

Topic briefing: Time in temporary accommodation

July 2018

This is one of a series of topic briefings relating to housing and homelessness. This is a statistical briefing looking at the time households in Scotland spent in temporary accommodation in 2017/18.

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- [Health and homelessness](#)

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Key points

- New Scottish Government data shows for the first time how long households spend in temporary accommodation.¹
- The statistics conclusively show that thousands of households in Scotland depend on temporary accommodation for extended lengths of time.
- On average, households spent 171 days (just under 6 months) in temporary accommodation in 2017/18.
- 13% of households spent more than a year in temporary accommodation.
- Households with children tended to spend longer in temporary accommodation than households without children (201 days compared to 161 days).
- New enforceable standards are necessary to ensure that temporary accommodation, where its use is necessary, provides a positive stepping stone into permanent accommodation.²

Background

Accessing quality temporary accommodation (TA) is the crucial first step away from homelessness for many households. We know that there can be long delays between a household first applying as homeless and moving into permanent accommodation and that the majority of households spend time in temporary housing as part of this journey.

Being in temporary accommodation can be disruptive especially for the 6,615 children who live there³ and research has shown that long periods in TA can impact on a child's physical and mental health and their educational attainment.⁴ Households in TA can feel disconnected from the wider community, unable to settle in and make the accommodation a home. 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. **We fundamentally believe that while the situation remains that people have to use temporary accommodation as a stopgap while they wait for a home, they should not have to spend any length of time in poor quality**

¹ Analysis of data from the HL3 return is included for the first time in the Scottish Government's annual homeless statistical bulletin. Scottish Government (2018), Homelessness in Scotland: 2017-18, <https://www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/06/9554/downloads>

² Shelter Scotland, Temporary accommodation standards: campaign briefing, November 2013 http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_library/policy_library_folder/temporary_accommodation_standards_campaign_briefing

³ Scottish Government (2018), Homelessness in Scotland 2017-18, <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/06/9554>

⁴ Shelter Scotland, Temporary accommodation standards: campaign briefing, November 2013 http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_library/policy_library_folder/temporary_accommodation_standards_campaign_briefing

accommodation. New legally enforceable standards are necessary to ensure that TA, where its use is necessary, is of a good quality and provides that positive stepping stone into permanent accommodation.

The Scottish Government recognises the importance of good quality temporary accommodation and have accepted in principle the recommendations from the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG) around temporary accommodation⁵ including the introduction of a legally enforceable standards framework for temporary accommodation and an extension of the 7 day time limit on unsuitable accommodation to all households. The standards framework is based heavily upon the joint guidance we produced with CIH Scotland in 2011.⁶ It is imperative that these recommendations are now rapidly turned into action.

Temporary accommodation data

For years, data on temporary accommodation usage has been limited: the ‘HL2 return’, submitted by local authorities and published by the Scottish Government, only records snapshot data of the numbers of households in different types of TA at specified dates, and the Scottish Housing Regulator published statistics only provide placement level data.⁷ This means there has been very little understanding or acceptance of the total length of time people and families have been spending in TA. This is despite the fact that we know that many people will move between a number of types of TA before moving to settled accommodation; for example a person might initially be allocated a B&B place but be moved to a temporary flat when one becomes available. Shelter Scotland has long campaigned for more data to be available showing how long people spend in TA.

We first compiled a report on the total time households spent in temporary accommodation in 2014, using data from Freedom of Information (FOI) requests which were made to local authorities. The first report included the recommendation that this information was made available as part of national statistics.⁸ In 2015 and 2016, we repeated the exercise and published our last report at the start of 2017.⁹

⁵ Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (June 2018), Final recommendations report, <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/homelessness-and-rough-sleeping-action-group-final-report/>

⁶ Shelter Scotland and CIH Scotland (2011) [Temporary Accommodation Guidance](https://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_library/policy_library_folder/temporary_accommodation_guidance), https://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_library/policy_library_folder/temporary_accommodation_guidance

⁷ See information on the Scottish Housing Regulator’s Scottish Social Housing Charter, <https://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk/publications/charter-data-all-social-landlords>

⁸ Shelter Scotland (2015) The use of temporary accommodation in Scotland, https://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_library/policy_library_folder/the_use_of_temporary_accommodation_in_scotland

⁹ Shelter Scotland (2016) The use of temporary accommodation in Scotland – 2015, https://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_library/policy_library_folder/the_use_of_temporary_accommodation_in_scotland_-_2015 and Shelter Scotland (2017) The use of temporary accommodation in Scotland – 2016

In 2017, the Scottish Government made a new data return (the 'HL3') mandatory, which would provide the information we had gathered in the FOI research. In June 2018, the Scottish Government published the 'HL3' data for the first time. This data provides new information on TA usage, building upon the basic information provided in the HL2.

Findings of the HL3 data

The new HL3 data shows that during 2017/18, and based on data from households leaving temporary accommodation in 2017/18:

- Households in temporary accommodation spent an **average of 171 days** (just under six months) in temporary accommodation placements.
 - This figure relates to total time spent across all temporary accommodation placements, i.e. where households have lived in more than one placement it relates to total time spent across all accommodation.
- **Households with children tend to be in temporary accommodation for longer:** 204 days compared to 161 days for households without children.
- Of the 20,450 households that exited temporary accommodation during 2017/18, the majority (68%) had a total duration of 5 weeks to 12 months,
 - 4,344 households (21%) were in temporary accommodation for 5 to 12 weeks
 - 4,770 households (23%) were in temporary accommodation for 3 to 6 months
 - 4,784 households (23%) were in temporary accommodation for 7 to 12 months.
- **2,582 households (13%) were in temporary accommodation for a year or longer**
- 4,006 households (20%) were in temporary accommodation for 4 weeks or less.
- When looking at average time within each placement;
 - Housing association placements (212 days), local authority placements (141 days) and private sector lease placements (177 days) are more likely to have involved longer periods of time on average than other types of temporary accommodation.
 - In comparison, hostel placements (64 days) and bed and breakfast placements (36 days) tend to be shorter on average.

https://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_library/policy_library_folder/the_use_of_temporary_accommodation_in_scotland_-_2016

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- The average time spent in temporary accommodation varies significantly across local authorities, from 455 days in Shetland to 80 days in East Ayrshire.

These findings broadly reflect the trends and timescales we identified in our time in temporary accommodation report series.

Unsuitable Accommodation Order

The Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2014¹⁰ (the “Unsuitable Accommodation Order”) is intended to protect households with children or pregnant members from poor quality temporary accommodation, and roughly defines what these conditions are. In practice, most B&Bs are considered unsuitable for families and the Unsuitable Accommodation Order effectively limits their use. Originally, the Order limited the time that families could be placed in unsuitable accommodation to a maximum of 14 days in emergency situations, but recognising the negative impact that poor temporary accommodation has on children in particular, and in line with their 2016 manifesto commitment,¹¹ the Scottish Government reduced the time limit from 14 days to 7 days in late 2017. The latest homelessness statistical publication is the first indicator of how well the new time limit is operating in practice.

Breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order

We understand breaches to mean occasions where families have spent more than 7 days in unsuitable temporary accommodation. In addition to the time limit change, the new HL3 data return has changed the way breaches of the Order are reported; instead of reporting the number of breaches on a specific date, the cumulative total of breaches across the year is now reported. This is much more valuable than the previous method, and it also offers the ability to recognise if there are periods of the year where local authorities breach the Order more. As it is the first year of this new reporting method, it is not yet possible to compare performance with previous years.

The new statistics showed that:

- In the last year, there have been 400 placements across Scotland which have constituted a breach of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order.
- 280 of these breaches occurred in Edinburgh, followed by 65 in West Lothian.

¹⁰ [The Homeless Persons \(Unsuitable Accommodation\) \(Scotland\) Order 2014](#)

¹¹ The SNP, Manifesto 2016,

[https://d3n8a8pro7vymx.cloudfront.net/thesnp/pages/5540/attachments/original/1485880018/SNP_Manifesto2016-web_\(1\).pdf?1485880018](https://d3n8a8pro7vymx.cloudfront.net/thesnp/pages/5540/attachments/original/1485880018/SNP_Manifesto2016-web_(1).pdf?1485880018)

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- Breaches occurred in 10 out of the 32 Scottish local authorities.

This suggests that Edinburgh in particular is struggling to provide adequate temporary accommodation for families to meet need, which reflects the experience of our advisers and people who have come to us for help. A homelessness taskforce was set up by the City of Edinburgh Council to investigate issues around homelessness in the city and the taskforce published a report with actions and recommendations in June 2018¹², including a commitment to ending B&B use for families and reducing the length of stay in B&Bs for all other households. We will continue to monitor the implementation of these recommendations.

Case studies

The following cases studies are examples of how varied clients' experiences of temporary accommodation have been, in terms of length of time, breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order and the impact temporary accommodation can have on a person's life.

Case study 1

Cameron and Amy are a young couple from Edinburgh and at the time of their homelessness, Amy was 34 weeks pregnant. They were living with parents but were asked to leave and went to the City of Edinburgh Council for help with homelessness. They were placed in a bed and breakfast and despite assurances from the Council that it was family friendly, many other residents were openly using drugs and only one communal microwave was provided to residents to heat meals. The couple approached Shelter Scotland after living at the B&B for three weeks, and were informed that as per the Unsuitable Accommodation Order, they should not have been in the B&B for more than a week. The couple were unaware of this and Shelter Scotland advisers advocated on their behalf to the Council and were able to secure them a temporary flat. The couple were later moved to another temporary flat nearer to family, and remain there while they wait for permanent accommodation.

Case study 2

Linda is 48 and has severe, chronic fibromyalgia and is a wheelchair user. Linda is also partially-sighted. Linda became homeless last year due to being unable to afford the mortgage after her marriage had broken down a few years previously. She approached the council for advice and assistance four months before she had to leave her home in summer 2015. She was allocated two types of

¹² Housing and Economy Committee; [Item 7.7 - Homelessness Task Force – Actions, Recommendations and Outcomes](#) [report]

temporary accommodation over the period of a year, neither of which were accessible for wheelchair users. The first was a tenement block without a lift, and the second was a multistorey with lifts which were often out of order. Eventually, she borrowed a caravan and parked it outside so if the lift was broken she had somewhere to sleep, which happened on two occasions. There has also been a power cut and a fire since she has lived in the multistorey and all the disabled people in the building were stuck. Linda called this point in her life a time spent stuck in limbo.

Conclusion

This new Scottish Government data shows that people are spending too long in temporary accommodation; on average people are spending 171 days in TA, but families with children are spending even longer and 13% of all households are spending over a year there. It's crucial that this time, described as being 'stuck in limbo', is kept to a minimum and that new legally enforceable standards are introduced as soon as possible to ensure that TA, where its use is necessary, is of a good quality and provides that positive stepping stone into permanent accommodation.

Furthermore, where we already have legislation that recognises that certain temporary accommodation is unacceptable and damaging to its occupants, such as that legislated for under the Unsuitable Accommodation Order including the use of B&Bs for families for more than 7 days, it is vital that local authorities are both held to account for housing people in this accommodation and supported to reduce this illegal practice.

Shelter Scotland helps over half a million people every year struggling with bad housing or homelessness through our advice, support and legal services. And we campaign to make sure that, one day, no one will have to turn to us for help.

We're here so no one has to fight bad housing or homelessness on their own.

Please support us at shelterscotland.org

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