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# HOW IS TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION USED?

## Key points:

- The number of households in temporary accommodation as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 has risen to 10,989.
- The number of children in temporary accommodation has risen for the fifth consecutive year, to 6,795.
- Local authorities failed in their legal duty to provide temporary accommodation to households who have a right to it 3,535 times last year. 95% of these occurred in Glasgow.
- Households, especially households with children, are spending ever longer in temporary accommodation. On average, households spend 180 days in temporary accommodation.
- On 620 occasions last year, families were kept in unsuitable accommodation for longer than 7 days, breaching the Unsuitable Accommodation Order. Three in every four of these occurred in Edinburgh.
- Recently, the Scottish Government committed to extend the Unsuitable Accommodation Order to all households. This is a welcome announcement, but local authorities must be properly supported to implement it.

When a household applies as homeless, a local authority has a legal duty to provide the household with temporary accommodation while they assess whether or not the household is homeless. If the household is indeed found to be homeless, the local authority has a duty to provide temporary accommodation until settled accommodation can be found. That temporary accommodation might take the form of local authority- or housing association-owned properties, private rented properties leased by the local authority, hostels, bed and breakfast accommodation (B&Bs) or women's refuges.

However, not everyone stays in temporary accommodation. In 2018-19, 21,095 households entered temporary accommodation, compared to 36,465 households who applied as homeless. To avoid the stress of upheaval and the expense of temporary accommodation, some people choose to stay with friends and family instead. This means that temporary accommodation counts are an imperfect measure of homeless households.

It is well evidenced that extended stays in temporary accommodation are detrimental for people’s health and wellbeing.<sup>22</sup> Poor standards of temporary accommodation exacerbate this: At Shelter Scotland we regularly advise and advocate on behalf of clients who are living in mouldy, unhygienic, unsafe accommodation without basic cooking and washing facilities. The households staying in such places can feel disconnected from the wider community, unable to settle in and make the accommodation a home. The Scottish Government recently consulted on improving standards of temporary accommodation,<sup>23</sup> and proposed introducing advisory standards based on the standards produced in 2011 by Shelter Scotland and CIH Scotland.<sup>24</sup> Shelter Scotland believes that these standards are an appropriate base, but urges the Government to move towards legally enforceable standards as soon as possible. For more information on temporary accommodation, see our Time in Temporary Accommodation topic briefing.<sup>25</sup>

## How many people use temporary accommodation?

The government statistics measure the number of households in temporary accommodation in two ways. Firstly, a spot count of temporary accommodation use is recorded every March and September.

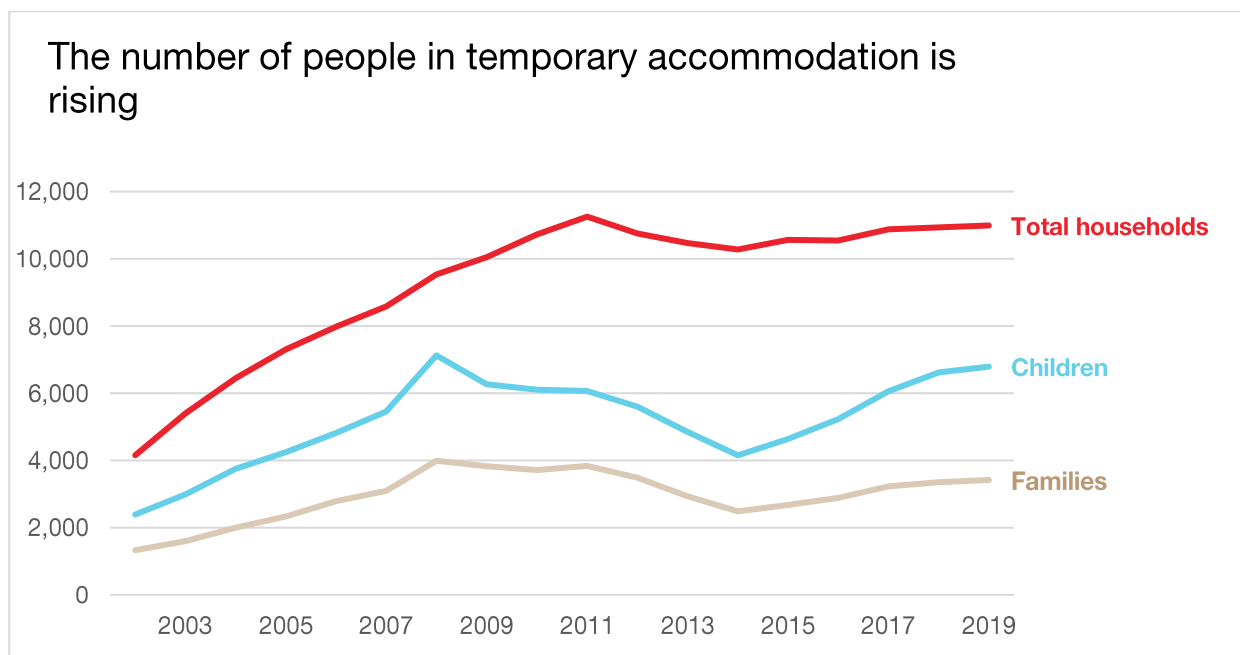


Chart 41: Numbers of total households, families (households with children) and children, in temporary accommodation as at 31 March each year, by year.

<sup>22</sup> Shelter Scotland (2013), [Temporary accommodation standards: campaign briefing](#)

<sup>23</sup> Shelter Scotland (2019), [Response to Scottish Government consultation on improving temporary accommodation standards.](#)

<sup>24</sup> Shelter Scotland/CIH Scotland (2011), [Temporary Accommodation Guidance](#)

<sup>25</sup> Shelter Scotland (2019), [Time in Temporary Accommodation 2019](#)

As we see from the graph above, the spot counts show that temporary accommodation use has been rising for the past five years. On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019, there were 10,989 households in temporary accommodation. Of these, 3,415 were families, and there were 6,795 children in these families. The number of children in temporary accommodation has been rising particularly fast over the past five years: since 2014, the number of children in temporary accommodation has risen by 64%.

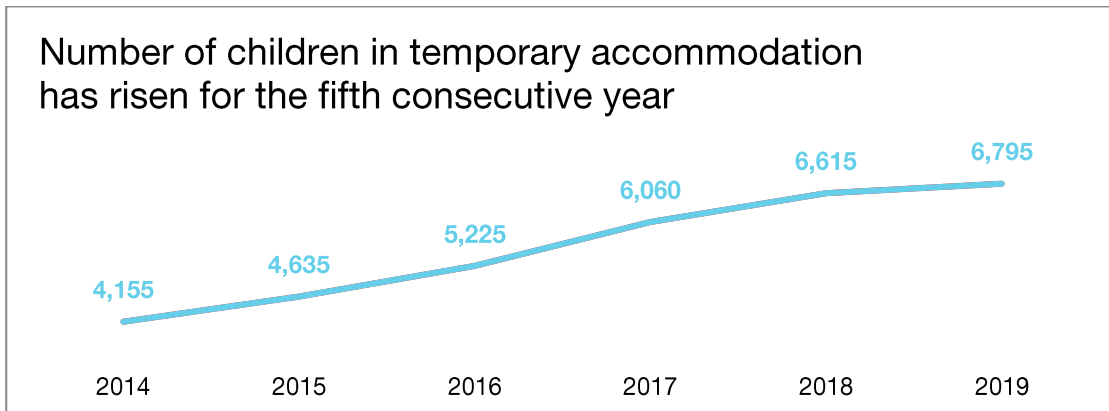


Chart 42: Numbers of children in temporary accommodation as at 31 March each year, 2014-2019.

The second way that numbers of households in temporary accommodation are measured in the official statistics is by tracking the number of households who enter and exit temporary accommodation within the financial year covered by the statistics. These statistics have only been available for the past two years. This year, it shows:



But it's important to remember that, although some households will have entered and exited during the year-long period measured above, many will only appear in one or the other count. Many households will have entered temporary accommodation between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 and will still be there, and many of those who left temporary accommodation in that time will have entered the previous year.

## How does use of temporary accommodation vary across the country?

Temporary accommodation was used by 58% of households who applied as homeless, and 71% of households who were assessed as homeless. This varies considerably by local authority: in Perth & Kinross and the Scottish Borders, only 31% of households who applied as homeless entered temporary accommodation; whereas in Shetland, it was 90%.

There are a lot of reasons why this figure might vary. A low percentage, showing that fairly few households who applied as homeless went on to use temporary accommodation, could be positive; it could suggest that these households went directly on to settled accommodation, and therefore didn't need temporary accommodation or that more people have support from family who they were able to stay with. Or it could be negative; for example is that households were offered temporary accommodation but decided not to use it because of condition, location, or price or that households who had a legal right to temporary accommodation were not supplied with it.

## Do people always get the temporary accommodation they need?

Once a household is assessed as homeless, or while the local authority takes time to make an assessment decision, the local authority has a legal duty to find temporary accommodation for the household. However, that legal duty is not always upheld – we refer to this as **gatekeeping**.

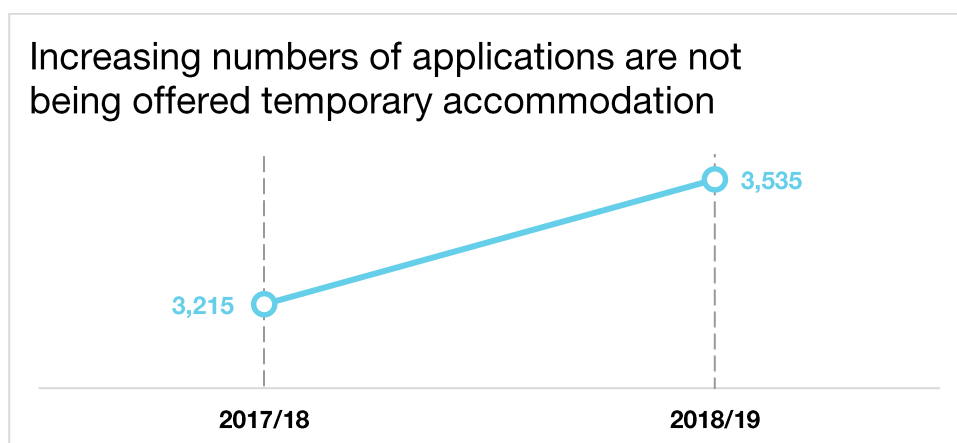


Chart 50: Numbers of households who had a legal duty to temporary accommodation but who did not receive it, 2017-18 and 2018-19.

In 2018-19, a shocking 3,535 applications (10% of total applications) were not offered temporary accommodation they had a legal right to. This number has increased since 2017-18. 95% these failures by the local authority to offer temporary accommodation occurred in Glasgow.

### **Case study: Maryam**

Maryam\* is a single mum. She had a housing duty owed to her by Glasgow City Council after leaving her home and making a homeless application due to domestic violence. Due to a lack of family-sized housing stock in her children's school catchment area, she was staying with her parents' while waiting for suitable accommodation. However, due to the overcrowding at her parents' house, Maryam needed to leave and approached the council for temporary accommodation, but was told that her caseworker was unavailable. Maryam tried to contact the casework team repeatedly and eventually found herself facing street homelessness with her children as the situation had deteriorated with her parents. At this point, Shelter Scotland were successful in contacting the casework team, who eventually arranged a private hotel for the family that afternoon for two nights. On the third night, no temporary accommodation could be found due to a football match being played in the city and all accommodation being booked. As a result, the client was forced to split up her children between family and she stayed with a friend. On the fourth night, a temporary furnished flat was sourced and the family moved in.

### **Where does Maryam appear in the statistics?**

✓ Maryam was assessed as homeless, but no temporary accommodation was found for her. This means her experience is one of the 3,365 times Glasgow City Council failed to comply with their statutory duty to provide accommodation.

✗ Maryam was statutorily homeless but not using temporary accommodation for some time. This shows why spot counts of temporary accommodation are not accurate indicators of homelessness in Scotland.

## **How long do people stay in temporary accommodation?**

There are now official statistics published which include information on how long households spend, on average, in temporary accommodation. On average, households spent 180 days in temporary accommodation in 2018-19. Households with children spend considerably longer in temporary accommodation – almost two months longer, on average – than households without children.

Households with children spend more time in temporary accommodation than those without  
And the gap is widening

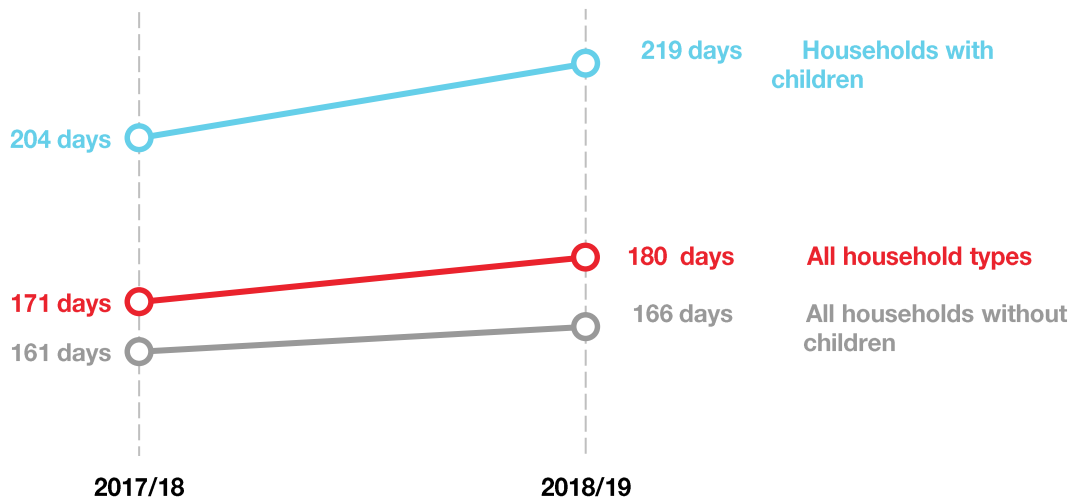


Chart 43: Average length of time households with and without children spent in temporary accommodation 2017/18 and 2018/19.

**Single people** spend the least time in temporary accommodation. However, even they spend, on average, 24 weeks (that’s between 5 and 6 months!) in temporary accommodation.

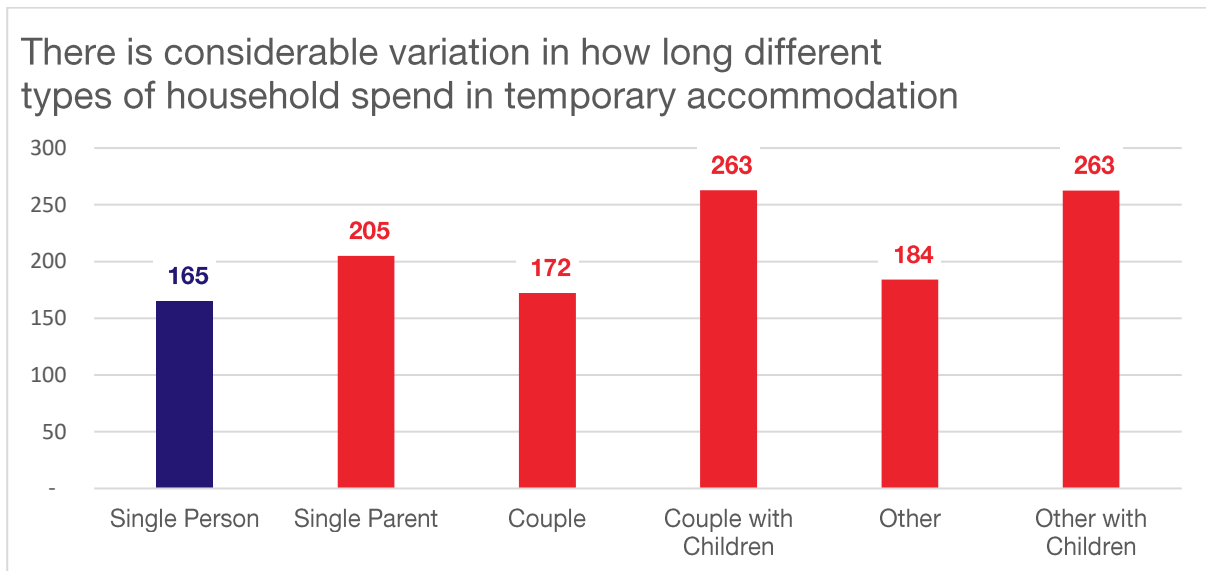


Chart 44: Average length of time (days) households spent in temporary accommodation 2018-19, by household type.

**How does this vary across the country?**

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There is considerable variation in how long households spend in temporary accommodation across different local authorities. Households without children spend the least amount of time in temporary accommodation, on average, in East Ayrshire (75 days, or 11 weeks), and the longest amount of time in East Lothian (361 days, or almost a year). Households with children spend the least time in temporary accommodation, on average, in Orkney (73 days, or 10 weeks), and the most time in Midlothian (a staggering 449 days, or 1 year and 12 weeks). Households with children spend longer in temporary accommodation than those without in 20 out of 32 local authorities.

## Average time spent in temporary accommodation varies greatly across local authorities

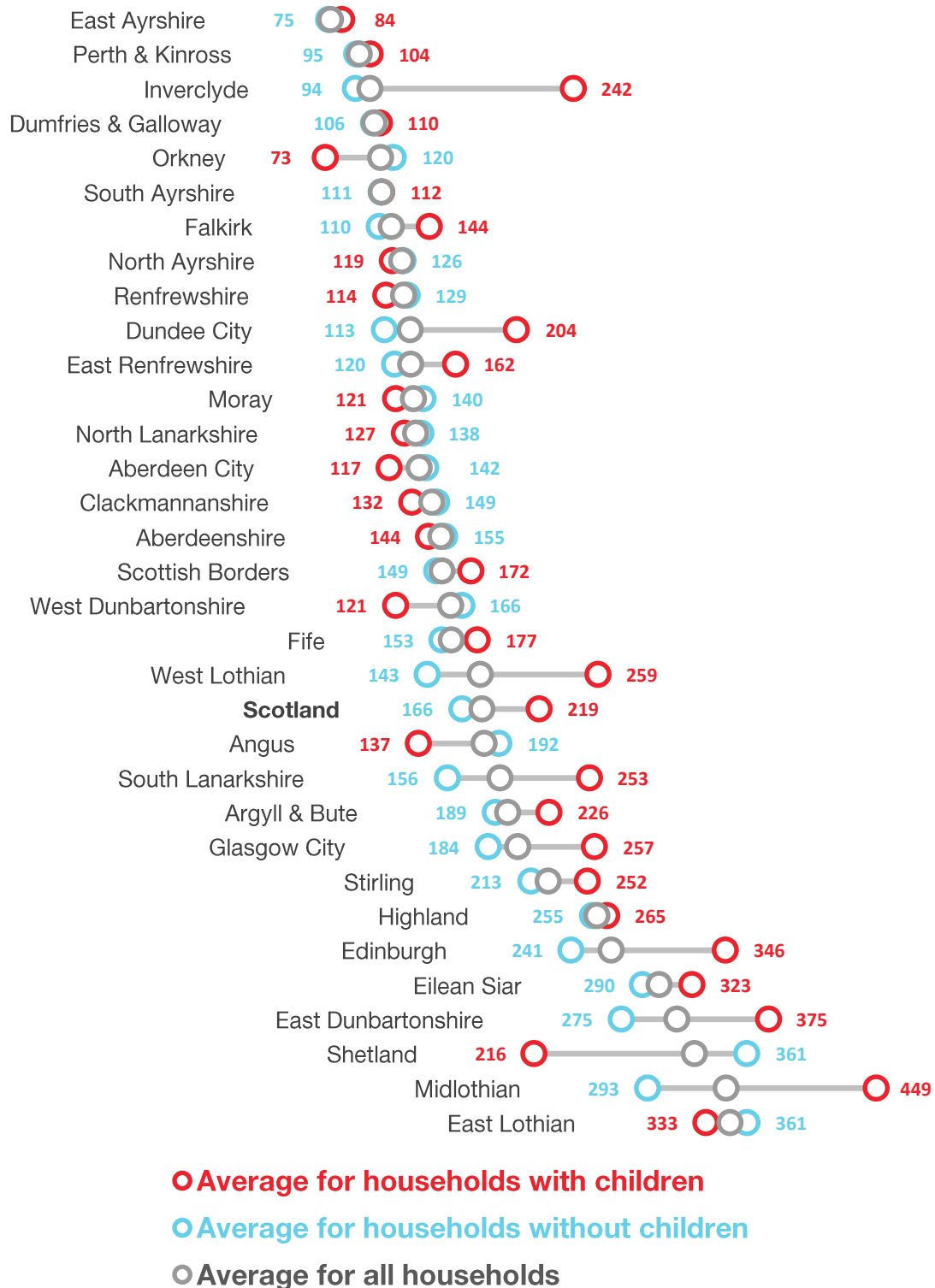


Chart 45: Average length of time households leaving temporary accommodation in 2018-19 spent there, by local authority.



However, be aware that the above data relates to households that left temporary accommodation between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019. There will therefore be households that entered temporary accommodation during that time who are still there (and are therefore not included in the above statistics), and will also be households who entered temporary accommodation *before* 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018 and are still there. 14% of households who left temporary accommodation in 2018-19 spent more than a year there, and this figure has been growing: in 2016, it was 12%.<sup>26</sup>

## What type of temporary accommodation do people stay in?

By far the most common type of temporary accommodation is local authority-owned housing.

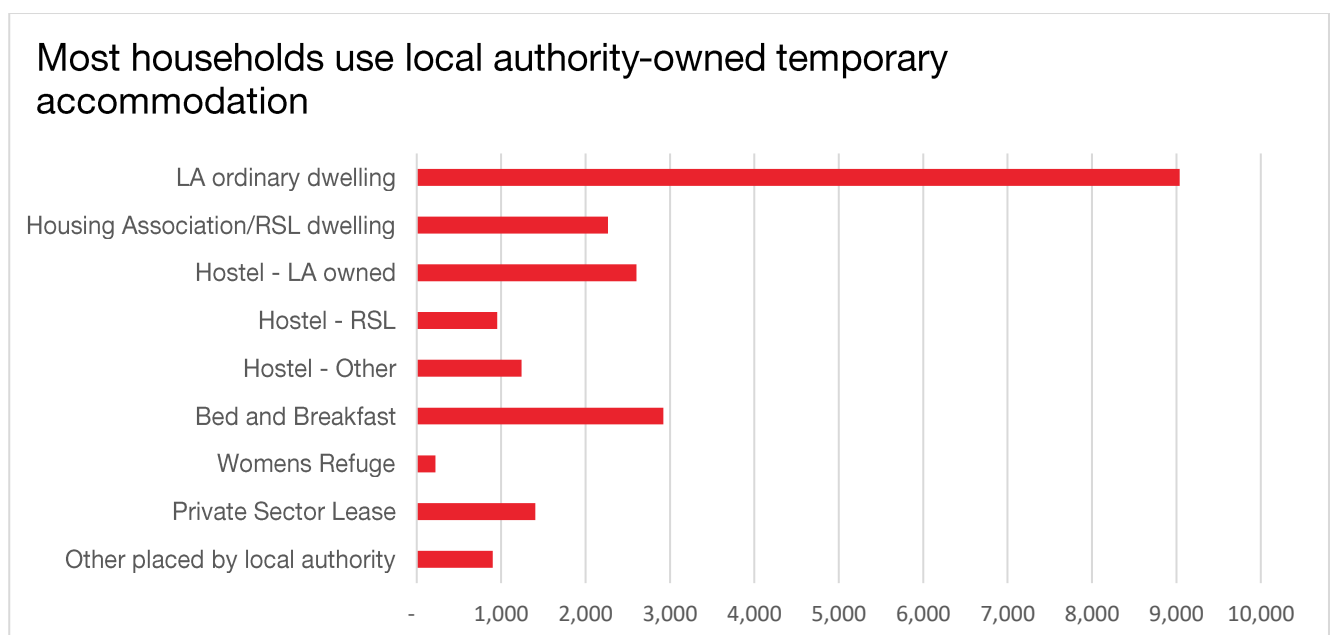


Chart 46: Numbers of households using different types of temporary accommodation, based on households who left temporary accommodation in 2018-19.



**Look out!** The graph above is based on exit data, so only shows the type of temporary accommodation households used last in their temporary accommodation journey. However, we can compare the proportions above to spot-count data, and we see a similar picture, in which the majority of households are using social sector temporary accommodation.

This does vary by local authority as, for example, some local authorities don't own any – or very little – of their own housing stock.

<sup>26</sup> Shelter Scotland (2017), [The use of temporary accommodation in Scotland 2016](#)

A single household may stay in multiple different temporary accommodation placements throughout their experience of homelessness. The data released on this is limited, but we do know that the majority of households who use temporary accommodation only have one placement. 18% have three or more placements, a small percentage of whom experience six or more placements.

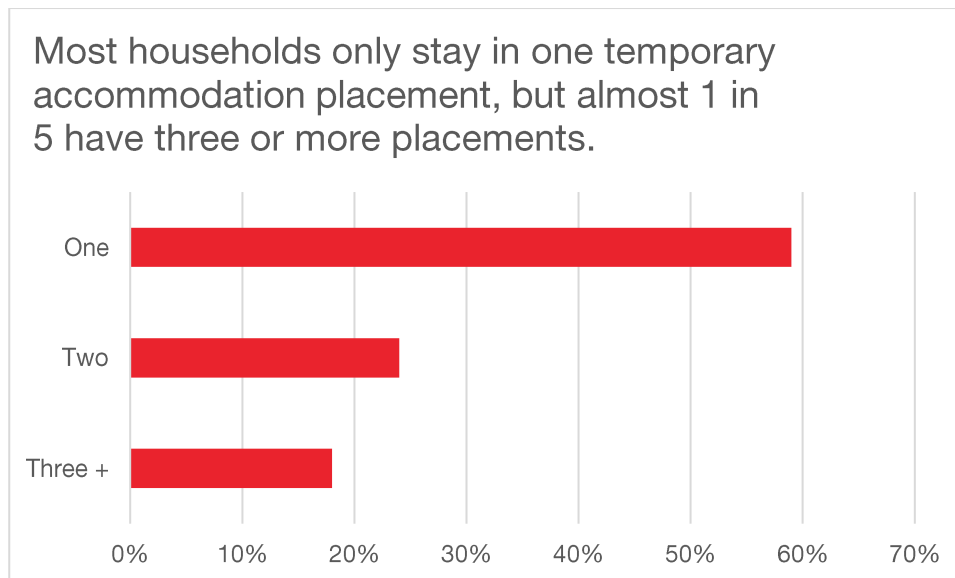


Chart 47: Proportions of households who used different numbers of temporary accommodation placements, based on households who left temporary accommodation in 2018-19.

### Case study: Nadia

Nadia\* is a single mother of two young children (aged five and one), who was assessed as homeless after fleeing an abusive partner. She was moved between five B&Bs and hotels in less than a month, some several miles from her eldest child's school and her support networks. This was very disruptive, particularly for her five-year-old. After just under a month, permanent accommodation was found for Nadia and her children.

### Where does Nadia appear in the statistics?

✓ Nadia and her children stayed in five temporary accommodation placements across 27 days. This means she is one of around 500 households who had this number of placements.

! Nadia and her children stayed in temporary accommodation for just 27 days, which is an unusually short amount of time, especially for a household with children: the national average for households with children is 219 days.

? Nadia and her children stayed in three different B&Bs across 16 days. Legally, this constitutes a breach of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order (UAO), so Nadia should appear as one of the 620 instances in which local authorities breached their duties under the UAO. However, as Nadia was moved between B&Bs, this breach may not have been picked up.

## Unsuitable Accommodation Order

The Unsuitable Accommodation Order specifies the number of days which households with children or pregnant people can be placed in accommodation deemed as 'unsuitable', such as hostels or B&Bs. In October 2017, this order was amended to reduce the limit from 14 days to seven days. Since this reduction, the number of breaches of the order has increased dramatically.

There has been a 57% increase in breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order in the last year

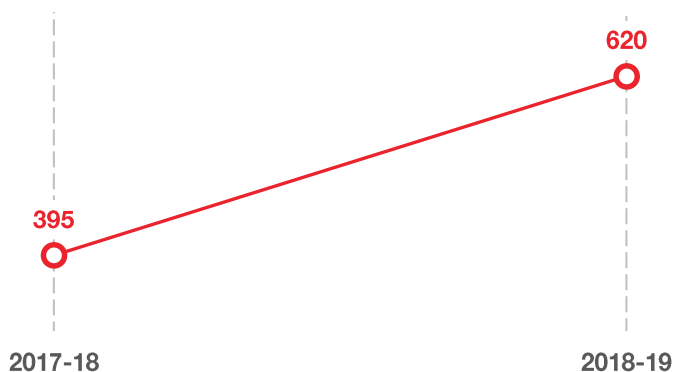
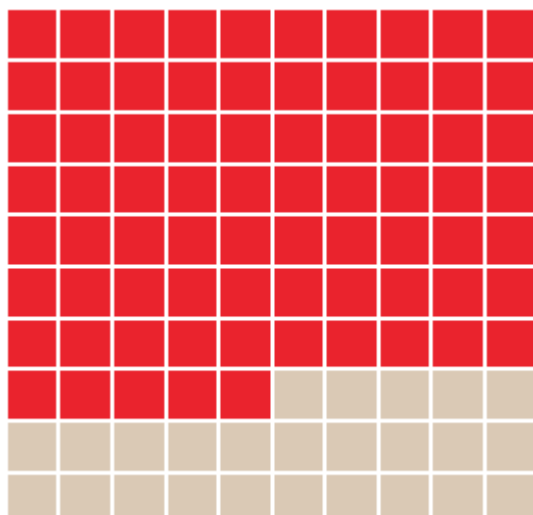


Chart 48: Number of breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order in 2017-18 and 2018-19.



**There were 620 breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order last year. 465 of these, or 75%, occurred in Edinburgh...**

**...but breaches were also recorded in 10 other local authorities.**

Chart 49: Percentage of all breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order in 2018-19 that occurred in Edinburgh.

We cannot compare numbers of breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order before 2017-18, as previously breaches were only counted on one day of the year.

The Scottish Government has recently committed to extend the Unsuitable Accommodation Order to all households, meaning local authorities will have a duty to ensure no one stays in unsuitable temporary accommodation for more than seven days. This change is due to be implemented by 2021. Shelter Scotland welcomes this announcement, but measures should be put in place to ensure that breaches do not continue to routinely occur.