

# Generation squalor

Shelter's national investigation into  
the housing crisis



# Shelter



# 100,000 people without a home

## Bleak time for record number of families

THE number of homeless families in England looks set to hit a record six-figure high, it was claimed today.

Figures released by the Government in September showed 52,480 homeless households are currently accommodated in temporary accommodation.

And homeless Shelter says the figures look set to rise. That would be a 135 per cent increase since 1995.

Shepherds' Bush, London, is a temporary accommodation for homeless families trapped in the city.

"It is a scandal that homeless families are now being housed in temporary accommodation with devastating effects on their health, education and future prospects."

future prospects.

"The Government's own reports show that if it is serious about tackling child poverty and social exclusion, it must do more to help homeless households."

Ministers have said that the current strategy to help homeless households is "a mix of measures".

But the Government's own figures show that the number of homeless households has risen by 135 per cent since 1995.

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Residents of St Briavel's, a village on the edge of the Forest of Dean, have lost their young people to spiralling property prices.

## The village where locals can't afford to buy a house

By CATRIONA DAVIES

IT IS no wonder people are rushing to buy homes in St Briavel's, a village on the edge of the Forest of Dean.

There is a castle that used to be King John's hunting lodge and a village post office that doubles as a tea room. Cus-

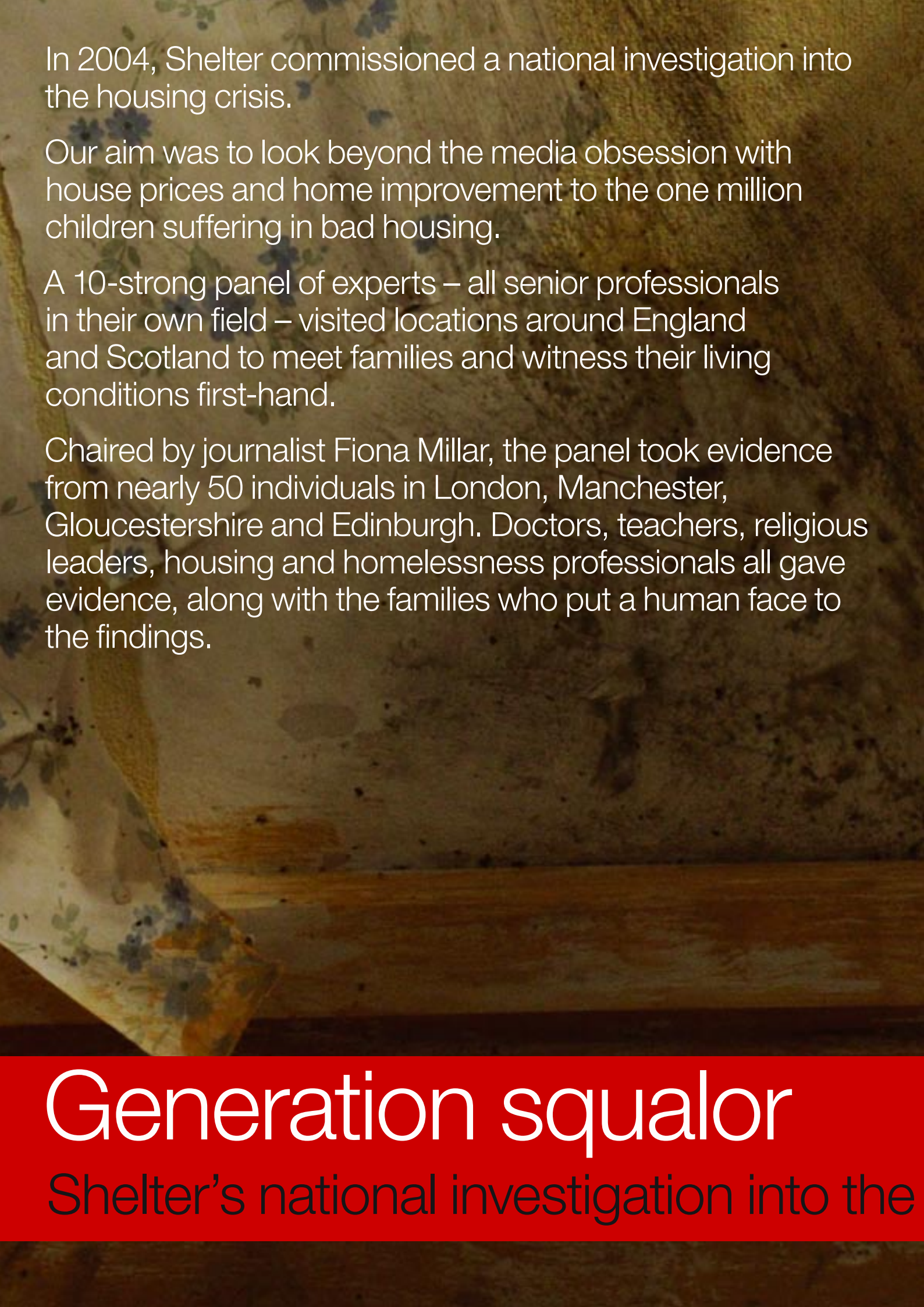
affordable housing in rural communities. It is planning a day of investigations and discussions with communities in the South-West before making recommendations.

Adam Sampson, the director of Shelter, said: "The South-West is the area of the country where the gap

run the village grocery store - her grandmother owned it - before the First World War - but it is unsure how much longer it can stay in business.

She said: "Ninety per cent of the youngsters move away. The new people that come here are either retired or commute a long way to work."





In 2004, Shelter commissioned a national investigation into the housing crisis.

Our aim was to look beyond the media obsession with house prices and home improvement to the one million children suffering in bad housing.

A 10-strong panel of experts – all senior professionals in their own field – visited locations around England and Scotland to meet families and witness their living conditions first-hand.

Chaired by journalist Fiona Millar, the panel took evidence from nearly 50 individuals in London, Manchester, Gloucestershire and Edinburgh. Doctors, teachers, religious leaders, housing and homelessness professionals all gave evidence, along with the families who put a human face to the findings.

# Generation squalor

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This report presents the panel's findings alongside Shelter's reports and independent research, building the case for urgent action to address the housing crisis.

Extracts from the transcripts, four accompanying investigation reports, and a major piece of new independent research that measures the growth of housing inequality across Britain, are available on request from [info@shelter.org.uk](mailto:info@shelter.org.uk)

The investigation is part of Shelter's million children campaign, which aims to end bad housing for the next generation of children. To find out more and to join the campaign, visit [www.shelter.org.uk](http://www.shelter.org.uk)

housing crisis



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## Acknowledgements

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Written by Anna Minton and Sarah Jones.

Some of the photographs in this report show people who participated in the investigation, but they are used for illustrative, rather than documentary, purposes. Some photographs show models. No connection is implied between the people shown in a particular photograph and any surrounding text.

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Cover photograph: Graham Fink

**Adam Sampson**  
**Director of Shelter**



Photograph: Eddie MacDonald

**Over one million children in Britain live in bad housing. There are, however, many pressing social problems in today's society. As debates rage around the future of the NHS, the education system and rising crime, why should we prioritise housing?**

The testimonies that follow from families, health visitors, teachers and politicians, answer that question once and for all. They tell, time and again, of bad housing's devastating impact on children: disrupted education, depression, social isolation, bullying, and a litany of medical and behavioural problems. These personal costs clearly amount to a wider cost to society.

Shelter is indebted to the work of Fiona Millar and our eminent panel members, the evidence-givers, and the families who gave up their time to help us find the answers. Their work shows clearly that housing does matter, and that where children live is central to their future, and ours.

The chronic lack of affordable housing in Britain today lies at the heart of this problem. The Government has pledged to create a fairer society where everyone has a chance of a decent home. In Scotland, progressive new legislation will give everyone the right to a home by 2012. Housing is back on the political map.

But these aims will not be met without ambitious, and sometimes unpopular, policies. It is our hope that Shelter's investigation will give politicians the ammunition to be bold.

**‘Where children live is central to their future, and ours’**

**Fiona Millar**  
**Chair of the investigation**



Photograph: Mark Watkins

**For three months I chaired this investigation into the impact of bad housing on children. One of the visits I made during those three months encapsulates what I learnt.**

Just before Christmas, I found myself helping a newly evicted mother of three (with a sick newborn baby) pack up and move miles away from the family home, to cramped temporary accommodation on a bleak estate.

Professionals would describe her children as having a 'complex family life'. And complex it was. Apart from her sick baby and an absent partner who had left them in debt, their problems included a 40-minute journey to school on public transport.

Her eldest, a bright and bubbly 11-year-old, spoke enthusiastically of her ambition to be a lawyer, even though she was often unable to make it to school in her Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs) year and had no idea which secondary school she might attend.

Her positive spirit may see her through. It is more likely, though, that over time she and her siblings will fall victim to the problems common to children who have to move frequently and who live in poor, overcrowded housing with no space in which to study. Underachievement, bullying, behavioural problems, and low self-esteem are common. Roaming the streets and antisocial behaviour often follow.

While I was there, the head teacher of the children's primary school phoned, concerned for them, but probably also with an eye on her next year's test results. It was a reminder that the children themselves are not the only victims; schools also face real problems.

Two key issues strike me. First, with one million children in bad housing, and well over 100,000 homeless households in England and Scotland now living in temporary accommodation, we need to wake up to the relationship between housing and other social issues – particularly education.

Second, offering people the chance to buy their own homes is a worthy goal, but if it is at the expense of more affordable social housing and giving all children a warm, safe place to live, it may be a short-sighted one.



Photograph: Nick David



Photograph: Jason Lock



Photograph: Nick David



Photograph: Nick David



Photograph: Felicia Webb



Photograph: Nick David



Photograph: Nick David



Photograph: Nick David





# Summary

In 2004, Shelter conducted a major national investigation into the housing crisis faced by over one million children up and down the country.

The subject matter was often new to the members of the investigation panel, all of whom are eminent people in their fields but not necessarily experts on housing. The evidence they heard was not merely shocking, but deeply upsetting.

From the alarming tales of 'buggy babies' with misshapen skulls, to accounts of suicidal children just eight years of age, the living conditions for some children in twenty-first century Britain astonished the panel.

Some of them had assumed that, since there had been a reduction in street homelessness, housing and homelessness was no longer a critical issue.

They found, instead, a desperate situation on a shocking scale. 'We are now in the midst of the worst housing crisis that I've ever known, and it's a silent crisis,' Karen Buck MP told the panel.

The most astounding discovery for the panel was that, wherever they went, children were suffering the same dire effects from bad housing: severely compromised education, clinical and mental health problems, insecurity, and low expectations. Housing clearly matters.

Temporary accommodation, often the worst form of bad housing, is leading to a generation of lost, confused, and lonely children growing up with a broken education, no place to call home, and no social network to turn to.

The experts giving evidence confirmed that the root causes of the crisis – the ever-diminishing pool of social housing, and the effect of high house prices – were the same across Britain. Under-investment is the problem; the solutions are more affordable housing and support for those in need.

This report lays out the evidence, as told to the investigation. The panel focused on the impact on children of a housing crisis that society can no longer ignore. This is what they found:

- Physical and mental trauma in children forced to move house frequently, sometimes as often as six times in one year.
- Temporary accommodation constantly disrupting education.
- Homeless families often on the move, hidden from view, and not accessing services that they need.
- Alarming mental health problems, including suicidal depression and self-harming, in children living in bad housing.
- Ill health as a result of squalid housing conditions, especially in the private rented sector – asthma, skin diseases, respiratory disorders.
- Ill health, including deformed skulls in 'buggy babies' and severe sleep problems, as a result of overcrowding.
- A widening gap between rich and poor children due to the inequality of housing wealth.
- People in rural areas being priced out of the local housing market and forced to move away from support networks or stay at home longer.

**Over one million children in Britain live in bad housing – enough to fill Edinburgh, Bath and Manchester.**

Source: *Toying with their future*, Shelter, 2004

**Over the past 10 years, housing wealth per child increased 20 times more in the richest 10 per cent of areas, than in the poorest 10 per cent.**

Source: *Know your place*, Shelter, 2004

**71 per cent of people agree that Britain is in the midst of a housing crisis.**

Source: MORI poll for Shelter, 2004



‘When we use the word temporary now, we’re not talking about weeks, we’re talking about years.’

**Mark Foster**, Chief Executive, King’s Cross Homeless Families Project



01





Children on the move: the crisis  
of temporary accommodation



‘For two years, we were just going to the council and home, and stuff like that, and for four months we didn’t go to school. We went to six houses. No, seven houses, and six new schools.’

**Alex, London**



‘It’s Primary 6 where the first boys start talking about suicide. Mental health issues are so huge.’

**Liz Whyte, Royston Primary School**

A fact so well known as to have become something of a cliché is that moving house is one of life’s most stressful events, surpassed only by bereavement or divorce. For children who lack the life skills to cope with continuous disruption, the trauma is even worse.

One of the key findings of the investigation is the devastating impact that living in temporary accommodation has on children. On every visit, the panel heard tales of insecurity and vulnerability as families were shunted from pillar to post.

The most severe effect of temporary accommodation appears to be the disruption in education that accompanies the continual change of schools, stunting a child’s emotional and intellectual development. Homeless children miss a quarter of their schooling, losing out not only on essential learning, but also on the friendships and social

networks so important to healthy emotional development.

Alex is a typical example. She told Zoya Mustafa, an independent researcher who gave evidence to the London investigation: ‘For two years, we were just going to the council and home, and stuff like that, and for four months we didn’t go to school. We went to six houses. No, seven houses, and six new schools.’

Zoya Mustafa told the panel: ‘That makes it very clear what the effects are, and that there is a clear link between the effects of housing, specifically, and educational attainment.’

Alex’s case shows that temporary accommodation is very often far from temporary. Mark Foster, Chief Executive of the King’s Cross Homeless Families Project, explained: ‘We’re in the situation, now, where temporary accommodation in London is used for



## What is temporary accommodation?

When a family becomes homeless – usually because of relationship breakdown, domestic violence, or losing a tenancy – they can apply to the local council for housing. They are assessed to determine whether they are legally homeless and entitled to be rehoused.

There is rarely enough permanent housing available, however, so they usually find themselves placed in ‘temporary accommodation’, which is often unsuitable, miles away from family and friends, and in poor condition. They may remain in this state for months or even years, often being shunted to different temporary homes as time goes by.

Photograph: Jason Lock

longer and longer periods of time, and over wider and wider areas. When we use the word temporary now, we’re not talking about weeks, we’re talking about years.’

Children’s education is not the only thing to suffer. Access to services,

especially those targeted at vulnerable families, is also compromised.

Scottish Children’s Commissioner Professor Kathleen Marshall told the Edinburgh investigation that it was impossible to underestimate ‘the difficulties in engaging with children

who are constantly shunted between local authorities’.

Of all the problems associated with temporary accommodation, the most distressing was the growing incidence of mental health problems. Children as young as eight revealed

**In England, over 100,000 households, including 116,581 children, are now in temporary accommodation – this is double the figure for 1997.**

Source: ODPM homelessness statistics, December 2004

**Last year, 26,584 children in Scotland lived in households that applied as homeless – one child for every classroom.**

Source: Scottish Executive Statistical Bulletin, HSG 2004/05

**Homeless children living in temporary accommodation on average miss out on a quarter of their schooling.**

Source: *Living in limbo*, Shelter, 2004





suicidal feelings linked to their current housing situation.

Liz Whyte, Head Teacher at Edinburgh's Royston Primary School, explained the impact of homelessness on the children in her school: 'It's Primary 6 where the first boys start talking about suicide. Mental health issues are so huge.'

Sam Booth, a family liaison worker based at Holy Name Primary School in Moss Side, Manchester, echoed Liz Whyte's experience: 'We are seeing, in the classrooms, homeless children with lots and lots of emotional difficulties.

They've been traumatised by the events that have happened, having moved from one place to the next. They're missing their family, and friends from schools. They're often reluctant to engage with adults as well, because of the fact they know they're going to be moving.

'In my experience, the younger the homeless children are when they come into our school, the more they cry. They are very clingy and very emotional. The older children present signs of having behaviour issues. They're aggressive. They don't want to talk. They find it hard to build friendships.'

The mental pain and delayed development, suffered by homeless children constantly on the move, has long-term costs for society. In the short term, too, the rise in the use of temporary accommodation is proving inordinately expensive for the Government.

London panel member George Ferguson, President of the Royal Institute of British Architects, concluded: 'It strikes me as economic madness, this shuffling people around. It's an expensive and unsatisfactory way of dealing with things.'

## **Liz Whyte** Head Teacher, Royston Primary School, Edinburgh

Liz Whyte's school is just 10 minutes' drive from the immaculate Georgian squares of Edinburgh's New Town. Yet, her 205 pupils live in one of the most deprived parts of the city. She told the panel:

'This is an area of huge deprivation. We've got an awful lot of itinerant tenants down here, which means that families come for a short time, they're in here and then they disappear. It turns out they've been homeless but we weren't informed.

'It makes the organisation of the school difficult, because what we try and do is identify children's needs and put in support. We identify a need, we start to put in the support, and then the family moves.

'I had a pair of twins from a very needy family. We organised full-time nursery places for the first time in history, because we felt they needed the support. We got the full-time places and then the family were put in homeless accommodation on the other side of the city. So these children cannot access the support.'

Liz described how, with families being moved up to eight times in two years, the impact on the children was huge. 'The little girl, for example, is a very bright girl. I'm delighted she's back because she is one of our achievers.

'But this child, who was confident before all this started, was frightened to go into the classroom to see her old classmates. They were all really happy to see her, but she was like a frightened rabbit, a totally different child to the one we said goodbye to in May.

'We've now got this nervous, shy wee girl, so we're doing a lot of work to try and get her confident again.'

It can take months to put the right support in place for children, especially with the social and emotional difficulties they often have. 'We've got a floating population – every school in this area. A lot of our parents have private

landlords, which is another issue because the family can just be put out. There are big issues there with tenancies and housing conditions, damp conditions; the landlord won't put in decent heating or ventilation on the windows. So there are problems with children's health because of that.

'There are so many issues with people in short-term accommodation. They've not got a cooker, some of them, and this is the twenty-first century.

'A few of my children are still lying on mattresses on the floor. There was one family, where the wee one came in absolutely delighted because he's just got a bed. He told everybody, he was so proud. He didn't realise that everybody else had a bed.'

Children's sleep patterns and health suffer. 'We've got a lot of children who are just not well. A lot of tummy bugs, and a lot of children who are in hospital.

'The mental health issues are so huge. We have nine-year-olds self-harming. There's a lot of rocking, fingers in ears, bizarre behaviours. When life's hard, you just draw into yourself. A lot of children display "autistic spectrum" behaviours.

'School is often the only constant in children's lives, and never underestimate the power of peers. Who's got a best pal? Everybody. You need your pals. Now, if you've been in eight schools in two or three years, you don't have a best pal. You're lucky if you have a pal at all. That has an enormous impact on a child's well-being.

'It's easy for us to say all children are resilient, they'll be over it in a fortnight. They might get over it for the first time after a fortnight, but the second time their resilience is dipped into, the third time their resilience is dipped into... and there can only be so much resilience. There's only so much within ourselves. Some of us just sink.'

'It strikes me as economic madness, this shuffling people around. It's an expensive and unsatisfactory way of dealing with things.'

**George Ferguson**, President of the Royal Institute of British Architects





‘We are seeing, in the classrooms, homeless children with lots and lots of emotional difficulties. They’ve been traumatised by the events that have happened, having moved from one place to the next. They’re missing their family, and friends from schools. They’re often reluctant to engage with adults as well, because of the fact they know they’re going to be moving.’

**Sam Booth**, Family Liaison Worker, Holy Name Primary School, Moss Side, Manchester

The panel found that homelessness can cause acute isolation and exclusion from mainstream society. Shonaig MacPherson, deputy-president of the British Chambers of Commerce and one of the Edinburgh panel members: ‘Schools, led by teachers such as Ms Whyte, can become the constant in a child’s life, helping to build skills that children from deprived backgrounds require to better their life chances. I was astonished to learn about the high turnover of pupils.

‘There wasn’t enough personal attention to the needs of individual families who needed to be rehoused. It was almost as though it was sort of done by computer, like here was a name and they’ve got this many kids, and then here’s a property and we’ll put them there.’

However, Edinburgh Councillor Sheila Gilmore explained that local



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**Shonaig MacPherson,**  
deputy-president of the British  
Chambers of Commerce

Photograph: Nick David

authorities want to do more, but often simply can’t: ‘I think the overwhelming reason is actually the stock issues and the shortage, because what people need and want is not what’s there.’

The problem of families not accessing services came up, time and again. Sam Booth from Moss Side found that: ‘If the children have got problems in terms of special education needs, and the assessment hasn’t been completed, we have to start the assessment process all over again. So these children are missing out on that one-to-one support. There is a myth around, and some of the families believe it, that when they go homeless, they’ll only be there for a couple of months. So they’re reluctant to get GPs. They’re very reluctant to even bring children to school.’

Local authorities find that the problem is compounded by often-

contradictory legislation from central government. Jon Lord, who heads Bolton’s community housing services, had been frustrated in his attempts to improve the system: ‘You’ve got a whole host of uncoordinated pieces of legislation. If you look at the legislation around antisocial behaviour, or crime and disorder, and try and square that with the responsibilities in the Children Act and homeless legislation, they are actually completely contradictory.’

The benefits system often compounds the problem. As Neale Coleman, Adviser to the Mayor in London, pointed out: ‘Far too often people get shoved in temporary accommodation, with very high rents. If they were to go to work they’d just lose all their benefits and it would be a terrible mess, so they just can’t.’

Pat Statham from Rochdale Council felt the solution was ‘making sure

homelessness is always on the agenda, and not something you think about later’.

Jane Clarke, a health visitor in Cinderford, Gloucestershire, explained the positive impact that a decent home has: ‘For the children in temporary housing, their lives are sad. They improve when they get put into a house they know they’re going to stay in.’



‘There’s depression, there’s asthma, there’s increased cases of diarrhoea and vomiting. Glue ear is much more prevalent, which leads to deafness... sleep problems are created by the overcrowding and noise from next door. That creates lethargy.’

**Jane Cook**, Nurse Practitioner, Hope





Children in squalor:  
the extent of poor conditions



‘The carpets are often filthy, so mums don’t want children crawling around and playing on the carpets. There’s cockroaches, you know, and all sorts of delightful things.’

**Jane Cook**, Nurse  
Practitioner, Hope



We are the fourth largest economy in the world, yet across the country, the panel heard about children suffering in appalling housing conditions. The negative effects on health, education and well-being were only too clear.

The panel heard of the existence of ‘buggy babies’, babies who are left in their prams either because of the appalling conditions that surround them or because there is literally no space for them to sit or lie down. These ‘buggy babies’ develop deformed skulls as a result.

Simon Toyne, deputy unit manager at the West Pilton Child and Family Centre, told the Edinburgh investigation: ‘If the place is cluttered and there’s nowhere for the child to sit or lie or play, you get “buggy children”. We get a lot of young babies that end up in their buggies for hours on end.

‘Their heads get straightened because they’ve spent so much time lying down. In a baby, the skull is soft so it misshapes their head. The skull sets and they’re left with life-long damage. It’s such a huge stigma and for something that could have been avoided. There’s a huge amount of guilt in parents who later realise that it’s too late to do anything.’

Horrible as this account was, it was far from the only time the panel heard about ‘buggy babies’. Liz Whyte talked of the ‘buggy bairns who sit in their buggies 24/7’, and similar stories emerged in London as well.

Nurse practitioner Jane Cook told the panel: ‘Children are often strapped in buggies or placed in cots so they will be kept safe.

‘The carpets are often filthy, so mums don’t want children crawling around and playing on the carpets. There’s cockroaches, you know, and all sorts of delightful things.

‘Poor housing and homelessness deprives children of many of the normal experiences of permanently housed children.’

Poor housing conditions were also shown to have a myriad of other effects on the mental and physical health of children.

The investigation heard from Jane Cook about how damp, mould, and cold invariably lead to an increase in upper-respiratory infections and general ill-health: ‘There’s nearly always an increase in upper-respiratory infections, there’s general ill-health, there’s poor sleep patterns.

# LIVING HELL OF HOMES CRISIS

By Victoria Thomas

THIS is Venah and her family who live in a tiny two-bedroom flat in Hackley's Soho Hill Road.

The four children, aged from one to 11, all sleep in the same bed. There is no hot water or central heating and nowhere for them to play.

Rubbish is strewn on the landing, foul language can be heard down the hall and 27-year-old Venah suspects there are drug dealers in her block.

"It is a horrible place to bring up children," she said, fighting back tears. "They are always ill."

Wahy Mugarisawa and her family are just one example of a looming crisis facing Birmingham today.

Homeless charity shelters say 10,000 families in Birmingham now live in cramped, squalid conditions where three or more children have to share the same room.

"Overcrowding must be tackled to prevent future generations of children being permanently scarred by it," said Mr Sampson.

Gina King, head of the Region for the National Housing Federation,

said the number of affordable homes let by local authorities and housing associations fell by 22 per cent from 1999 to 2003.

In turn, the number of families on the housing waiting list grew from 95,020 to 107,135.

A spokeswoman for Birmingham

City Council acknowledged the problems with overcrowding and said plans were afoot to develop new social and affordable housing.

An allocation of £154 million has been set aside for over 1,000 new homes over the next two years.

'There's depression, there's asthma, there's increased cases of diarrhoea and vomiting. Glue ear is much more prevalent, which leads to deafness... sleep problems are created by the overcrowding and noise from next door. That creates lethargy.'

But what struck her particularly strongly was how, once a family's housing problems were solved, everything else seemed to follow.

'I can go in time and again with people with depression, not coping, feeling dreadful. They get rehoused to somewhere reasonable, and I go back in

a month and it's like going to a different home. Mothers I thought weren't actually coping are just lovely. They're lovely with their children and they have nice lives. It makes such a difference to people's lives.'

She related a horrifying list of illnesses that result from poor housing: 'There's respiratory problems, mental health problems, developmental problems, musco-skeletal problems, dental problems, skin conditions, a lowered immune state as a result of ongoing stress, high rates of accidents, communicable diseases. Families

will not just have one problem, they're usually multiple and complex.'

Simon Toyne found mental health problems particularly acute: 'As a rough statistic, I'd say three out of four parents have depression or some form of mental health problem.'

Poor conditions were found to be a particular problem among the black and minority ethnic (BME) community. Asian communities, particularly in areas like Rochdale and Oldham, were often found to be living in housing inappropriate for their needs. This mirrored findings in London, where

**Around a million houses in England and Wales are unfit to live in. More than 90 per cent of them are occupied.**

Source: English House Conditions Survey 2001, Welsh House Conditions Survey 2002

**Multiple housing deprivation is as bad a risk to health as smoking, and worse than excessive alcohol consumption.**

Source: *Housing and health: Building for the future*, British Medical Association, 2003

**Over 70 per cent of social housing in Scotland fails to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.**

Source: Scottish Executive



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**Jane Cook,**  
Nurse Practitioner, Hope



Photograph: Nick David

## Regeneration and its unintended side effects

In Manchester, the panel heard about the impact of government initiatives to regenerate run-down areas. In many parts of the north and midlands, huge regeneration schemes are underway to transform so-called 'low demand' areas which are blighted by empty properties, falling house prices, poor amenities and high levels of unemployment, crime and antisocial behaviour.

As social housing designer and panel member Wayne Hemingway said: 'Housing is more than having a roof over your head. It's about the ability to have a community outside of the housing. So that means safe places where kids, adults, everyone can meet.'

Panellists heard about some of the very positive regeneration initiatives in these housing market renewal areas. However, they also heard evidence about their unintended impact on local housing markets.

Pete Bailey explained: 'Really, in essence, I think you could summarise what's happening in the north-west housing markets in two ways; one, it's changing, changing very rapidly. And two, it's incredibly diverse.'

The panel heard evidence of buy-to-let investors flooding into the market, causing house prices to rise steeply. Jon Lord of Bolton Council had seen '70

apartments built by a private builder, all 70 got rid of on one morning by auction, and not one person in Bolton who bought one of those apartments.'

Homelessness is also on the increase in many of these areas, and has risen more quickly in the north of England in recent years than in the south.

Pat Statham, Homelessness Services Manager at Rochdale Council, described the situation: 'I've worked in Rochdale for 24 years and we could house everybody. We didn't need a homeless population. But now we have people going through the homelessness service that we didn't and wouldn't expect to be working with.' Concerns were expressed about plans to demolish existing housing in light of this evidence.

Overall, the picture has become very complex in these areas. Regeneration money is flooding in, bringing significant benefits in terms of the quality of local neighbourhoods.

However, while healthier housing markets in these areas are a positive outcome of regeneration activity, the unintended side effects are increased homelessness and property prices that are rising beyond the reach of local people.



overcrowding and poor conditions among BME communities were rife.

People are often placed in housing that is not suited to their needs. Jane Clarke reported: 'I've got one family where there are 40 stairs – I count them every time I go up to the flat – and this lady is ill. She's got a one-year-old child, she's got ill health, and to get the pram up and down is almost impossible. She's more or less isolated until her partner comes home.'

Paul Mishkin, an Environmental Health Officer for the London Borough of Islington, found case after case of

poor housing conditions ruining families lives: 'Some examples include a mother living with her two teenage daughters in a homeless hostel. They had no choice but to use and share sanitary amenities like the bath, toilet, shower, with the other occupants in the hostel.

'Another example was a B&B hostel where sewage was backing up from the toilets into the bathroom. No one was dealing with it.

'This has a direct, obvious impact on the transfer of communicable diseases, and the resultant depression of the occupant.

'The links between poor housing and health are extremely wide. Sub-standard accommodation, suffering from damp and mould growth, can directly contribute to children developing asthma.'

Phil Hanlon, Professor of Public Health at Glasgow University, summed up the issue following the visit to Edinburgh: 'Large-scale studies, which investigate the wider social context of housing interventions, are now required.'

Photograph: Graham Fink



'The links between poor housing and health are extremely wide. Sub-standard accommodation, suffering from damp and mould growth, can directly contribute to children developing asthma.'

**Paul Mishkin**, Environmental Health Officer, London Borough of Islington



‘The room was so small.  
We stayed more than one  
year and we kept getting  
nervous because we were  
so squashed.’

Young person, London investigation



03



Children who don't count:  
the meaning of overcrowding



## Why children don't count

The definition of statutory overcrowding in England has remained unchanged since its introduction in 1935. Unsurprisingly, therefore, it does not accord with modern-day living standards. Under this definition:

- babies less than a year old are not counted as members of the household
- those between one and 10 are counted as half a person
- living rooms and large kitchens are regarded as acceptable places to sleep.

The result is that families with children must endure very high levels of overcrowding before the statutory threshold is breached.

Photograph: Felicia Webb



'It strikes me as completely absurd and unacceptable that children aren't counted as people. And babies apparently don't exist at all.'

**Lindsay Nicholson**, panel member and Editor-in-Chief of *Good Housekeeping*

The impact of overcrowding was most shockingly revealed in the London visit. The evidence sessions exposed the acute physical and mental effects of having nowhere to sit or eat, let alone play or do homework. A young person, cited in the London investigation, put it succinctly: 'The room was so small. We stayed more than one year, and we kept getting nervous because we were so squashed.'

The scale of the problem that emerged was equally shocking. With more than half a million overcrowded households in England, and close to 50,000 severely overcrowded households, it is clear that the examples described are symptomatic of a very widespread problem.

London is home to more than a third of overcrowded households. The problem is particularly acute for BME groups, who are more than six times

more likely to be overcrowded than white households.

Overcrowding is also a problem across England, even in rural areas. Jane Clarke found that: 'One of the problems that keeps coming up is overcrowding, that there are families of three children in a small one-bed flat.'

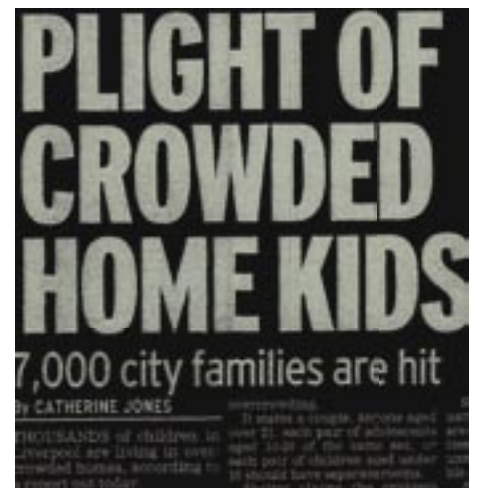
Given the scale of the problem and the serious impact on children's health and development, it is scandalous that the issue merits so little attention. As London MP Karen Buck told the panel: 'Nobody is really covering overcrowding, just nobody.'

Much of the problem is hidden because under the existing definition of statutory overcrowding, which dates back to 1935, children are quite literally not counted.

As with homelessness, overcrowding has a dramatic effect on education, social networks, and friendships for

**Severe overcrowding in London is 60 per cent up over the 10 years to 2001. More than 100,000 children in England now live in severely overcrowded homes.**

Source: *Survey of English Housing 2002/03*, 1991 and 2001 censuses



**Over half a million households in Britain live in officially overcrowded housing.**

Source: Survey of English Housing 2003/04, Scottish House Conditions Survey 2002, Welsh House Conditions Survey 1998

**Over 230,000 households in England are on council housing registers for three-bed (or larger) properties. Only 5,000 socially rented homes this size are built each year.**

Source: ODPM housebuilding statistics 2003/04, ODPM HIP data, 2003

children. Nurse Practitioner Jane Cook told the London panel: 'It's difficult to study. You can't exactly bring friends back for tea if you all live in one room, and I've worked with families where in fact there wasn't a table in the room, they all sat on the bed and ate.'

Karen Buck described how one of her constituents, a boy who shared a one-bedroom flat with his mother, would never have anybody home: 'He said – what was he, 12 or 13 – "If I were to tell people I'm still sleeping with my mother, I'm going to get teased. I'm going to get serious grief at school."'

For London panel members Lindsay Nicholson and George Ferguson, it was clear that the situation had to change. Lindsay Nicholson said: 'It strikes me as completely absurd and unacceptable that children aren't counted as people. And babies apparently don't exist at all. Anyone who's fortunate enough to have



‘There are the many, many families – I can think of literally dozens and dozens – that have come to see me that have eight, nine or 10 people living in a two-bedroom flat.’

**Oona King MP**

## Nicola Parkinson, mother of three, gave evidence to the London investigation:

**I’m in a one-bedroom flat with three children. I’ve been there five years. It’s full of damp, which I put down to condensation... basically it’s just too small for me and they keep telling me it’s not overcrowded.’**

**Lindsay Nicholson:** And the reason you’re not overcrowded is...?

**Nicola:** They only class children as half a person.

**George Ferguson:** But surely you’re in a one-bedroom flat, so you have, by their funny calculations, two-and-a-half people?

**Nicola:** Yes.

**George Ferguson:** But two-and-a-half people wouldn’t be very comfortable in a one-bedroom flat anyway, would they?

**Nicola:** Well, yes. Then the lady from Health came up and measured it. And she still said I wasn’t overcrowded because every person gets a certain square metres.

**Fiona Millar:** So, how does it affect you personally then?

**Nicola:** Depressed, stressed all the time. I’ve got no time for myself. I just can’t breathe. The kids fight and argue but I can never walk off.

children in proper housing conditions knows that they take up far more space than a much more organised adult.

‘And, although I can see that to start counting these people overnight is going to be a political problem, I think we just have to do it. I think it’s unacceptable for most of us to live in 2004 and expect children to live in 1935.’

George Ferguson added: ‘It was shocking to me, and it was news to me today, that some children don’t get counted as people in the overcrowding statistics. I’d almost reverse it and say that children matter so much that you

should give them two points rather than none.’

Overcrowding can lead to behavioural problems. As Karen Buck said: ‘It’s one of the drivers pushing adolescents and young teenagers out on to the streets. If there is literally nowhere for them to go and nowhere for them to play music, then they will go... I don’t think we can hang the peg of antisocial behaviour on overcrowding, but I have no doubt whatsoever, from what I’ve seen, that it’s one of the drivers for that.’

Shystie, a panel member, had herself grown up in overcrowded housing and

‘All I want is my own room. Then when I’m sick I can just lie down and shut the door.’

**Ben, a 10-year-old with sickle-cell disease**

## Letter to Karen Buck MP from a 10-year-old constituent whose family tried, but failed, to be moved from a two-bedroom flat.

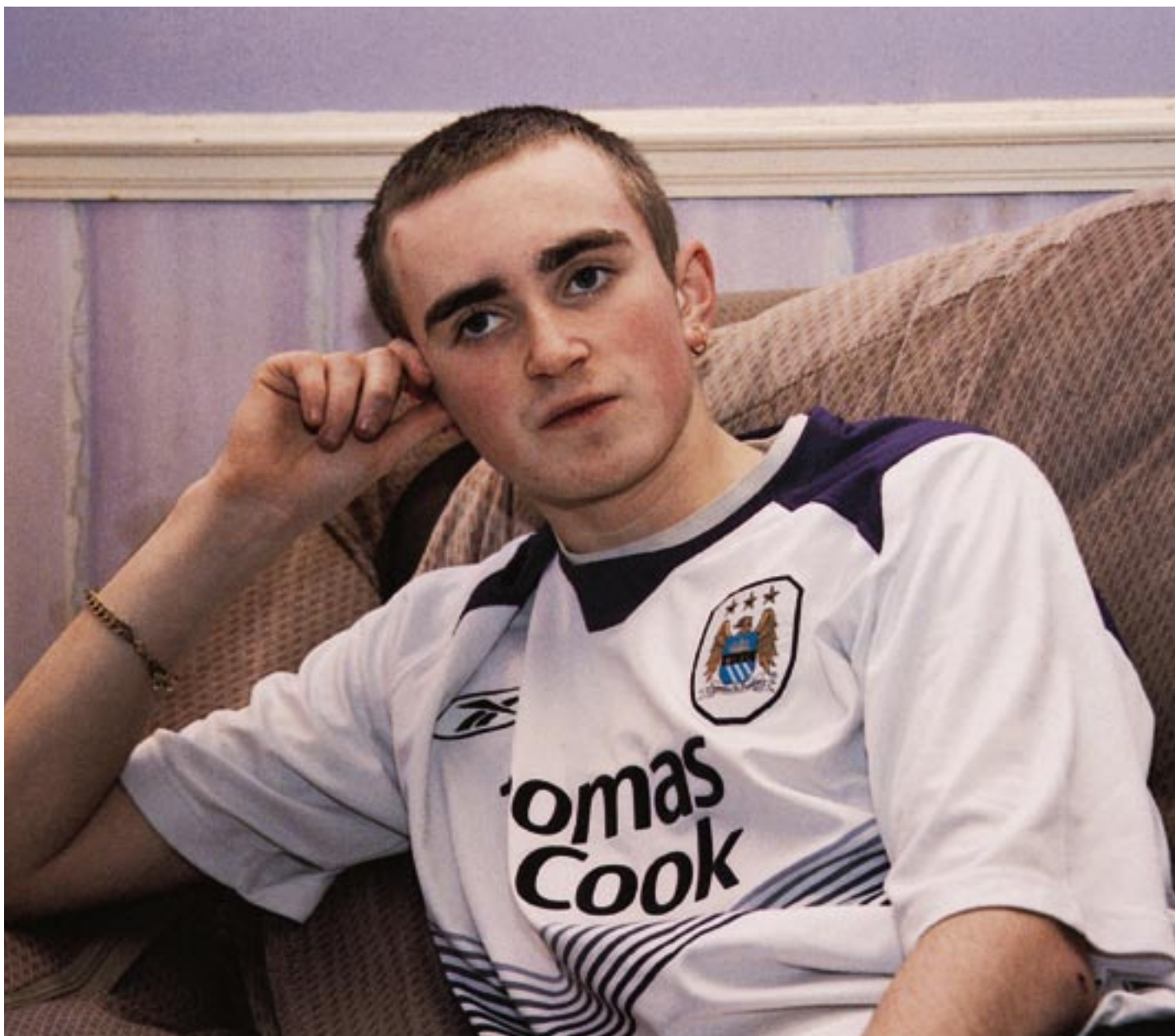
‘My name is Ben. I’m 10 years old. I suffer with severe sickle cell disease. I live at home in a two-bedroom flat with my mother and four sisters. All my life I’ve only known pain and sickness. I feel like I’ve spent half my life in hospital, that’s how many times I’ve been in.

‘I don’t even have my own room or my own bed. I sleep on the floor on the blow-up bed in my mother’s room. I also have to share this room with my elder sister. When I was sick my two little sisters were always around me,

bothering me all the time. Sometimes I feel like I’m going to kill myself or run away, but it’s like an angel is telling me not to because it wouldn’t be right.

‘I get so fed up all the time. I just feel so sad. Everything is going wrong. I’m losing my memory. Sometimes I can’t remember how to spell easy words or do maths. It’s hard to concentrate on schoolwork and homework and I keep struggling every day.

‘All I want is my own room. Then when I’m sick I can just lie down and shut the door.’



felt its effects: 'Overcrowding is a really big problem. When I was growing up there were six of us in a two-bedroom flat and I had to share with my brothers and sisters... So I hear what people are saying, that they can't bring friends back, and homework and that kind of thing.'

Health was also an issue. Neale Coleman explained: 'The increase in overcrowding in London began in the late 1980s. There is an increase in tuberculosis and other illnesses that have occurred since then.' Problems were particularly acute among BME communities.

Linda Dickson, a support worker with Shelter's Edinburgh Families Project, gave the Edinburgh panel video evidence of the conditions homeless families are often forced to live in. She filmed a two-bedroom, high-rise flat in which a family of six had been housed for a year.

Walking around the flat, she reported: 'This is the bedroom where four children sleep in temporary accommodation. This is the bed where the children have to sleep. There's one wardrobe for four children as well. In the kitchen everything is falling apart.'

'The washing machine has broken about seven times – there's a lot of washing needed with six people in the house. And the fridge freezer isn't working at all. The family have been in the tenancy for a year.'

'This is the other bedroom, but it's really difficult to use because the heating's never worked. Although they've tried to sort it, it's not fixable and they have no heating in here at all. They only use it in the summer, so Dad has to sleep on the couch and Mum has to share with the children most of the time as well.'

## Crowding hits nation's young

London has claimed the title of the most overcrowded city in the world, with a new report by Shelter revealing that one in five children are living in overcrowded conditions. It calls for greater investment in affordable housing to meet the demand.

Shelter's latest report, 'The State of the Nation's Young', reveals that overcrowding is a major problem for young people across the country. The report found that overcrowding is a major cause of health problems, including mental health issues, and that it is a major barrier to employment and education. The report also found that overcrowding is a major cause of homelessness, with many young people being forced to leave their homes because they have no space to live.

The report also found that overcrowding is a major cause of poverty, with many young people being forced to live in poor quality housing and have no access to basic services. The report calls for a major investment in affordable housing to meet the demand, and for the government to take action to reduce the number of young people living in overcrowded conditions.

**Case study**

The report also includes a case study of a young person living in overcrowded conditions. The young person, who is a member of a BME community, has been living in a two-bedroom flat for a year. The flat is overcrowded, with six people living in it. The young person has no access to basic services, and has no space to live. The report calls for the government to take action to reduce the number of young people living in overcrowded conditions, and for the government to invest in affordable housing to meet the demand.



‘The state of private rented accommodation is absolutely diabolical. It really is horrendous. I’ve had families who’ve rented a house who’ve got open manholes in the backyard. We’ve got windows, you go to open them, and they’re falling out.’

**Fiona Muir**, New Era, Burnley



Children cheated:  
unscrupulous private landlords



While most landlords treat their role seriously and provide a good service, there are a minority who, either through ignorance or greed, leave their tenants in appalling conditions.

With few rights, families are often not in a position to improve their situation. Case studies from around the country confirmed that families in private rented accommodation can live in constant fear of eviction. Consequently, they are too frightened to ask landlords to carry out improvements.

Paul Mishkin told the London panel: 'A lot of people don't know their legal rights, that they have a right to constant hot water, adequate light, and ventilation, and to be free from damp and cold. A lot of people don't want to

complain because they may face the threat of eviction.'

Mishkin described these landlords as 'the rogue landlords, the bad landlords. Simply in it for the money. They don't have any concern for their tenants' welfare.'

It was a similar story in Manchester. Giving evidence, Pete Bailey from the Government Office for the North West said: 'The big problem is that a lot of tenants in those circumstances have only got six-month tenancy agreements. If they kick up a fuss about the repairs that need doing, it's relatively straightforward now for a landlord to end a tenancy agreement.'

There is no doubt that the most frequent, and often worst, examples

of poor housing conditions occurred in the private rented sector. A lot of tenants don't even know who their landlord is. Local authorities have a statutory duty to house homeless families, but, with an ever-diminishing pool of social housing at their disposal, many local authorities lease properties from large-scale private landlords. In addition, the increase in the buy-to-let market has meant that many privately rented properties are managed by estate agents, acting as intermediaries for the landlord. Steve Webb MP for Northavon explained that, in rural areas, 'there really is very little private rental accommodation.'

Pete Bailey added that: 'Small amateur landlords are the ones that

'If they kick up a fuss about the repairs that need doing, it's relatively straightforward now for a landlord to end a tenancy agreement.'

**Pete Bailey**, the Government Office for the North West

Photograph: Nick David



'I find, from my casework, that the majority of problems that I've got with people in poor-quality housing come from the private rented area'

**Diana Organ MP**, Forest of Dean



are the least aware about their role and responsibilities as a landlord.'

Tony Wilson, a consultant and member of the Manchester panel, was particularly shocked at the conditions he witnessed at the home of a family he visited.

He told the investigation: 'The husband has a good job. It looks like a very nice terraced house, but the house is damp and cold and there's mould. There's two children, two and six months, and there's an array of children's teddy bears and dolls and one great pile of them are to be thrown out. You can't see it, but when you feel them they're all damp and mouldy. There's a baby girl. And they don't even know who the landlord is.'

Fiona Muir, a project worker at New Era in Burnley, was even clearer in her condemnation: 'The state of private rented accommodation is absolutely diabolical. It really is horrendous. I've had families who've rented a house, who've got open manholes in the backyard. We've got windows, you go to open them, and they're falling out. We've got electric wires – honestly, electric wires – coming out of the wall in the child's bedroom because the landlord hasn't put a socket on them.'

Her colleague Catherine Howley described one of the worst examples she had encountered: 'I could tell the story of a house which has had four owners in the last four-and-a-half months. It's had five tenancies in one year.'

'The house has black mildew and the floor is that far below the skirting boards. The floor has sunken down so far. And, constantly, people are being rehoused and they haven't a clue who the landlord is. And we're trying to pick up the pieces.'

Steve Webb had seen many cases where private landlords simply refuse to take tenants on Housing Benefit: 'So what do you do? You've got people on modest incomes. The only rents in the private sector are extraordinarily high. But you think, on a low-paid job, combine it with tax credits or whatever, you can then afford one of those rents. But then they come along and say: "If you're on Housing Benefit, we won't take you." How do you break out of that?'



**Nearly half of private rented properties in England fail to meet the Government's decency threshold.**

Source: *English House Conditions Survey 2001*

**Housing Benefit fails to cover the rent of more than 70 per cent of low-income households who rent privately.**

Source: *Housing benefit reform: next steps*, Kemp, Wilcox, Rhodes; JRF, 2002

**In England losing an assured shorthold tenancy in the private rented sector is the third most common cause of homelessness. 17,600 households were affected in 2003.**

Source: ODPM homelessness statistics, December 2004

Photograph: Amit Lennon



‘It’s true to say that homeless people generally have very few choices available to them, but homeless people in rural areas have considerably less choice.’

**Kim Close**, Senior Countryside Adviser at the Countryside Agency





Children in the countryside:  
the truth behind the rural idyll



‘Second-home ownership is increasingly a major contributor to the escalation of house prices and also the reduction in house units available for local people.’

**Stephen Wright**, Director  
of the Gloucestershire Rural  
Community Council



The investigation uncovered evidence of a growing crisis of affordability in rural areas that is pushing families into unsuitable, or even dangerous, accommodation.

Kim Close, Senior Countryside Adviser at the Countryside Agency, summed it up: ‘It’s true to say that homeless people generally have very few choices available to them, but homeless people in rural areas have considerably less choice.’

The investigation found that, in villages throughout Gloucestershire, there is barely any social housing

and getting on to the housing ladder is impossible for most local people. As estate agent Ian Wright said: ‘Local people wishing to stay within their family communities are finding it impossible to do so.’

Pete Bailey was finding similar problems: ‘In some rural areas now there is a major impact. I was in Keswick not long ago, where people were telling me that some Right to Buy properties are going for a third of a million pounds. There’s no way that the key workers in those kind of areas, the teachers, the health workers, can start to afford



‘Every week  
someone comes  
to see me  
because they  
haven’t got a  
decent home  
to live in.’

**Steve Webb MP**

Photograph: Nick David

**In the 15 years to 2001, England lost nearly 25 per cent of its rural council houses through Right to Buy. Rural Scotland is now losing 10 affordable homes for rent, for every three new ones built.**

Sources: House of Commons, Official Report, 13 May 2002, col. 444W; *Scotland's rural housing*, Shelter Scotland and Rural Forum Scotland, 1997

**The number of households in England who own second homes has increased by 15 per cent over the past year.**

Source: *Survey of English Housing provisional results 2003-04*, ODPM

**Homelessness rose nearly 30 per cent in remote rural areas in England between 1999/2000 and 2002/2003.**

Source: *State of the Countryside*, Countryside Agency, 2004





that. And that really does start to throw the whole sustainability of this sort of community into question.'

The result, driven by the lack of social housing, is that families and children are put into temporary accommodation and suffer continuous disruption.

Lindsay Nicholson found evidence of exactly that. She told the Gloucestershire investigation: 'I went this morning to visit someone who's in temporary accommodation. She's been moved eight times. She's got an 18-month-old child who's been moved five times in his life – which is really not on – because there is no council housing for her to go into, despite the fact that, on anyone's criteria, she would qualify.'

Even when housing is available, it is often far from schools and support networks, and the lack of transport can make it impossible, as Diana Organ MP had found with her constituents: 'There

may be affordable housing in the outlying villages, but people don't want to go there because the transport is hopeless. And, without a car, it might just as well be offered as if it were on Mars.'

In part, this is driven by the impact of Right to Buy, where many homes have been sold off and new ones have not been built. Kim Close explained: 'Overall in the region we lose twice as many properties to Right to Buy as the social housing system is able to deliver, and that is magnified in rural areas.'

The other issue that emerged particularly strongly was the inflationary effect of second-home ownership.

Stephen Wright asked: 'What can we do about the people who have just bought the large manor house for £1.6 million and are now hell-bent on buying every property in the community that comes on the market so that they can have a holiday let?'

For him, it is clear that 'second-home ownership is increasingly a major contributor to the escalation of house prices and also the reduction in house units available for local people.' Second homes also have a detrimental impact on local communities as they mean that vital local services, such as the post office, local shop or pub – often the life blood of so many village economies – are underused.

Costs are now so high that 'the average house price is at least eight times the average salary. In quite a lot of rural areas it can sometimes be in excess of nine or 10 times the average salary,' Kim Close explained.

Lisa Morgan, a receptionist at the local opticians who also works part-time at the Learn Direct centre, is a typical example. A single mother with a 15-month-old daughter, she is living in cramped and strained conditions with

‘The average house price is at least eight times the average salary. In quite a lot of rural areas it can sometimes be in excess of nine or 10 times the average salary.’

**Kim Close**, the  
Countryside Agency



Photograph: Nick David

her parents, sharing a box room with her daughter. With rents currently running at £400–£450 a month, renting in the private sector is not an option. Buying is, of course, out of the question.

She has been on the waiting list for social housing since March 2003. However, she has been told by the council that she is not a priority case and would be unlikely to become one unless her mother evicts her.

For Jonathan Kerslake, a caseworker with Shelter’s Somerset Housing Aid Centre, Lisa’s situation is very common. He said: ‘It should never happen that, for someone like Lisa, her mum has to ask her to leave before she can access housing.’

Lord Haskins, a member of the Gloucestershire panel, found the issue very clear-cut. ‘I think Lisa’s case is blatantly straightforward. The shortage of housing accommodation, which

is a state responsibility, is just about money,’ he told the investigation. ‘With Lisa’s issue it seems to me that the Government should just be dealing with it. People like Lisa should not find themselves in the dilemma they are in.’

The very existence of viable local communities may be threatened, as John Cannon, Head Teacher at Redwick and Northwick Primary School, explained: ‘There is a general fall in the primary population in the rural areas, and this is due, I think almost exclusively, to the house prices. The houses on the market are bought up by older people with no children. This means that the school population falls. The school then comes under review and this, in itself, is a great threat to the existence of a school.’





# Conclusion

# Housing: the great divide

This investigation has shown that in twenty-first century Britain, housing has become the great divide. On the one hand, £2.4 trillion of private wealth is now tied up in our homes – twice the amount of all life insurance and pension funds – and more people own their own homes than ever before.

On the other, over one million children live in bad housing, and the number of homeless households trapped in temporary accommodation has more than doubled in England since 1997. Severe overcrowding is worsening, and some of the housing conditions encountered by our panel had more in common with Charles Dickens's depiction of Victorian poverty than a thriving, modern nation.

The findings of our evidence sessions mirror those of the investigation research we commissioned. This showed that we are more polarised by wealth from housing than at any time since the Victorian era, and the gap is increasing every year.

Children lucky enough to be born on the right side of the divide can expect benefits in childhood, financial help to buy their own home, and a windfall on their parent's death. On the other side of the divide, the one million children living in bad housing suffer insecurity, disrupted education, poor mental and physical health, and damaged futures. The evidence is that housing, increasingly, determines a child's chances in life.

As a nation, we should aspire for better than this. The fourth richest economy in the world should not accept third-rate housing standards.

In recent years, housing has moved up the political agenda. In England, the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan sets out how it intends to increase the supply of affordable housing and regenerate run-down areas in the north and midlands. The Homelessness Act 2002 strengthened the rights of homeless people and a new Housing Act will improve standards in the private rented sector. The Government has also set targets to bring all social housing up to a decent standard and to halve the number of homeless households living in temporary accommodation by 2010.

In Scotland, the Scottish Executive has backed radical new recommendations to give everyone the right to a home by 2012. The Homelessness (Scotland) Act 2003 enshrines this in law, and a new Private Sector Housing Bill provides an opportunity to address some of the worst housing conditions in Europe. A new cross-tenure Scottish Housing Quality Standard has also been developed, which all social housing will have to meet within 10 years.

These measures have been followed by new investment in social housing, north and south of the border. However, as our investigation has shown, this is not enough to solve the housing crisis.

# Shelter's agenda for change

Based on the findings of this investigation, our recommendations are set out below.

## **Trebling investment in new social housing**

At the root of so many of the problems we encountered in this investigation was the shortage of decent affordable housing. Despite recent increases in investment, both north and south of the border, Britain still spends only around 0.2 per cent of its GDP on providing new social housing. In England, the number of new social homes being built is still less than in 1997 and is only around half that achieved in the mid-1990s. In Scotland, current output is running at half the level achieved in 1980. To meet the chronic shortage of affordable housing, we believe that investment in new social housing should be trebled, bringing it up to approximately 0.5 per cent of GDP.

## **A more stable and affordable housing market**

Over the long term, a more stable and affordable housing market must be a central plank of economic policy. Progressive reform of property and land taxation is necessary to achieve this stability and to raise revenue to build more affordable housing. The Westminster Government and the Scottish Executive should give urgent consideration to how this can be achieved.

## **Improving the use of existing homes**

We must do more to utilise the existing housing stock by making more effective use of empty homes and promoting schemes to help people move when their housing needs change. Right to Buy should be curtailed, especially in areas of housing shortage, and new schemes developed that help people into home ownership without depleting our housing stock.

## **A stronger private rented sector**

The private rented sector is the missing link in Britain's housing strategy. It should do much more to meet a range of housing needs, including those of key workers and people on low incomes. To do so, conditions and security at the bottom end of the market must be improved. New legislation in England and Scotland to license many of these properties will help. But this should be backed by a new code of practice to improve standards, among all private landlords and measures to give tenants greater security of tenure.

## **Tackling overcrowding**

In England, the Government must use its new powers under the Housing Act 2004 to introduce a modern statutory definition of overcrowding that recognises today's understanding of the need for space and privacy. More family-sized affordable homes need to be built and funding regimes should be changed to make it easier for housing associations to achieve this. A target should be introduced to reduce overcrowding, and this could be worked towards over the next 10 years.

## **Rural reform**

Our investigation shows that the housing crisis bites just as hard, and in some cases harder, in rural areas. A package of reforms is needed to address this. New social housing is desperately needed in rural areas, and current rates of provision must be increased. Local authorities should be given powers to suspend the Right to Buy and reduce the discounts available under the scheme in areas of shortage. They should also be given stronger powers to increase the rate of Council Tax on second homes and to reinvest the receipts in new affordable housing.

## **Sustainable communities**

Our investigation heard about some really positive regeneration initiatives. These initiatives should be allowed to flourish, but must meet the needs of all sections of the community without increasing homelessness. Current housing market renewal plans should be reviewed to ensure that this is achieved. Better planning, improved services and essential infrastructure, such as transport and schools, must also go hand in hand with new housing development.

## **Less bureaucracy, more transparency, better advice**

We need more transparency and less bureaucracy for people as they move through the housing system, so they know where they stand and what they can expect. Housing Benefit, in particular, must do more to support people who need it and help them get back into work. Access to independent advice is essential to empower people to improve their housing situations. Better, and more geographically comprehensive, advice and legal services are needed.

## **Working together locally**

Local agencies must work together to ensure that housing is much more closely linked to other key services. Local-authority education departments, social services, health bodies and, in England, the new Children's Trusts must work much more closely with housing departments to ensure that housing and wider support needs are looked at alongside each other. Local strategies must be more effectively co-ordinated, and key services must work to prevent homelessness from occurring in the first place while protecting the legal rights of homeless people.

## **A Department for Housing and Communities**

Our investigation shows that housing now needs to be a top government priority alongside health and education. This needs to be reflected more clearly within the structures of government. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) currently holds responsibility for housing, regeneration and communities. The Deputy Prime Minister has significantly raised the priority attached to housing within government. However, we believe the scale of the challenge set out in this report and the critical phase the housing agenda has now reached demand a clearer and more publicly recognisable departmental focus. A 'Department for Housing and Communities' would provide this and the remit of the current ODPM should be refocused accordingly. This would mirror arrangements in Scotland, which has its own Communities Minister.



# The panel

## Chair of the investigation

**Fiona Millar** is a journalist specialising in education issues. She writes for *The Guardian* and recently wrote and presented a film about parental choice, *The Best for My Child*, for Channel Four. She is also chair of the National Family and Parenting Institute, a trustee of the Roundhouse, and a governor of two schools in Camden. She has three children and lives with her partner in north London.

*'Housing is the great invisible factor. It is core to every aspect of children's lives, and yet it's not up there at the top of the political agenda.'*

## The panel

**George Ferguson** is the President of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). He founded the national group of practices Acanthus in 1986. His work has primarily been involved with urban regeneration, of which his own Tobacco Factory mixed-use project in Bristol is a model. He is a passionate environmental and architectural writer and broadcaster.

*'It strikes me as economic madness, this shuffling people around. It's an expensive and unsatisfactory way of dealing with things.'*

**Phil Hanlon** is Professor of Public Health at Glasgow University and an honorary consultant in public health with NHS Greater Glasgow. He has been a researcher with the Medical Research Council in the Gambia, director of Health Promotion with the Greater Glasgow Health Board, medical director of the Royal Alexandra Hospital, director of the Public Health Institute of Scotland, and an adviser in health improvement to the Scottish Executive's Health Department. *'Edinburgh now lacks the quality and range of social rented housing it needs to respond to the problems presented to us through the panel visits.'*

**Lord Haskins** began work for Northern Foods in 1962, becoming chairman in 1986. He was made a life peer in 1998. He has worked for both the British and Irish Governments and was a member of the Culliton Irish Industrial Policy Review group in 1991. He has also been a member of the Commission for Social Justice, the UK Round Table on Sustainable Development, director of the Yorkshire Regional Development Agency and member of the Government's New Deal Task Force. In 2003, he was commissioned by the Government to complete a Rural Delivery Review, which resulted in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' Rural Strategy 2004.

*'The shortage of housing accommodation, which is a state responsibility, is just about money.'*

**Wayne Hemingway** is the co-founder of Red or Dead, which won the British Fashion Council's 'Street Style Designer of the Year' award three times in a row in the late 1990s. After Red or Dead, Wayne and his partner Gerardine set up 'hemingwaydesign', which specialises in affordable and social design. Their largest project is the award-winning Staiths South Bank, an 800-property mass-market housing project on Tyneside for George Wimpey Homes, where hemingwaydesign are involved from the master planning and architecture through to the landscaping and marketing. Other housing projects include the regeneration of a large social housing scheme in north London, and The Birchin, an affordable apartment-development in the Northern Quarter, Manchester.

*'There are so-called "entrepreneurs" out there buying up whole streets of dilapidated properties in areas that they know will have large-scale government housing money spent on them; they turn these derelict or semi-derelict properties into inhumane rental properties and sit and wait for profit via values going up or via compulsory purchase... in the meantime, vulnerable families who rent these so called "homes" live in third-world conditions... we must work out a way of dealing with this.'*



Photograph: Amit Lennon

Fiona Millar



Photograph: Amit Lennon

George Ferguson



Phil Hanlon



Photograph: Mark Watkins

Lord Haskins



Photograph: Jason Lock

Wayne Hemingway

**Liz Lochhead** is Scotland's leading poet, playwright and writer. She has been Writer In Residence at both Edinburgh University and the Royal Shakespeare Company, and has published numerous works over the past 30 years. Her most famous stage work is *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off*.

*'I think somebody's making a lot of money out of these people. The private landlords are making money out of these poor people.'*

**Shonaig MacPherson** is deputy-president of the British Chambers of Commerce and a non-executive member of the Scottish Executive Management Group. She is also a fellow of the Royal Society in Edinburgh and a member of the Cultural Commission. Her background is in the legal profession and, until recently, she was the senior partner of UK law firm McGrigors.

*'For me the most vivid evidence of the impact of homelessness on children was the description of "buggy babies", which was independently provided to us at West Pilton Child and Family Centre and then at Royston Primary School.'*

**Lindsay Nicholson** was appointed Editor-in-Chief of *Good Housekeeping* five years ago. Before that she was Editor of *Prima* magazine. She is also a trustee of the parenting charity Home-Start. Lindsay has one child, and recently remarried after 12 years as a single parent.

*'The Dickensian definition of overcrowding shocks me. It strikes me as completely absurd and unacceptable that children aren't counted as people. And babies, apparently, don't exist at all.'*

**Shystie** is a rising hip hop artist whose acclaimed album, *Diamond in the Dirt*, has been described as 'uniquely street but hugely accessible, like a female Eminem shot through by garage raves, road and hyper-colourful Londonese'. She grew up in north London, and started MCing at sixth-form college. She is now the fastest MC in the UK.

*'I grew up in Hackney. There were six of us living in a two-bedroom flat. It was meant to be temporary. They put us on the waiting list for five years. How long is temporary?'*

**Tony Wilson** worked as a TV journalist, airing a variety of bands on television for the first time, including the Sex Pistols, Blondie, and the Stone Roses. He progressed to setting up his own record label, Factory Records, which was most famous for Joy Division, New Order, and the Happy Mondays. He is best known for the opening of his legendary club the Hacienda, in 1982, which left its mark on music history. Tony lives in central Manchester and is currently undertaking consultancy work for Elevate, the North East Lancashire regeneration body.

*'The property I visited, they don't even know who the landlord is. The house is damp and cold and there's mould. There are two children, two and six months, and there's an array of children's teddy bears and dolls and one great pile of them are to be thrown out. You can't see it, but when you feel them they're all damp and mouldy.'*



Photograph: Ian Walker

Liz Lochhead



Shonaig MacPherson



Lindsay Nicholson

Photograph: Amit Lennon



Shystie

Photograph: Amit Lennon



Tony Wilson

Photograph: Jason Lock



# The visits

## London

The London investigation focused on the impact on children of rocketing house prices and the diminishing number of affordable homes. Over 60,000 households in London are homeless and living in temporary accommodation. The loss of affordable housing, through Right to Buy and chronic underinvestment in new social housing, has forced councils to house families in temporary accommodation for months or even years while they wait for a permanent home.

Overcrowding is endemic, and large families suffer in tiny flats for years. Many children live in homes that are unfit for human habitation, especially in the private rented sector, where families have few rights. A family's Housing Benefit often doesn't even cover the cost of the rent. An underclass of children, hidden from view and not accessing services, is developing fast.

A policy report and statistical analysis on overcrowding, *Crowded house*, was published as part of the investigation. It is available by emailing [info@shelter.org.uk](mailto:info@shelter.org.uk)

### Evidence

**Trevor Philips**, Director, Commission for Racial Equality  
*The impact of housing on black and minority ethnic communities*

**Mark Foster**, Chief Executive, King's Cross Homelessness Families Project  
*The effects of homelessness and living in temporary accommodation on children*

**Zoya Mustafa**, Independent Researcher  
*The impact on health, education and mental well-being, of living in bad housing*

**Paul Mishkin**, Environmental Health Officer, London Borough of Islington  
*Children living in squalor and what it means to live in housing deemed 'unfit for human habitation'*

**Jane Cook**, Nurse Practitioner  
*Children who get sick because of where they live*

**Cllr Tony Newman**, Deputy Leader, Croydon Council

**Neale Coleman**, Adviser to the Mayor of London  
*Why we don't have enough decent homes and how we can build more*

**Karen Buck MP**, Regent's Park and Kensington North

**Oona King MP**, Bethnal Green and Bow  
*The impact of the chronic housing crisis on children, and the politicians' response*

**Nicola Parkinson**, mother of three young children  
*The reality of living in overcrowded housing*

### Home visits

**Jennifer Russell**, and her children **Sade**, **Keshere** and **Durell**

**Nurra Mohammed**, and her two children

**Noreen O'Neil**, and her boys **James** and **Callum**

**Shelley Hodgson**, and her two sons

# 100,000 without a home

## Bleak time for record number of families

THE number of homeless families in England looks set to hit a record six-figure high, it was claimed today.

Figures released by the Government in September showed 99,340 homeless households were in temporary accommodation in the second quarter of this year.

And homeless charity Shelter says the latest figures look set to top 100,000. That would be an increase of 135 per cent since Labour came to power in 1997.

Shelter director Adam Sampson said: "This is an appalling and

distressing situation. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has

announced a new target of 20,000 temporary accommodation places by 2007.

But the charity says that is not enough. It says the government must do more to tackle the housing crisis.

Some thought there would be a

future prospects.

"The Government's own reports show that if it is serious about tackling child poverty and social exclusion, it must do more to get homeless households out of temporary accommodation. Ministers must set out a new strategy to deal with the problem."

"A failure to act now will come at enormous human cost and condemn a record number of children in life."

## The reality of the grim

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# LIVING HEAVENLY HOMES CRISIS

By Victoria Thomas

THIS is Venah and her family who live in a tiny two-bedroom flat in Hookley's 'Boho Hill Road.

The four children, aged from one to 11, all sleep in the same bed. There is no hot water or central heating and nowhere for them to play.

Rubbish is strewn on the landing, foul language can be heard down the hall and 21-year-old Venah suspects there are drug dealers in her block.

"It is a horrible place to bring up children," she said, fighting back tears. "They are always ill."

Venah Mohammed and her family are just one example of a housing crisis facing Birmingham today.

Homeless charity Shelter says 19,000 families in Birmingham now live in squalid, equal conditions where three or more children have to share the same room.

Adam Sampson, Director of Shelter, said: "Children need room to grow and their health, education and well-being are being damaged by the miserable conditions they are forced to live in."

With around 60,000 children affected in the West Midlands alone, Shelter has launched a 'sit in protest' calling on the government to provide more affordable, family-sized homes.

It will be held at Bullring this Saturday, November 13, and people are asked to show their support by sitting in a special red chair.

"Overcrowding must be prevented future generations from being permanently affected."

## Housing at 'Victorian levels'

A spokeswoman for Birmingham City Council said: "We are aware of the problem and are working to improve the situation."

"In our report, 'Living in the Past', we claim that the present situation is 'driving a wedge between rich and poor' where housing wealth is run much faster for better-off families, leaving poorer families

in a state of crisis. The report also says that the government must do more to tackle the housing crisis."

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# people a home

## Crowding hits nation's young

Shelter has claimed that thousands of families are being driven apart by overcrowded conditions. It says urgent action is needed to tackle the overcrowding crisis. Its report Crowded House suggests that more than 10 million is being overcrowded.

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## Great housing divide

20 times greater than that of poor children. As a result, poor people face an "unimaginable" gap, trapped in "ghettos" where they will have to stay for generations.

**Case study**  
The new report considers the housing divide in the north, where the gap between rich and poor is 20 times greater than that of poor children. As a result, poor people face an "unimaginable" gap, trapped in "ghettos" where they will have to stay for generations.

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And, in UK terms, many communities in Scotland are suffering from such inequalities. In Easterhouse, Glasgow, house prices have dropped over 100 years, from £36,056 in 1993 to £13,943 in 2003. Prices in Parkhead, Glasgow, have risen by only £4,000 in the same decade, to £44,673.

In Luton, Bedfordshire, prices rose by only £9,000 to £47,583. Cumbernauld, in Tays, showed a fall of £2,000 between 1993 and last year, with a 2003 average of £47,565.

And Sharn, Leicestershire, also showed a drop, from £51,877 in 1993 to £49,211.

Adam Sampson, the director of Shelter, said: "Housing is one of the single biggest causes of inequality."

However, it is not just the north that is suffering from such inequalities. In Easterhouse, Glasgow, house prices have dropped over 100 years, from £36,056 in 1993 to £13,943 in 2003. Prices in Parkhead, Glasgow, have risen by only £4,000 in the same decade, to £44,673.

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## Manchester

Housing markets in the north are changing fast and becoming increasingly diverse. The stereotype is of abandoned estates, rogue landlords and empty streets. But this has begun to change. Government money is pouring into regeneration schemes, markets are picking up, buy-to-let in particular, and house prices in some places have rocketed.

Although regeneration is positive, sudden changes have led to a potentially volatile market. Wages haven't risen at the same rate, and homelessness is increasing fast. Evictions are on the up, and the supply of temporary accommodation is falling. Sustainable communities are becoming harder to build as people are increasingly priced out of certain areas.

The investigation studied market renewal areas, and looked at their impact on children and their families who can no longer afford to buy, are priced out of the rented market, and who can't access decent social housing.

A policy report analysing the changing market in the north, *On the up*, accompanied the visit and is available by emailing [info@shelter.org.uk](mailto:info@shelter.org.uk)

### Evidence

**Pete Bailey**, Team Leader, Government Office of the North West

*The changing region – the impact of changes in the housing market*

**Beverley Bennett**, mother of four

*The difficulty of trying to find somewhere affordable to live*

**Sam Booth**, Family Liaison Worker, Holy Name Primary School, Moss Side

*The effects of temporary accommodation on children in education*

**Catherine Howley**, Project Worker, New Era, Burnley

**Fiona Muir**, Project Worker, New Era, Burnley

*Children disadvantaged by their housing*

**Pat Statham**, Homelessness Services Manager, Rochdale Council

**Jon Lord**, Head of Community Housing Services, Bolton Council

*Supporting families who need help, and delivering enough housing in a volatile market*

### Home visits

**Deborah Thompson and Mark Hunter**, and their children Gary, Kimberley and Ben

**Claire and Mark Scholes**, and their children Amy and Katie

**Alison Green**, and her children Adam, Chloe and Ellie

Crowded House: crowding the dream out of children and their families. In 1970s, for many, it was a dream of a decent home.

Shelter says a recent survey of housing, yet which has shown that in the north, with only 47% of the 10 million people who live in the north.

Shelter found that overcrowding is a problem in the north, with 10% of the population living in overcrowded conditions. In 1970s, for many, it was a dream of a decent home.

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LEFT: Adam Sampson

he north 24 typical houses in Luton.

Shelter director Adam Sampson said the research

found a child's opportunities

are increasingly linked to where

their parents happen to live.

While the housing boom

has further enriched the



# Gloucestershire

The severe and growing shortage of affordable housing is threatening to polarise rural communities, by forcing families out of the countryside and removing a labour force needed to sustain rural life. There is a real danger that living in the countryside will become the preserve of the wealthy and that the diversity of rural communities will be undermined. Unless action is taken now to replace the affordable homes lost through Right to Buy and rocketing house prices, rural life, as we know it, could be lost.

Families who become homeless are housed away from family and friends, forced to live in sub-standard private rented housing, or move in with family in the hope that their situation will improve in the future. They need support, but services can be sparse, with weak transport networks exacerbating the problem.

A policy report on this topic, *Priced out*, is available by emailing [info@shelter.org.uk](mailto:info@shelter.org.uk)

## Evidence

**Steve Webb MP**, Northavon  
*A politician's experience of children priced out of rural areas*

**Diana Organ MP**, Forest of Dean  
*Children in bad housing and the Government's response*

**Stephen Wright**, Director,  
Gloucestershire Rural Community Council  
*The changing rural housing market and its impact*

**Ian Wright**, Manager, Bairstow Eves Countrywide Estate Agency  
*House price rises, second homes, and the effects on poorer families*

**John Cannon**, Head Teacher, Redwick and Northwick Primary School  
*The impact on rural schools of homelessness and rising house prices*

**Jane Clarke**, Health Visitor, Cinderford  
*Children who are sick because of where they live*

**Deacon John Proctor**, Chair, Alabare Christian Care Centres

**Rachel Wetton**, Homelessness Service Manager, Alabare Christian Care Centres  
*Services for isolated homeless families, Wiltshire*

**Kim Close**, Senior Countryside Adviser, Countryside Agency  
*Rural housing across Britain and changing trends*

**Jonathan Kerslake**, Shelter Caseworker, Somerset Housing Aid Centre

**Lisa Morgan**, working single mother  
*The effects of living in bad housing on children*

## Home visits

**Janice Morgan**, and her children **Carrie** and **Grantley**

**Christina Greenhorn**, her two children **Deanna** and **Kerri**, and her grandchildren **Elle-Jay**, **Kallie** and **Jaycee**

**Claire Rashley**, and her children, **Jordan** and **Lewis**

**Karen Pegler**, **Charlie** and **Keelin**

# Rural housing creating 'gho

Shelter is calling on councils throughout England to double Council Tax for second home owners after their new report revealed that homelessness is growing quicker in the countryside than in urban areas.

*Priced out: the rising cost of rural homes found that ownership of second homes in*

rural areas has dramatically increased (15 percent from 2000 to 2005) against a backdrop of rising homelessness and increasingly unaffordable homes.

Shelter says that the problem is being felt across rural England, with many areas experiencing a loss of community and people who are unable to live in their own homes.

## South West second-

By Janet Hughes

**T**HE South West has recently found that 15 per cent of second homes are a problem for people living in the area.

Shelter is calling on councils throughout England to double Council Tax for second home owners after their new report revealed that homelessness is growing quicker in the countryside than in urban areas.

Residents of St Briavels face an uncertain future as they have lost their young people to spiralling house prices.

# The village where locals can't afford to buy a house

By CATRIONA DAVIES

**I**T IS no wonder people are rushing to buy homes in St Briavels, a village on the edge of the Forest of Dean.

There is a castle that used to be King John's hunting lodge and a village post office that doubles as a tea room. Customers in the grocery shop greet each other by name and exchange banter.

Most of those customers, however, are retired. Numbers at the village school are 10 per cent lower than they were four years ago, and nearly one in 10 of the 286 houses is a second home.

House prices have risen almost twice the national average over the past five years, meaning that many people who

grew up in the village have been forced to move away to buy a place of their own.

Shelter, the housing charity, has warned that St Briavels is one of many villages around Britain where the fabric of the community is under threat from spiralling house prices fuelled by an invasion of second home owners and a lack of social housing.

In a report to be published next week, Shelter will highlight the shortage of

affordable housing in rural communities. It is planning a day of investigations and discussions with communities in the South-West before making recommendations.

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Director of Shelter, Adam  
Sampson, said: "There is  
something wrong when  
thousands of second homes sit  
empty in the countryside while  
levels of homelessness rise

drastically. The combination  
of second home buyers and a  
failure to replace lost homes  
has pushed us to the point  
where families who have

lived in a town or village for  
generations are threatened to  
lose their homes.

Building more affordable  
homes is the only genuine long-  
term solution to this problem.  
The Government must ensure that Council  
housing is built in sufficient numbers.

There are a number of reasons why  
Council housing is not built in sufficient  
numbers.

One reason is that Council  
housing is often seen as a last resort.  
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the village grocery store  
or grandmother owned it  
before the First World War  
it is unsure how much  
it can stay in business.

said: "Ninety per cent of  
village shops are now  
owned by out of town  
people who are not  
interested in the village  
community."

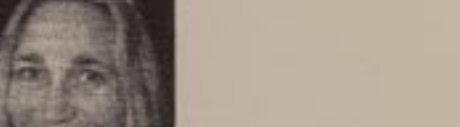
work.  
The village shop is  
often the only place  
where people can  
get their shopping  
done.

shop open, I don't know  
much longer I'll be able  
to go in. I don't know  
much longer I'll be able  
to go in.

quarrying used to be  
one of the main  
industries of the town.

but now employ  
ment is very low  
and many people  
have left the town.

squalid slums



## Edinburgh

Edinburgh is one of Europe's great cultural and financial centres. Tourism alone generates £1 billion a year for the city. Traditional commentators would say the city is booming, with house prices rising by 124 per cent since 1997.

There is, however, a side of Edinburgh not seen by the average visitor. Since 1997, homelessness in Edinburgh has risen by 44 per cent. Beyond the tourist trail are areas characterised by high unemployment, shifting populations, high levels of poverty and poor housing stock. Much is being done within these communities, but their experience remains a stark contrast to the millionaire houses of Edinburgh's Georgian squares and elegant suburbs.

To coincide with the Edinburgh panel visit, Shelter commissioned groundbreaking research from Sheffield University that uncovered unprecedented and rising levels of housing inequality directly caused by the distorted housing market. Shelter believes that housing is now one of the single biggest drivers of inequality and it increasingly determines a child's chances in life.

### Evidence

**Ron Smith**, Chief Executive, Edinburgh Solicitors Property Centre  
*The housing market in Edinburgh and recent trends*

**Simon Toyne**, Deputy Unit Manager, West Pilton Child and Family Centre  
*The effects of bad housing on the development of pre-school children*

**Liz Whyte**, Head Teacher, Royston Primary School

*The effects of bad housing on the education of primary-school children*

**Dave Hewitt**, Senior Development Worker, Pilton Communities Health Project

*The impact of bad housing on the health of communities*

**Paula Robertson**, Manager, Shelter's Edinburgh Families Project and

**David Gibb**, Manager, Shelter's Edinburgh Housing Aid Centre

*The advice and support provision available to homeless and badly housed families in Edinburgh*

**Cllr Sheila Gilmore**, Executive Member for Community Safety and Housing, City of Edinburgh Council

*The effects of temporary accommodation on local families and the allocations policy for housing in Edinburgh*

**Professor Kathleen Marshall**, Commissioner for Children and Young People in Scotland

*The work of the Children's Commissioner in relation to children and housing*



Residents of St Briavels face an uncertain future as they have lost their young people to spiralling property prices

# The village where locals can't afford to buy a house

By Catherine Davies

With no wonder people are heading to buy houses in St Briavels, a village on the edge of the Forest of Dean.

There is a castle museum to be King John's hunting lodge and a village post office that dates as a new front. Customers in the grocery shop meet each other by name and exchange banter.

Most of these small shops, however, are run by volunteers in the village who are 70 years old or older. They were last seen in 1992, and nearly one in 10 of the 250 houses is a second home.

It has been a long time since the village was a busy place. The last time it was a busy place was in the 1950s, when the village was a busy place.

It was a busy place, but it was a busy place. It was a busy place, but it was a busy place. It was a busy place, but it was a busy place.

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## Housing wealth at 'Victorian' level

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## THE SH STATE HOUSING

### Absent landl

### rich from sq

Giffenville West has been branded as one of the most deprived areas in the southwest after a report revealed \$1 per rent of homes in the ward are considered "non-decent" and \$5 per rent "substandard".







## Bad housing wrecks lives

Registered charity number 263710

We are the fourth richest country in the world, and yet millions of people in Britain wake up every day in housing that is run-down, overcrowded, or dangerous. Many others have lost their home altogether. Bad housing robs us of security, health, and a fair chance in life.

Shelter believes everyone should have a home.

We help 100,000 people a year fight for their rights, get back on their feet, and find and keep a home. We also tackle the root causes of Britain's housing crisis by campaigning for new laws, policies, and solutions.

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EC1V 9HU

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or visit [www.shelter.org.uk](http://www.shelter.org.uk)

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