

Research report

The facts: bad housing and homelessness for children and young people in Scotland 2011

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Shelter
Scotland

The facts: bad housing and homelessness for children and young people in Scotland 2011

Summary

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

- One in ten (96,000) children are living in overcrowded homes in Scotland. This means children live in nearly two thirds (65 per cent) of all overcrowded households.
- Nearly one in five (179,000) children are living in fuel poverty in Scotland. This is enough children to fill Hampden Park stadium three times over. The number of fuel poor households with children rose by 40 per cent in the last year predominantly because fuel costs rose faster than incomes.
- Although the number of homes which fail the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) is falling, it still remains the case that 61 per cent of children in Scotland are growing up in properties that fall below the SHQS.
- 186,000 children live in homes which have condensation or damp, or both, putting these children at a higher risk of asthma and other respiratory problems. This is the same as if every child in Edinburgh and Glasgow were living in places with damp or condensation problems.
- Sixty children a day become homeless somewhere in Scotland. That is enough to fill three primary one classes every day and is a total of 22,000 children a year.
- Nearly half of all homeless children (46 per cent) are under five years old.
- Despite a modest rise of one per cent in the overall levels of homelessness over the last five years there has been a six per cent rise in the number of families with children who are homeless over the same period.
- Lone parent families are over represented within the homeless population. They are the second largest group of homeless households, accounting for 25 per cent of all homeless households despite representing only six per cent of all households in Scotland.
- An estimated 1,200 children in Scotland were in families evicted from social housing in 2009-10, usually for rent arrears. This means that approximately three children a day lose their home due to eviction.
- Approximately 25 in every 1,000 young people in Scotland become homeless.

- Young homeless people are vastly over represented in the homeless population. They represent 37 per cent of all homeless households despite only four per cent of all households in Scotland being headed up by someone under 25.
- Young people who run away are at particular risk of experiencing homelessness as a young person. The findings of a recent survey suggest that the vast majority of young homeless people (84 per cent) had also run away overnight from home or care when they were under 16.

In order to improve the housing situation for thousands of children and young people in Scotland, Shelter Scotland would like to see:

- More high quality housing designed for young people and families with children, in areas they want to live, to address the backlog of children and young people living in temporary accommodation.
- Improved quality of temporary accommodation through embedding minimum standards for all temporary accommodation set out in the *Guidance on Standards for Temporary Accommodation*.
- The Scottish Government to develop and publish “pre-action requirements” (minimum steps to be taken) for social landlords so that eviction becomes a genuine last resort.
- The Scottish Government to publish guidance on homeless people’s right to support when they are accepted as homeless.
- Councils to implement Scottish Government guidance on acting in the best interests of children facing homeless, published last year, to ensure children’s needs are prioritised
- Councils to develop systems to ensure that education and social work services are aware of the housing problems faced by children affected by homelessness.
- A greater focus on tackling running away as part of work to prevent youth homelessness.

Background

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

This report is the third and final annual report produced by Shelter Scotland's Children's Service to provide a real picture of how many children are affected by poor housing conditions in Scotland. Over the last three years Shelter Scotland has been running this service with the support of the Big Lottery Fund and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, with the twin aim of offering practical help with the education of homeless and badly housed children and, at a campaign and policy level, seeking to highlight the challenges and solutions facing these children.

We have sought to make sure that all the information is as up to date as possible and hope that it is a useful publication for people working to improve the lives of children and young people in Scotland.

Children's housing situation has a significant impact on the quality of children's lives and well-being.¹ Children who are living in sub-standard housing or who are homeless are also likely to be from deprived communities and low income households. Over half (53 per cent) of all social housing in Scotland is concentrated in the 15 per cent most deprived areas and 23 per cent of all children in social housing live in these areas.² Addressing poor quality housing and homelessness are key components in tackling child poverty and we must recognise the role of housing policy in eradicating child poverty by 2020.

The cost of housing can put significant pressure on family budgets and can tip a family into living below the poverty line. Once housing costs are taken into account (i.e. when family income is looked at after the rent or mortgage has been paid) the number of children living in poverty rises from 210,000 to 260,000.³ The problem of housing costs is exacerbated by the dire shortage of affordable housing in Scotland with 160,000 households on council housing lists and increasing pressure on housing supply due to recent a 30 per cent cut in the

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

² Scottish Government (2010) *Scotland's People Annual report: results from Scottish Household Survey, 2009*; Scottish Household Survey, 2009.

³ Scottish Government (2010) *Poverty and income inequality in Scotland: 2008-09*, 20 May.

housing budget by the Scottish Government. In addition the pressure of housing costs on the family budget is likely to worsen due to cuts in housing benefit over the next few years.⁴

Children in bad housing

A home should be wind and weather tight, warm, and have modern facilities. Poor conditions are where housing is in need of substantial repair; is structurally unsafe; is damp, cold, or infested; or is lacking modern facilities such as an effective central heating system. The problems of bad housing considered in this report are overcrowding, fuel poverty, condensation, damp and dwellings that fail the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS).

Overcrowding

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

The amount of space a family has to live in is measured in two ways:

- Census data records the number of 'persons per room', irrespective of age or gender, and makes a simple comparison between the number of household members and the number of rooms, not including bathrooms, cloakrooms or toilets.
- The other, more sophisticated measure is the 'bedroom standard' which compares the actual number of bedrooms a household has with a standard number that takes into consideration the gender, ages and relationships between household members. The bedroom standard is used by the Scottish House Condition Survey (SHCS), and by many landlords in allocating property.

Using the bedroom standard, for example, the standard number of bedrooms for a couple with two boys, aged 8 and 12 and a 14 year old girl would be 3: one for the couple, one for the two boys because they are of the same gender and under 21 and one for the girl because children over the age of 10 of different genders should not share a room.

By this standard one in ten (96,000) children is living in overcrowded conditions in Scotland.⁵ This means children live in nearly two thirds (65 per cent) of all overcrowded households.

Fuel poverty

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

⁴ More information on the impact of housing benefit cuts on families with children can be found in Scottish Government (2010) *Housing Benefit changes: Scottish Impact Assessment*, December

⁵ Data from *Scottish House Condition Survey, 2009*

In Scotland, nearly one in five (179,000) children are living in fuel poverty.⁶ This is enough children to fill Hampden Park stadium three times over. Lone parent families are particularly affected by fuel poverty. One lone parent family in every three (40,000) is fuel poor compared to one in four last year.⁷ In the last year there has been a 40 per cent rise in the number of households with children who are fuel poor. This rise will make it particularly challenging for the Scottish Government to meet its commitment to abolish fuel poverty by 2016.

The rise in fuel poverty will largely be because fuel prices last year rose faster than peoples' incomes.⁸ It is low income families that are at greatest risk of fuel poverty and often have to choose between essential household items or living in an adequately heated home. They tend to have to pay more for their gas and electricity because they often opt for pre-payment meters, to help with budgeting, but which means they pay 8-10 per cent more for their fuel bills than those paying by direct debit.⁹

Failing the Scottish Housing Quality Standard

All social housing must pass the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) by 2015. Private owners and private landlords are under no obligation to bring their properties up to a standard which meets the SHQS. The Standard requires dwellings to be above a Tolerable Standard, free from serious disrepair, energy efficient, with modern facilities and services and healthy, safe and secure.

Although more homes are now passing the SHQS, it still remains the case that 61 per cent (606,000) of children are living in homes that are below the SHQS. Houses largely fall below the SHQS due to poor energy efficiency.¹⁰

Condensation and damp

There are 186,000 children living in homes that are either affected by rising or penetrating damp and / or have condensation in at least one room.¹¹ These children are at a greater risk of experiencing asthma and other respiratory problems. This is as if every child living in Glasgow and Edinburgh were living in homes with damp or condensation problems.

⁶ Data from *Scottish House Condition Survey, 2009*

⁷ Scottish Government (2010) *Scottish House Condition Survey: Key Findings for 2009*

⁸ Gas and electricity costs rose by about 22 per cent and 7 per cent respectively, compared to a rise in household income of about 1 per cent over the same period. Scottish Government (2010) *Scottish House Condition Survey: Key Findings for 2009*

⁹ Save the Children (2007) *The Poverty Premium: How poor households pay more for essential goods and services*

¹⁰ Data from *Scottish House Condition Survey, 2009*

¹¹ Data from *Scottish House Condition Survey, 2009*

Children with no permanent home

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

Approximately 22,000 children were made homeless in 2009-10, which is very similar to the number in 2008-09.¹² Sixty children a day are still being made homeless somewhere in Scotland, enough children to fill three primary one classes every day.¹³

Despite little change in the number of children who are homeless over the last year the longer term picture is quite different. In the last five years the number of people becoming homeless has risen by one per cent compared to a rise of six per cent in the number of homeless families with children in the same period.¹⁴ The largest rise has been in the number of lone parent families who are homeless, rising from 9,941 families in 2004-5 to 10,582 in 2009-10.¹⁵

Reason for homelessness

The main causes of homelessness for families with children are a non-violent household dispute or relationship breakdown (20 per cent), being asked to leave their accommodation (17 per cent) and domestic abuse (14 per cent).¹⁶ In a further seven per cent of households rent arrears or mortgage default was the main reason a family with children was homeless, accounting for nearly 1,300 families.¹⁷ Financial difficulties, debt or unemployment was cited as a contributory factor for 16 per cent of families.¹⁸

¹² Data from Scottish Government (2010) *Operation of the homeless persons legislation in Scotland, 31 August 2010*

¹³ Own calculation. Scottish Government (2010) *Pupils in Scotland 2009*; Data from Scottish Government (2010) *Operation of the Homeless Persons legislation in Scotland: national and local authority analyses 200-10. Detailed Tables*. Referred to hereafter Scotland Government (2010)

¹⁴ Data from Scottish Government (2010)

¹⁵ Data from Scottish Government (2010)

¹⁶ Data from Scottish Government (2010)

¹⁷ Not all families who are evicted will present as homeless so this figure does not represent all families evicted from social or privately owned housing. Data from Scottish Government (2010)

¹⁸ Data from Scottish Government (2010)

Nikki and her two children, Elise, age 8 and Caleb, age 6 lost their home due to a number of reasons. Nikki was suffering from mental health issues and had to leave work because of her ill health. She started to fall behind with paying her rent and the landlord threatened to evict her and the family for rent arrears. As a result of all this stress her relationship with her partner broke down.

Nikki went to the council for help with housing but the two temporary accommodation flats she was offered were uninhabitable. The first flat was mouldy, damp, stank of urine and there was blood on the mattress and faeces on the wall and the second one was infested by cockroaches and had exposed wiring. Nikki decided she and the children would move in with her mother, stepfather and nephew instead. The conditions there were very cramped; her nephew had to sleep in the hall in a sleeping bag because Nikki and her two children were sleeping in his bed. This lasted for six months until a suitable permanent home for the family was found.

Nikki and her children all received support from Shelter housing support services to help them cope with their situation and to settle into a permanent home. The children were provided with educational support to help them settle into a new school.

Homelessness and family types

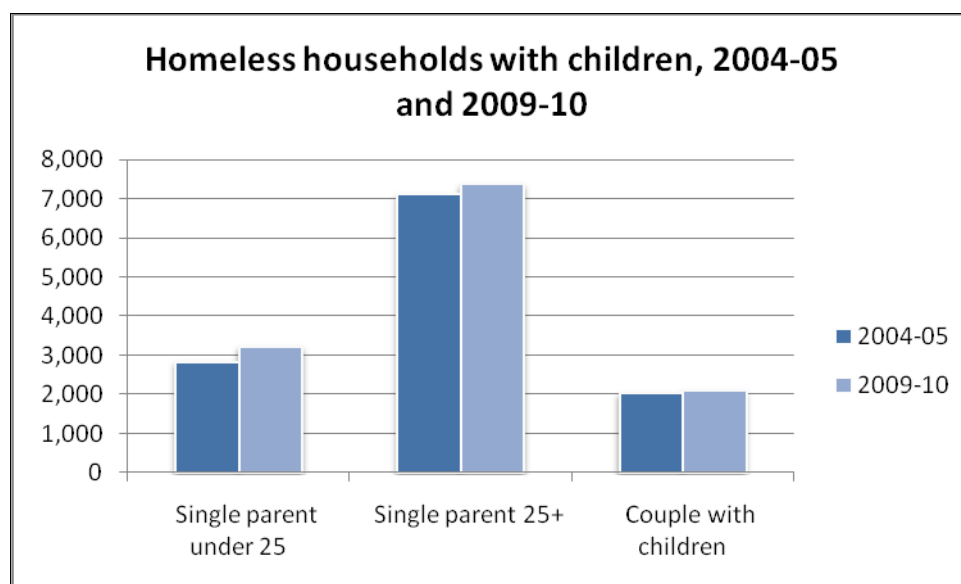


Figure 1

Figure 1 shows the types of households with children assessed as homeless and the rise in the last five years. Lone parents head up over 80 per cent of homeless households with children and are over represented within the homeless population. They are the second largest type of homeless household, accounting for 25 per cent of all homeless households despite representing only six per cent of all households in Scotland.¹⁹

Nearly half of homeless children are under five years old. A breakdown of dependent children in families assessed as homeless shows that 46 per cent are aged 0-4, 34 per cent are aged 5-11, 15 per cent are aged 12-15 and five per cent are aged 16-18.²⁰

Temporary accommodation

Children often have to spend months, even years in 'temporary' houses waiting to move into a permanent home, sometimes moving several times. Temporary accommodation varies widely in type and standard. In general it will be furnished flats or houses, owned by a council, housing association or private landlord. In an emergency situation families may be placed in bed and breakfast accommodation for the short-term. Families can find themselves being placed out of their local area far from the support of families and friends, with long journeys to and from school. Children live in two out of every five (38 per cent) households in temporary accommodation.²¹ In order to help address the variation in the standard of temporary housing, Shelter Scotland, in partnership with the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland, has developed a benchmark for all providers of temporary accommodation to work towards in terms of the quality, location and management of properties being let to homeless households.²²

There has been a dramatic rise in the number of homeless families with children waiting for a permanent home. The last five years have seen a 46 per cent rise in the number of families with children living in temporary accommodation; a similar rise to that seen by other groups over the same period.²³

Using the latest snapshot figures from the Scottish Government there were 6,402 children living in temporary accommodation on 31 December 2010.²⁴ The majority (89 per cent or

¹⁹ Using data from Scottish Government (2010); SCROL (2001) *S248 Age of Household Reference Person (HRP) by household composition*. Available at www.scrol.gov.uk

²⁰ Data from Scotland *Operation of the homeless persons legislation in Scotland: 2009-10*

²¹ Data from Scottish Government (2010)

²² The Chartered Institute of Housing and Shelter Scotland (2010) *Guidance on Standards for Temporary Accommodation*.

²³ Data from Scottish Government (2010)

²⁴ Scottish Government (2011) *Quarterly Reference Tables: households in temporary accommodation to 31 December 2010*, March 8.

5,673) were staying in local authority or housing association housing, nine per cent (590) were in private rented accommodation, one per cent (59) were in bed and breakfast hotels and a further one per cent (80) in hostels.²⁵

Homeless children in unsuitable temporary accommodation

A small number of homeless children continue to stay in bed and breakfast hotels despite the introduction of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order (2004) which effectively bans its use for families with children, except in specific circumstances. Bed and breakfast hotels that accept homeless people are a specialist type of accommodation. The standard of the rooms may be poor, bathroom facilities may have to be shared and there are usually no cooking facilities.

There has been a marked decline in the number of homeless families with children staying in bed and breakfast accommodation that is deemed unsuitable. At any one time in 2010 there was an average of eight breaches of this Order, compared to an average of 16 in 2009 and 51 in 2008.²⁶ At the same time however in 2010, there were an average of 52 families with children each day staying in bed and breakfast hotels but without breaching the Order.²⁷ The Order is not breached if a family is in bed and breakfast accommodation for less than two weeks or where a family has made a genuine choice to stay beyond this time rather than move into other suitable accommodation that has been offered to them by the council.

Eviction of children and their families

Families can be evicted even if there are children in the home. In fact, approximately a third of all households evicted by a social landlord have children in them.²⁸ In 2009-10 an estimated 1,200 children lost their homes due to eviction. This is the equivalent of three children every day in Scotland being put at risk of homelessness because they have been evicted or forced to abandon their home by their landlord.²⁹ The majority of evictions are for rent arrears.

A best value audit conducted by Stirling Council of evictions in 2008 found that children were in nearly half of all households evicted for rent arrears. The average cost of each eviction was found to be over £5,000 with costs continuing to rise the longer families spend in

²⁵ Scottish Government (2011) *Quarterly Reference Tables: households in temporary accommodation to 31 December 2010*, March 8

²⁶ Scottish Government (2011)

²⁷ Scottish Government (2010) *Operation of the homeless persons legislation in Scotland: 2009-10, 31 August 2010*

²⁸ Communities Scotland (2005) *Eviction in practice*

²⁹ Using data from Communities Scotland (2005) *Eviction in practice*; Scottish Government (2010) *Housing Statistics for Scotland*; Scottish Housing Regulator (2010) *Annual Performance and Statistical Return (APSR)*

temporary accommodation. As well as being expensive, eviction is not an effective method of getting rents paid or recovering arrears and can have a far reaching impact on children's lives.³⁰ These findings put into question whether the eviction of families with children is ever the right course of action to tackle rent arrears.

To help ensure eviction is only ever used as a last resort for collecting rent owed the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 allowed for the development of a set of pre-action requirements that social landlords must meet before they take a household to court for rent arrears. It will mean a series of steps landlords must take before taking a household to court ensuring early action is taken to resolve problems related to rent arrears without them escalating to the stage where families are threatened with losing their home.

Homeless young people

There has been a three per cent rise in the number of young people, aged 16-24, who became homeless in the last year.³¹ This means 25 young people in every 1000 became homeless.³² Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that the rate of homelessness among young people in Scotland is three times higher than in England.³³ Although this may highlight greater need in Scotland, as the report explains this can be accounted for by the wider priority need categories in Scotland compared to England.

Young people are still vastly over represented in the homeless population. They represent 37 per cent of all homeless households but only four per cent of all households in Scotland are headed by a young person under 25.³⁴

The proportion of young people being given priority need status in 2009-10 was 87 per cent, compared to 84 per cent the previous year.³⁵ This should be expected with the widening of the priority need category which means all unintentionally homeless households will have a

³⁰ For more information see Shelter (2009) *Eviction of children and families: the impact and the alternatives*. Available at: http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_library/policy_library_folder/eviction_of_children_and_families_the_impact_and_the_alternatives

³¹ Using data from Scottish Government (2010)

³² Data from *Operation of the homeless persons legislation in Scotland: 2009-10, 31 August 2010*; GROS (2010) *Mid-2009 Population Estimates Scotland*

³³ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2008) *Youth and homelessness in the UK*

³⁴ Data from Scottish Government (2010) *Operation of the homeless persons legislation in Scotland: 2009-10, 31 August 2010*; SCROL (2001) *S05 Age of Household Reference Person (HRP) by sex and living arrangements*.

³⁵ Data from Scottish Government (2010)

right to a home by 2012. While the figures suggest progress towards the 2012 commitment this rate needs to be increased if all councils are to meet the commitment.

Reason for homelessness

The most common reason for homelessness among young people is relationship breakdown, typically with parents or step-parents. For many this is a consequence of long-term conflict within the home and often involving violence.³⁶

The link between young people becoming homeless and the challenges they face when they are under 16 are clearly highlighted by recent research which found that young people who run away are at particular risk of experiencing homelessness once they are aged 16 or over. The findings highlight that the vast majority of young homeless people (84 per cent) had also ran away overnight from home or care when they were under 16.³⁷ Many had run away more than once, and as part of this experience they had often slept rough and sometimes stayed away from home for more than four weeks. This suggests that any focus on preventing homelessness needs to tackle the issues faced by young runaways.

Half of young homeless people were living with their parents or family before becoming homeless - this rises to 70 per cent for those aged 16-17.³⁸ In 2009-10, 38 per cent of young people, aged 16-24 became homeless because they were asked to leave their accommodation, 29 per cent were asked to leave due to a household dispute or relationship breakdown, with 32% of these disputes being violent or aggressive.³⁹

Homelessness compounds a number of the problems faced by young people. This is particularly evident with mental health problems and/or the onset of (or exacerbation of existing) substance misuse problems. There is particularly strong evidence that homelessness impedes young people's participation in employment, education or training.⁴⁰

Homeless young people and household type

There tends to be a view that the majority of homeless young people are men when in fact if you consider homeless young people who have children then most households are headed up by a woman. More than half (57 per cent) of young homeless households are headed by a woman. This is illustrated in figure 2 which also shows that most homeless young people

³⁶ JRF (2008) *Youth and homelessness in the UK*

³⁷ Shelter Scotland (2011) *Running away and future homelessness – the missing link?*

³⁸ Scottish Government (2010) *A National Statistics Publication for Scotland, 31 August 2010. Operation of the Homeless Persons Legislation in Scotland: 2009-10*

³⁹ Data from Scottish Government (2010)

⁴⁰ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2008) *Youth and homelessness in the UK*

are single (67 per cent), 22 per cent are lone parents and five per cent are young couples with children.⁴¹

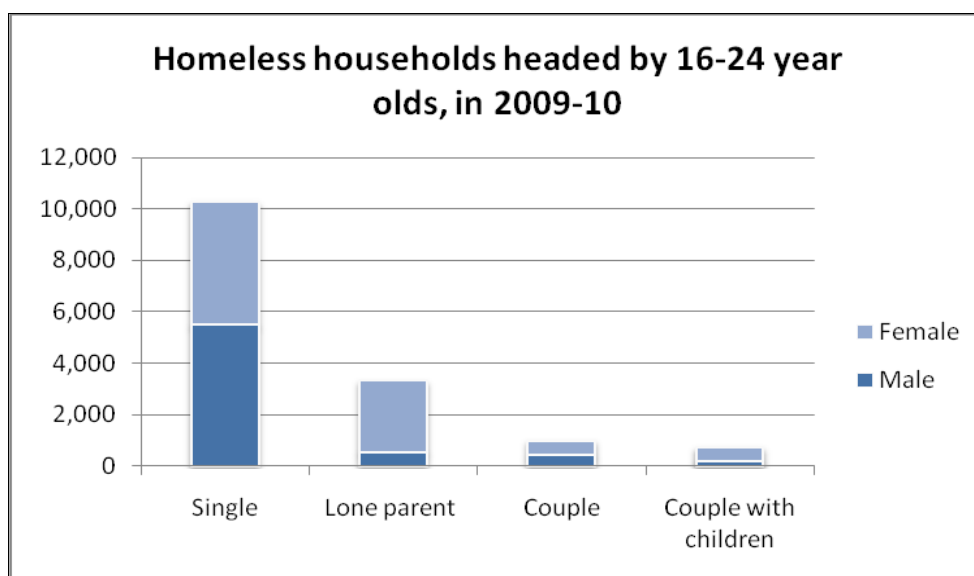


Figure 2

Young people leaving care and homelessness

Despite efforts to reform the system for children and young people in care or leaving care, there are estimates that a third of homeless people were formerly in care.⁴² Of those young people eligible for aftercare services in Scotland on 31 July 2010, 14 per cent (538 young people) had experienced one or more episodes of homelessness.⁴³ On this date, 135 of the young people were staying in homeless accommodation. This is likely to be an under estimate since 35 per cent of young people who were eligible for an after care service were not, for various reasons, receiving this service.

What can be done?

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

⁴¹ Data from Scottish Government (2010) *Operation of the homeless persons legislation in Scotland: 2008-09, 4 September 2009*

⁴² The Centre for Social Justice (2008) *Couldn't Care Less: A policy report from the Children in Care Working Group*, September.

⁴³ Scottish Government (2011) *Statistics Publication Notice: Health and Care Series: Children Looked After Statistics 2009-10, CLAS2009-10 - Additional Tables*, 23 February.

Shelter Scotland believes it is morally right and economically sensible to invest now in addressing bad housing and homelessness to remove the disadvantage caused by poor housing and help lift children out of poverty.

There are seven areas of action Shelter Scotland would like to see for children and young people in Scotland:

- More high quality housing designed for young people and families with children, in areas they want to live, to address the backlog of children and young people living in temporary accommodation.
- Improved quality of temporary accommodation through embedding minimum standards for all temporary accommodation set out in the *Guidance on Standards for Temporary Accommodation*.
- The Scottish Government to develop and publish “pre-action requirements” for social landlords so that eviction becomes a genuine last resort.
- The Scottish Government to publish guidance on homeless people’s right to support when they are accepted as homeless.
- Councils to implement Scottish Government guidance on acting in the best interests of children facing homeless, published last year, to ensure children’s needs are prioritised
- Councils to develop systems to ensure that education and social work services are aware of the housing problems faced by children affected by homelessness.
- A greater focus on tackling running away as part of work to prevent youth homelessness.

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