

Scottish Government homelessness statistics: update to September 2019

This briefing follows the publication of the Scottish Government's biannual [Homelessness Scotland: update to September 2019](#) statistical release on 28th January 2020.

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.

Key points

- Local authorities have failed in their legal duty to offer temporary homeless accommodation to households 10,840 times since January 2017.
 - The majority of these cases were in Glasgow. The council are currently the subject of an inquiry by the Scottish Housing Regulator.
 - The City of Edinburgh Council have also for the first time reported failures to accommodate, stating that they have not provided temporary accommodation when they had a statutory obligation to do so 1,405 times since January 2017. They have said their previous non-disclosure of this statistic is because of technical problems. This raises real concerns on whether there is an understanding and acceptance of the real scale of the issue.
- Local authorities were in breach of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order 190 times between April and September 2019 (125 in Edinburgh). This means there were 190 instances where households with children or a pregnant woman were kept in temporary accommodation deemed 'unsuitable' for longer than 7 days. Whilst this was a significant decrease on the year before, it still represents many instances of the law being broken.
- Both these issues are having a devastating impact on people at crisis point, who are not being given the standard of housing, care and support that they are legally entitled to.
- Furthermore, the numbers of households and children in temporary accommodation are increasing. These figures are now at an all-time high with 11,432 households including 7,252 children in temporary accommodation on 30th September 2019.
- This is despite there being no statistically significant change in numbers of homeless applications. In the year to September 2019, **36,375 households applied as homeless**, compared to 36,384 in the year to September 2018.
- Scotland has world leading homelessness legislation, but these statistics make clear that this legislation continues not to be upheld in an unacceptable number of instances.
- Despite the Scottish Government's current affordable housing building programme, there is still a chronic shortage of social housing in Scotland. Political commitment post-2021 and substantial further investment in building affordable homes is urgently needed to effectively tackle the housing emergency and to ensure everyone has a safe, affordable home.

Temporary accommodation

- On 30th September 2019 there were 11,432 households in temporary accommodation (4% increase on the previous year). These households included 7,252 children (6% increase on the previous year). These figures represent an all-time high since the changes to the homelessness legislation in 2002.
- For those leaving temporary accommodation between April and September 2019, on average, households spend 178 days in temporary accommodation. For households with children, the average time spent in temporary accommodation is 212 days and for households without children 167 days. This is largely unchanged from the previous year and highlights the importance of introducing strong legally enforceable standards on temporary accommodation.
- On a positive note, between April and September 2019, 10,945 households entered and 11,315 households exited temporary accommodation. This implies that some progress is being starting to be made in clearing the bottleneck in temporary accommodation.

Lack of enforcement of statutory duties

- Councils failed to comply with their statutory duty to offer temporary accommodation to homeless people 10,840 times since January 2017. This happened on 1,815 occasions between April and September 2019.
 - The vast majority of these occurred in Glasgow (86%), with a significant proportion also happening in Edinburgh.
 - Since January 2017, Glasgow City Council failed to offer temporary accommodation 8,820 times. Between April and September 2019, this occurred 1,540 times. Shelter Scotland had previously raised legal action against the Council which has been paused following the Scottish Housing Regulator's announcement of [further intervention](#).
 - Since January 2017, the City of Edinburgh Council failed to offer temporary accommodation 1,405 times. Between April and September 2019, this occurred 175 times. Edinburgh City Council has never previously reported it was not meeting its statutory duty to provide temporary accommodation to homeless people. The Scottish Government publication cites technical issues for the council's failure to report the figures previously.
- There were continued breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order, where households with children or a pregnant woman are kept in temporary accommodation deemed 'unsuitable' for longer than 7 days.
 - 190 breaches of the unsuitable accommodation order were recorded between April and September 2019, with 125 in Edinburgh.
 - These have significantly decreased, with Edinburgh City Council reporting a 31% reduction in breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order.
 - However, the number of breaches is still unacceptably high and there can be no doubt about the adverse impact this is having on children across the country.

Regional breakdown

The following table provides a breakdown of figures for Shelter Scotland's four hub cities.

	Aberdeen	Dundee	Edinburgh	Glasgow
Homeless applications	738 (-14%)	796 (+8%)	1,755 (-4%)	2,984 (+7%)
Households assessed as homeless	613 (-14%)	587 (+11%)	1,665 (-4%)	2,507 (+10%)
Households in temporary accommodation (as of 30th Sept)	330 (-21%)	256 (+5%)	1,732 (+19%)	2,317 (+8%)
Average number of days in temporary accommodation.	133 (-4%)	133 (-4%)	271 (+9%)	222 (+9%)

These figures are for April-Sept 2019. Comparisons in brackets are to April-Sept 2018.

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