

Research

The facts: bad housing and homelessness for children in Scotland 2009

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Shelter

The facts: bad housing and homelessness for children in Scotland 2009

Summary

- Children and young people in Scotland continue to live in run-down, overcrowded, damp housing or are stuck in temporary housing affecting all aspects of their current and future lives.
- More than 90,000 children live in overcrowded homes – enough to fill Wembley, the second largest stadium in Europe.
- One in ten children is living in fuel poverty in Scotland.
- Two thirds of social housing which children live in has failed the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS).
- There are 79,000 households with children living in them which have condensation in at least one room, putting these children at a higher risk of asthma and other respiratory problems.
- Every day 60 children become homeless somewhere in Scotland. That is enough children to fill all secondary schools in Fife over a year.
- Despite levels of homelessness remaining relatively static in the last 5 years there has been an 18% rise in the number of homeless families over the same period.
- There has been a 27% rise in the number of households with children staying in temporary accommodation over the last three years.
- We estimate that nearly 2,000 children in Scotland were in families evicted from social housing in 2007/08, usually for rent arrears.
- Approximately 20 young people in every 1,000 young people in Scotland become homeless, nearly a fifth are aged 16-17.
- Every child and young person has a right to a decent home, yet the stark reality is that too many children and young people are still growing up in poor housing. Addressing bad housing and homelessness for children and young people is central to tackling child poverty and social inequalities in Scotland.
- Shelter believes more investment is needed in affordable, high quality housing that is designed for young people and families with children, in areas they want to live, and that appropriate support is available to prevent homelessness reduce its impact on children and young people.

Background

A decent, warm, safe home is crucial to all aspects of children's well being, yet the facts show tens of thousands of Scotland's children have to cope with waking up every day in cold, damp, overcrowded homes, or in a state of limbo due to homelessness.

This report is intended to be the first in a series of annual reports produced by Shelter's Children's Service to provide a real picture of how many children are affected by poor quality and unsuitable housing in Scotland. We welcome feedback and suggestions as to how we might expand the evidence base. We have tried to make sure that all the information is as up to date and accurate as possible and hope that it is a useful publication for people working to improve the lives of children and young people in Scotland. Although this report is Scotland wide we will endeavour to provide figures for local areas where available and on request.

Children's housing situation has a profound impact on the quality of children's childhoods and life chances, evidenced in research by the National Centre for Social Research and Shelter.¹ The same children who are homeless or growing up in sub standard housing are also likely to be from deprived communities and low income households. It is vital we recognise poor housing and homelessness as key components in children's experiences of poverty as well the role of housing policy in helping to lift children out of poverty and move towards the target to end child poverty by 2020.

Children in bad housing

The problems of bad housing considered in this report are overcrowding, fuel poverty, condensation, damp and dwellings that fail the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS).

Overcrowding

Living in cramped and overcrowded conditions leaves children without a quiet space to do homework, an area to play or have their friends over.

¹ Barnes, M. et al (2008) *The Dynamics of Bad Housing: The impact of bad housing on the living standard of children*, Nation Centre for Social Research; Shelter (2006) *Against the odds: An investigation comparing the lives of children on either side of Britain's housing divide*

The amount of space a family has to live in is measured in two ways. Census data records the number of 'persons per room', irrespective of age or gender, and makes a simple comparison between the number of household members and the number of rooms, not including bathrooms, cloakrooms or toilets. The other, more sophisticated measure is the 'bedroom standard' which compares the actual number of bedrooms a household has with a standard number that takes into consideration the gender, ages and relationships between household members.² For example the standard

Children living in bad housing are:

- less likely to enjoy and succeed at school than other children
- twice as likely as other children to leave school without qualifications
- almost twice as likely as other children to suffer persistent bullying
- five times as likely to lack a quiet place to do their homework as other children
- more likely to run away from home than other children (9% compared to 6%)

Shelter (2006) *Against the Odds*

number of bedrooms for a married couple with two boys, aged 8 and 12 and a 14 year old girl would be 3: one for the married couple, one for the two boys because they are of the same gender and under 21 and one for the girl because children over the age of 10 of different genders should not share a room. The bedroom standard is used by the Scottish Household Condition Survey, and by many landlords in allocating property.

Children are disproportionately likely to live in crowded households, living in two thirds of all overcrowded homes in Scotland.³ According to the 2001 census, Scotland has a much higher proportion of overcrowded households than anywhere else in Great Britain, apart from London.⁴

More than 90,000 children live in overcrowded conditions in Scotland – enough to fill Wembley, the second largest stadium in Europe. Overall this equates to one child in eight growing up in cramped conditions in Scotland.⁵ Figure 1 shows that larger households are even more likely to be overcrowded. More than a fifth of families with at least three children are overcrowded.

² Holmans, A. (2005) Inequalities in rooms and space. In Regan, S (ed) *The great divide: an analysis of housing inequality*, Shelter

³ SHCS (2007) *Scottish House Condition Survey Key Findings 2005/6*. Referred to hereafter as SHCS(2007)

⁴ See www.poverty.org.uk

⁵ Own calculations. SHCS (2007)

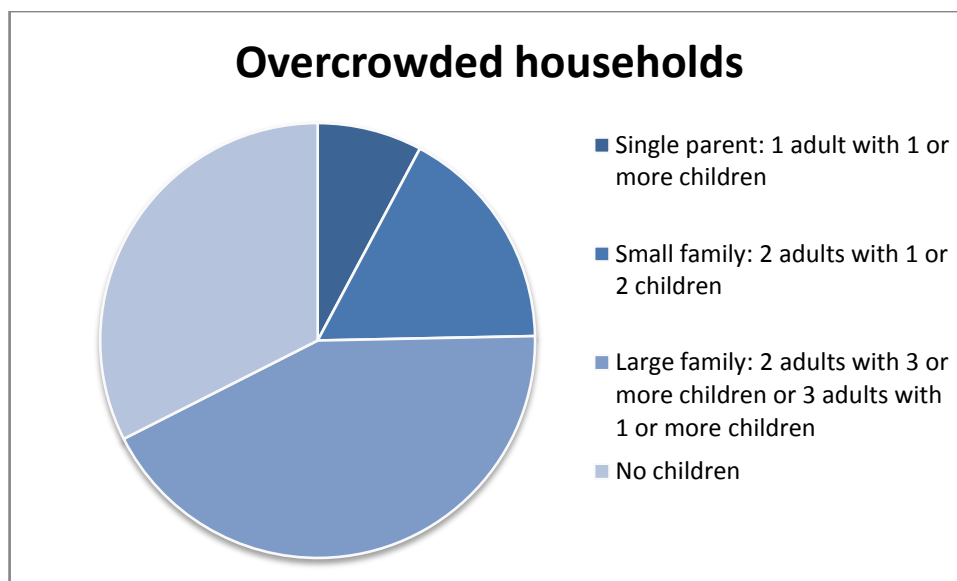


Figure 1

Fuel poverty

The term 'fuel poverty' applies to households that would be required to spend more than 10% of their income on all household fuel use to heat their home to an adequate level.

In Scotland, one in ten children is living in fuel poverty.⁶ This is the equivalent to all of the people in Falkirk (97,180) not being able to heat their homes. Lone parent families are particularly affected by fuel poverty. One lone parent family in every four is fuel poor representing half of all families with children in fuel poverty.⁷

Fuel poverty is, of course, highly correlated with income. Low income families are at greatest risk of fuel poverty and often have to choose between essential household items or living in an adequately heated home. Low income families also tend to pay more for their gas and electricity because they often opt for pre-payment meters, to help with budgeting, but which means they pay 8-10% more for their fuel bills than those paying by direct debit.⁸

⁶ Own calculation. SHCS (2009) *Scottish House Condition Survey Revised Key Findings 2007*. Referred to hereafter as SHCS (2009)

⁷ SHCS (2009)

⁸ Save the Children (2007) *The Poverty Premium: How poor households pay more for essential goods and services*

Sarah* and her three children were forced to leave their council flat when the poor conditions became too much. The flat was riddled with damp, mould and rats. All three children suffered from asthma and eczema which were aggravated by the damp conditions in the flat. They had to make regular trips to the hospital because of children's breathing problems. Although the council tried to make repairs the mould kept reappearing. They could not get re-housed by the council despite the children's serious health problems and the doctor's insistence that they move. The family did move out into private rented flats but after the second was sold she moved in with a relative. But conditions were cramped with Sarah having to sleep on the sofa. After all the upheaval and stress caused by not having a decent home, Sarah and her children now have a place of their own, near friends and family, and are a lot happier.

* Names have been changed to protect the family's identity

Failing the Scottish Housing Quality Standard

All social housing must pass the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) by 2015, which requires dwellings to be above a Tolerable Standard, free from serious disrepair, energy efficient, with modern facilities and services and healthy, safe and secure.

In 2007, there were 386,000 dwellings which children were living in that failed the SHQS.⁹ This represents two thirds of all social housing lived in by families with children.

Condensation

There are 79,000 households with children living in that have condensation in at least one room. These children are at a greater risk of experiencing asthma and other respiratory problems.

Children living in poor housing are more likely to suffer respiratory problems such as chest problems, breathing difficulties, asthma and bronchitis than other children

Shelter (2006) *Against the Odds*

Damp

There are 32,000 households with children living in homes affected by either rising or penetrating damp, which is the equivalent of one household with children in every 20.¹⁰

⁹ SHCS (2009)

Children with no permanent home

Homelessness refers to anyone who does not have a home; you do not have to be sleeping on the streets to be homeless. A homeless family may be sleeping at a friend's place, staying in bed and breakfast, living in overcrowded or unsuitable accommodation or being forced to leave their home. Homelessness figures refer to those who have been accepted as homeless by a local authority – in reality there may be others who are homeless who are not known by their local authority.

Every day 60 children become homeless somewhere in Scotland that is enough children to fill all secondary schools in Fife over a year.¹¹

Claire* and her 3 children, aged 11, 3 and 2, became homeless when she broke up with her partner. Their current temporary accommodation is a furnished flat on the third floor which is on the opposite side of town from where they used to live. The eldest is staying with a relative so that he can get to school easily and be near friends and family but means he misses his mother and siblings. Debbie has mobility issues making it even harder for her to tackle the three flights of stairs with the two youngest to access local shops and services and make the journey across town to nursery school. The middle child is also being assessed for a learning disability which again involves travelling across town since they moved. Living away from their family and social networks means less help is at hand to care for the children putting an additional strain on Debbie which impacts on her mental health and means she has less energy to focus on the children. The family are waiting for an offer of a permanent home that is suitable.

* Names have been changed to protect the family's identity

Homelessness has risen by less than 1% in the last 5 years yet the number of homeless families with children has risen by 18% in the same period.¹²

¹⁰ SHCS (2009)

¹¹ Own calculation. Scottish Government (2009) Pupils in Scotland 2008; Scottish Government (2008), *Operation of the homeless persons legislation in Scotland: 2007-08*. Referred to hereafter as Scottish Government (2008)

¹² Scottish Government (2008)

It is often supposed that the rising pressure on homelessness services is because new rights have been granted to single people, both to temporary accommodation in 2002 and looking ahead to 2012 when all unintentionally homeless people will have the right to a home. However, rights for families have not changed and the fact that the rise in family homelessness is so high suggests that there are more fundamental housing system pressures.

Reason for homelessness

The three most common reasons for homelessness given by families with children are a household dispute or relationship breakdown (16%), domestic abuse (15%) and being asked to leave their accommodation (15%).¹³

Homelessness and family types

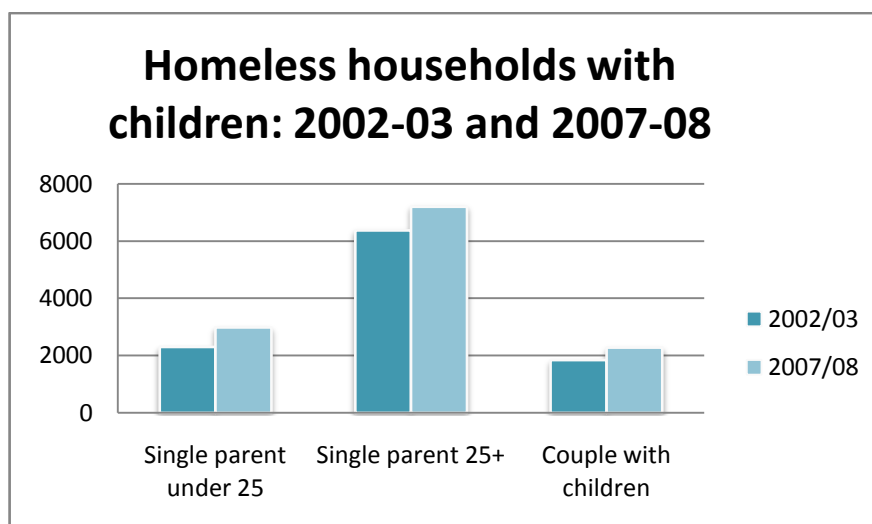


Figure 2

Figure 2 shows the types of households with children assessed as homeless and the rise in the last 5 years. It is maybe not surprising – although significant – that female lone parents over 24, head up nearly 60% of all households with children making a homeless application.¹⁴ Contrary perhaps to people’s perceptions, young parents aged 16-17, represent less than 3% of all homeless households with children.¹⁵

¹³ Scottish Government (2008)

¹⁴ Scottish Government (2009), *Operation of the homeless persons legislation in Scotland: quarters ending 30 June and 30 September 2008 (including households in temporary accommodation at 31 December 2008)*, 17 March. Referred to hereafter as Scottish Government (2009)

¹⁵ Detailed tables. Scottish Government (2008)

Nearly half of homeless children are under 5 years old. A breakdown of dependent children in families assessed as homeless shows that 43% are aged 0-4, 35% are aged 5-11, 17% are aged 12-15 and 5% are aged 16-18.¹⁶

Temporary accommodation

Children often have to spend months, even years in 'temporary' houses waiting to move into a permanent home. Temporary accommodation varies widely in type and standard. In general it will be furnished flats or houses, owned by a council, housing association or private landlord. In an emergency situation families may be placed in bed and breakfast accommodation for the short-term. Families may find themselves being placed out of their local area far from the support of families and friends, with long journeys to and from school. There are children in two out of every five households in temporary accommodation.¹⁷

There has been a dramatic rise in the number of homeless families with children literally waiting for a permanent home. The last three years has seen a 27% rise in the number of families with children living in temporary accommodation. There were 3,388 households with children in temporary accommodation on 31 December, 2008 compared with 2,661 on 31 December, 2005. These figures highlight the pressure being placed on housing supply for more suitable housing for families with children.

¹⁶ Scottish Government (2009)

¹⁷ Scottish Government (2009)

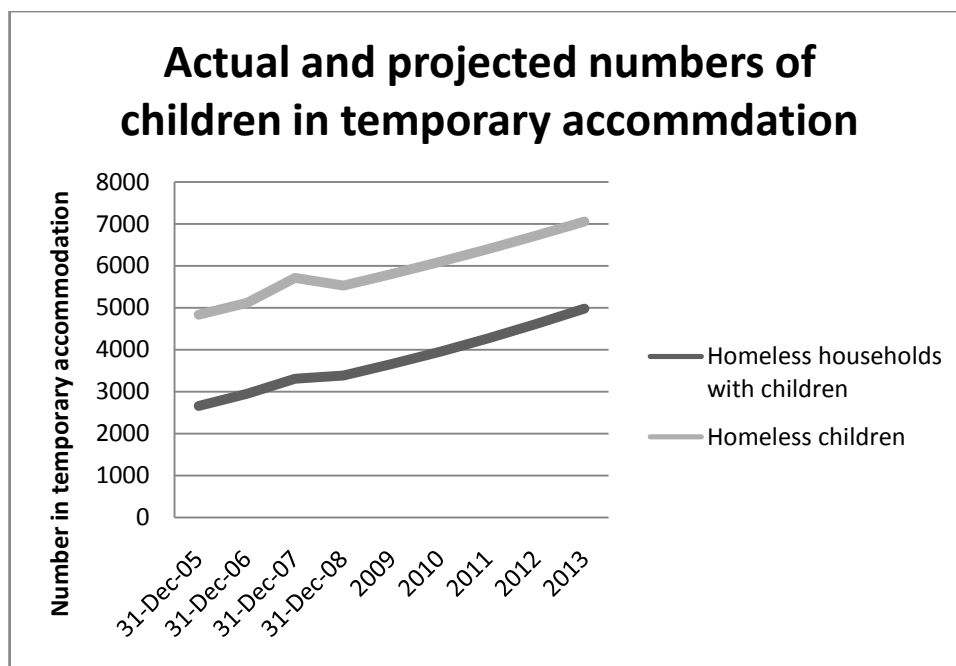


Figure 3 ¹⁸

Figure 3 shows a recent decline in the numbers of children in temporary accommodation although we cannot assume this trend will continue. If the number of households with children in temporary accommodation continues to change at a similar rate as it has over the last three years there will be an estimated 7,000 homeless children in temporary accommodation by 2013.

Using the latest snapshot figures from the Scottish Government there were 6,161 children living in temporary accommodation on 31 December 2008.¹⁹ Figure 4 shows that 87% were staying in local authority or housing association housing, while 2% were in bed and breakfast hotels, a further 10% were in private rented accommodation and 1% in hostels.²⁰

¹⁸ The projected numbers of households with children in temporary accommodation has been calculated using the average annual percentage change in snapshot figures between 31 Dec, 2005 and 2008.

¹⁹ This includes 631 children who were staying in temporary accommodation in Glasgow as a result of 'legacy' case reviews of asylum applications undertaken by the home office, which have not been included in the figures previously. For the purposes of comparison with previous years the figure of 5530 children in temporary accommodation has been used. Scottish Government (2009)

²⁰ Scottish Government (2009)

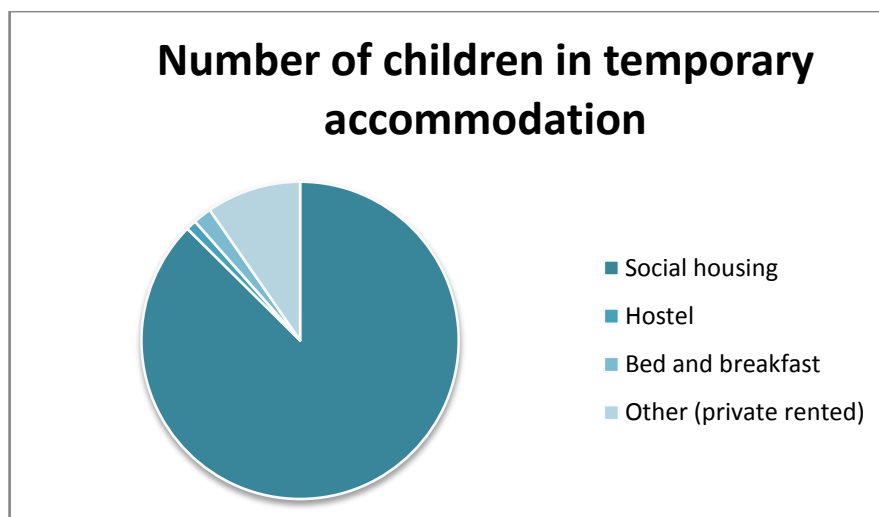


Figure 4

Homeless children in unsuitable temporary accommodation

Homeless children continue to stay in bed and breakfast hotels despite the introduction of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order (2004) Act which bans its use for families with children, except in specific circumstances. Bed and breakfast hotels that accept homeless people are a specialist type of accommodation. The standard of the rooms may be poor, bathroom facilities may have to be shared and there are usually no cooking facilities. Although there is considerable variation in the figures due to the relatively small number of breaches of this Order it is clear that the problem of children being placed in bed and breakfast hotels still persists and shows no sign of declining. A look at the average breaches over the last four years shows that at any one time there are approximately 48 homeless families with children staying in bed and breakfast accommodation that is deemed unsuitable.²¹ On 31 December, 2008 a further 91 families with children were staying in bed and breakfast hotels but without breaching the Order.

The latest snapshot figures show breaches across eight local authorities with the highest frequency in Highland (12), Moray (8) and Falkirk (7). There have been consistent breaches of the unsuitable accommodation order over the last two years in Clackmannanshire, Midlothian and Moray.

²¹ Scottish Government (2009)

Gill and her three children, Sarah, Jo and Mark* (aged 11, 6 and 4) have been homeless for two years ever since they were evicted for rent arrears, caused by a mix up with housing benefit payments. Since then they have moved four times including a stint in bed and breakfast accommodation. They now stay in a two bedroom temporary furnished flat. All aspects of the children's lives have been disrupted several times over. The two eldest children have moved schools twice, had poor attendance at school and suffered from low self esteem. The children dislike where they live. The flat is too small, the neighbours are unfriendly, they miss living near friends and family and playing outside because they do not feel safe in the area around their flat. The family is waiting for a permanent home back in their local area.

* Names have been changed to protect the family's identity

Eviction of children and their families

Families can be evicted even if there are children in the home. In fact approximately a third of all households evicted by a social landlord have children in them.²²

Eviction action by social landlord	Total number of cases in 2007/08	Estimated number of families with children	Estimated no. of children
Eviction decree granted	7966	3425	5959
Eviction occurred	3573	1115	1940

Table 1

Table 1 uses current eviction data along with previous research by Communities Scotland to estimate how many households with children were evicted in 2007-08. We can estimate that nearly 2,000 children were evicted from their homes in 2007-08. This means that every day five children in Scotland are put at risk of homelessness because they are being evicted or forced to abandon their home by their landlord.²³ In the majority of cases

²² Communities Scotland (2005) *Eviction in practice*

²³ Own calculations using ratios calculated in Communities Scotland (2005) *Eviction in practice* alongside the latest figures on eviction rates

eviction is due to rent arrears, despite eviction arguably being an ineffective method of recovering arrears.²⁴

Homeless young people

Approximately 20 young people (aged 16-24) in every 1000 young people in Scotland become homeless, nearly a fifth are aged 16-17.²⁵ Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that the rate of homelessness among young people in Scotland is three times higher than in England.²⁶

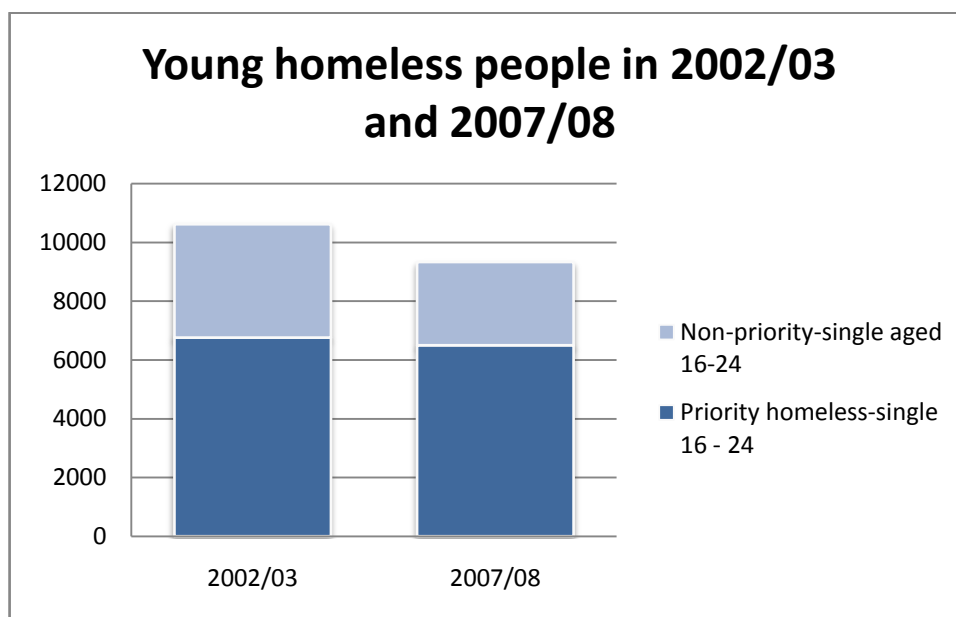


Figure 5

The number of single young people, aged 16-24, who are homeless has fallen by 12% in the last five years as shown in figure 5. This fall should be expected considering the persistent efforts by policy and services to try and ensure young people make planned moves when leaving home and are offered appropriate support to sustain tenancies.

However, young people are still vastly over represented in the homelessness population when compared to the total number of single young people in Scotland. Single young

²⁴ Shelter (2008) *Evictions by social landlords in Scotland*.

²⁵ Own calculation. Scottish Government (2008)

²⁶ JRF(2008) Youth and homelessness in the UK

people represent 23% of all homeless households while only 3% of households in Scotland are headed by a single person under 25.²⁷

A higher proportion of young people are being given priority need status compared to five years ago (64% in 2002/03 to 70% in 2007/08) but yet fewer young people are getting priority need status (see figure 5). The figures suggest that the widening of the priority need category is not being used to its full advantage for this age group. It is a missed opportunity to tackle the high numbers of young people experiencing homelessness.

The most common reason for homelessness among young people is relationship breakdown, typically with parents or step-parents, and often as a consequence of long-term conflict in the family.²⁸ Further, 16% of homeless young people, aged 16-17, have experience of being in care.²⁹

It is no surprise then that homelessness is young people's second highest concern after poverty in Scotland, according to a survey conducted by NCH Scotland and Young Scot.³⁰

What can be done?

It does not seem much to ask that every child and young person has a decent home to live in, yet the stark reality is that while some progress has been made there are still thousands of children and young people without a decent home.

Shelter believes it is morally right and economically sensible to invest now in addressing bad housing and homelessness to remove the disadvantage caused by poor housing and help lift children out of poverty. The situation is only likely to worsen with the current economic climate unless we take action to address the quality and availability of decent homes fit for children with services that meet their needs.

²⁷ Scottish Government (2008); SCROL (2001) *S05 Age of Household Reference Person (HRP) by sex and living arrangements*, www.scrol.gov.uk

²⁸ JRF (2008) *Youth and homelessness in the UK*

²⁹ Scottish Government (2008)

³⁰ *Hear our voice! Young People's Survey*, NCH Scotland and Young Scot. See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/7471891.stm>

Shelter would like to see:

- More affordable, high quality, energy efficient houses that are designed for families and young people, in communities in which they want to live.
- Better integrated working between housing, education, health and social work services to ensure children and young people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness have their needs met.
- Specialist support and services for children and young people experiencing homelessness and their families which can address their often multiple and complex problems such as financial problems, surviving domestic abuse, extreme poverty, bullying, family breakdown, stress and mental health issues.
- More child and young person centred, holistic, assessment processes when families and young people make homeless applications so that appropriate decisions are made that minimise the impact of homelessness on children and young people.
- Minimum standards for temporary accommodation to ensure a consistent high quality standard of accommodation for homeless families with children and young people that will meet their needs.