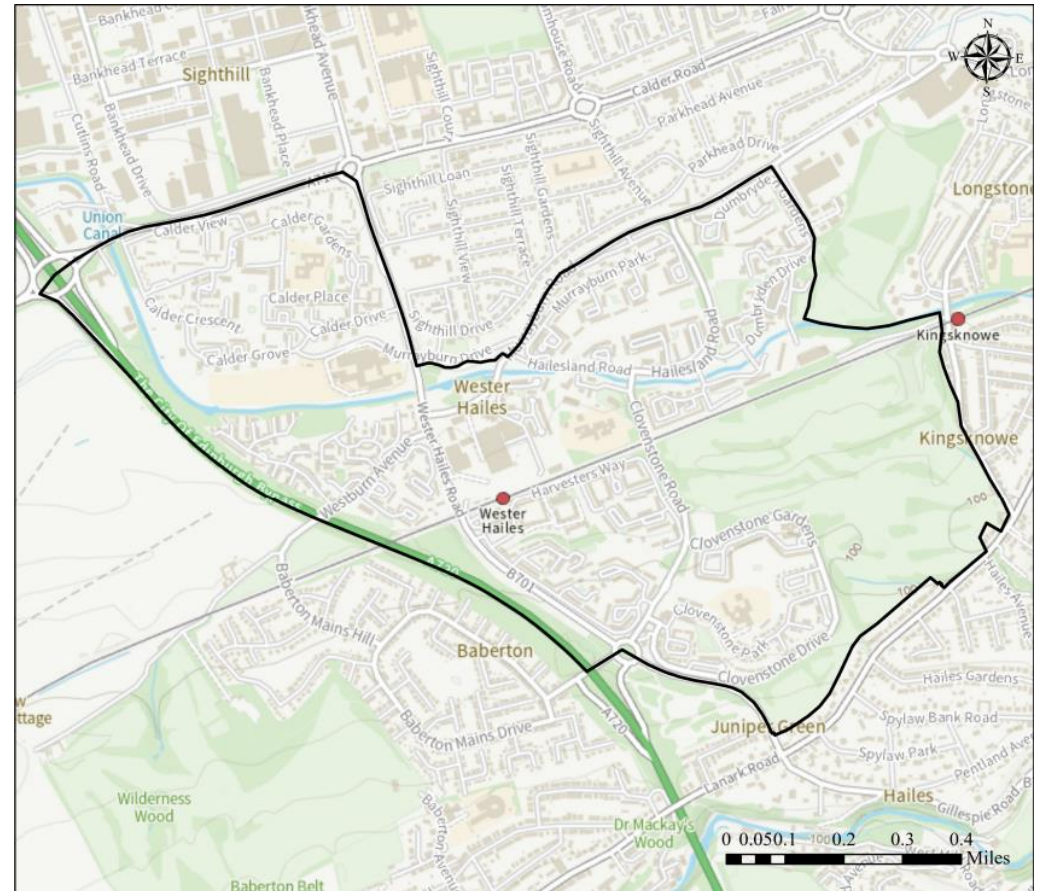
SWAP is a pilot project covering a defined geographical area in Edinburgh – Wester Hailes.

SWAP has 13 external partners and 8 internal partners. The pilot has funded a prevention of homelessness police post, Crisis Edinburgh post and additional time for GP's to deliver ask and act

The City of Edinburgh Council is the coordinating SWAP partner.

We are seeking to test and learn what works and what needs enhanced to help all partners implement Ask and Act.

All our partners are on their own journey, SWAP dovetails these together.



SWAP Partners

Prospect
Community
Housing

Health and Social
Care partnership

Police Scotland

The Scottish Fire
and Rescue
Service

The Scottish
Prison Service

Citizen's Advice

Crisis (Scotland)

Community
Renewal Trust
(Employability)

Triage (Youth
Employability)

NHS Lothian

Social Security
Scotland

Department of
Work and
Pensions (Job
Centres)

Edinburgh Future's
Institute

Key Workstreams

1. All partners are collecting data about how they 'ask' and 'act' in their own day-to-day service delivery. This information alongside household and demographic information is compiled into a shared minimum dataset. These datasets can then be analysed to provide a fuller picture of what these duties could look like on the ground.
2. Where a partner cannot resolve the needs of a household themselves, they can refer into the pilots Single Point of Contact (Spoc). Spoc is a weekly meeting with professionals from all partners where referred households are discussed and coordinated interventions offered to support them.
3. As part of Spoc, there is a £50,000 prevention fund which the group can use to provide financial assistance to referred households to support prevention of homelessness. This will be delivered using a Cash First approach
4. Lived experience research – interviews within HMP Edinburgh and focus groups facilitated by Crisis (Scotland).

What is a System Wide Approach to Prevention?

Name	DOB	Age	Address

1) Identifying Data – This allows us to assess the sustainability of a systems approach to prevention at 12, 24 and 36 months after households access an intervention.

Gender	NRPF - does the household have access to public funds?	Ethnicity	Sexual orientation	Disability

2) Demographic Data – because this is working across the system, this allows us to understand whether there are groups who struggle to access specific services in a preventative context and supports service design and delivery

Ask - what was the Ask?	Act (bullet point each Act)	Referral to SPoC?	Time spent on Ask and Act	What prompted you to ask?

3) Service Data – this helps us understand how the system interacts with people, how and where people interact with the system and how parts of the system interacts with each other

Challenges

Recruitment – fixed-term posts are challenging to recruit for and organisational timescales for recruitment can be protracted

Data Sharing in a Preventative Context – organisations are typically used to sharing data with each other but only when a household is at the point of crisis

Cultural barriers – each organisation and service have their own way of doing things and its own definition of key terms like “prevention” and “early intervention”. Services routinely identify need too close to crisis, therefore impacting opportunities to prevent ‘upstream’ and intervene or prevent the harms that lead to homelessness

Capacity – Whilst there is a clear appetite and buy in from all partners in relation to this approach, we cannot deny that capacity and resource issues continue to impact many parts of the system in relation to crisis intervention and critical need.

Solutions – Mitigation and Problem Solving

Recruitment – The pilot developed capacity within existing teams to upskill current workers via secondments and have recruited into some of the posts by offering the opportunities across the partner organisations.

Data Sharing in a Preventative Context – The pilot developed a clear yet simple data sharing model as well as linking up CEC’s Information Governance teams with partner IG teams. We also anonymised data returns where required whilst we waited for Data Sharing Agreements to be signed by partners.

Cultural barriers – Training was delivered to all front-line teams, focusing on what early identification of need looks like and ensuring training was developed within the context of the team's service. ie Police had very different training to GPs to ensure training was relatable and that the quality conversation was deliverable within their context

Capacity – we worked with partners to incorporate the ‘asks’ and ‘acts’ into their current service delivery. Through the weekly SpoC meetings, we had a clear action plan to prevent duplication of interventions.

Key Progress

- SPoC is operational with 12 meetings and 34 referrals since April 2026
- The first 3 weeks saw 177 households 'asked' across partners
- 8 out of 12 external operational partners have signed off the DSA
- We received completed shared minimum datasets from 8 partners
- Early signs indicate that households who experienced longer conversations with services tended to receive more actions
- Early patterns emerging of mental health needs among those referred into the pilot for support

Next steps

- Implementing action plans created on the back of receiving the first set of datasets – this includes training to reinforce the importance of quality conversations for partners where the datasets and referrals didn't reflect a strong sense that this was happening consistently
- Working with the Library in Wester Hailes which is seen as a hub for the community to deliver family fun days and regular events to support community cohesion and relationship building with supports being delivered across their neighbourhood
- Working with partners to engage with households across the system with lived experience. This process will support the reflexive approach taken in developing the pilot to ensure it meets the needs of the neighbourhood in a way that is inclusive, accessible and psychologically safe
- Continue to embed a culture of early, person-centred conversations across the system that identify a range of needs that households can be offered support with to prevent harms that can lead to homelessness