

Shelter briefing: Homelessness and Temporary Accommodation

Shelter is the UK's largest housing and homelessness charity. Throughout the pandemic, we have continued to provide information, support and advice to thousands of people experiencing bad housing or facing homelessness.

The numbers living in temporary accommodation have been steadily rising over recent years and last year, councils in England spent over £1 billion on temporary accommodation. More than 67,000 families spent lockdown trapped in temporary accommodation, which is often cramped, overcrowded and poor-quality.

To lift thousands of families out of homelessness and temporary accommodation, Shelter is calling on the government to:

- **Strengthen our welfare safety net, by removing the benefit cap, reversing the freeze to Local Housing Allowance (LHA), and ensuring the rates align with at least the 30th percentile of market rents going forward.**
- **Bring forward urgent legislation to give private renters more security and ending Section 21 “no fault” evictions, which remains one of the leading causes of homelessness.**
- **Invest in a new generation of social housing, to provide families with stable, permanent and affordable homes.**

The temporary accommodation industry

Councils have a legal duty to accommodate homeless families and procure temporary accommodation until settled accommodation becomes available. But a chronic lack of social housing, cuts to housing benefit and diminished council budgets has made it much harder for local authorities to cope with the volume of people who need their help. The reliance on temporary accommodation has therefore grown significantly over recent years:

- At the end of June 2020, there were 67,000 homeless households living in temporary accommodation in England, including 136,000 children.
- Over half of homeless families are in work.
- Over a quarter (26%) of this accommodation is out-of-area, because councils cannot find suitable local accommodation, resulting in long commutes to school and work.

[Research from Shelter earlier this year](#) revealed the explosion of the temporary accommodation industry. Between April 2018 and March 2019, councils spent over £1 billion on temporary accommodation – a rise of 9% in a year and 78% in five years. Our research also shows that 86% of this money is flowing directly to private providers, most of whom are unregulated. This explosion in expenditure has been fuelled by a chronic lack of investment in decent, genuinely affordable social housing. [Years of cuts to Local Housing Allowance](#) have also made the private rental sector increasingly unaffordable, contributing to a sharp increase in homelessness.

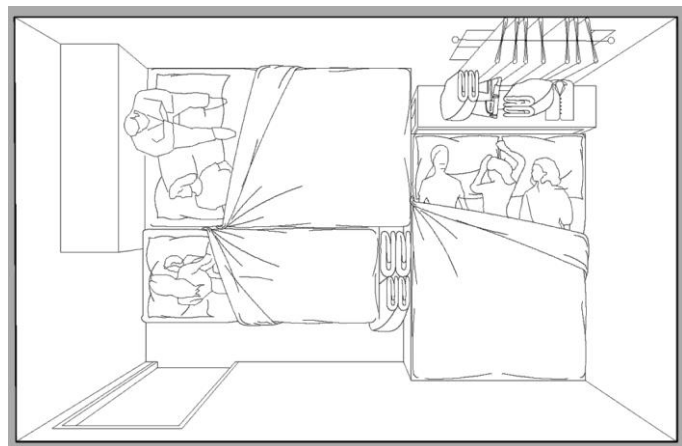
Permitted Development Rights and temporary accommodation

The expansion of Permitted Development Rights (PDR) in 2013 to enable conversion of offices into residential accommodation has directly led to the creation of poorly located, low quality and wholly unsuitable accommodation. By allowing developers to bypass the planning system we have lost out on more than 10,000 affordable and social homes that could have been delivered had these conversions gone through the planning system.

Examples like [Terminus House in Harlow](#) where hundreds of families are forced to live in appalling conditions, or the [conversion of an office in Watford](#) that includes flats without any natural light demonstrates the extent of the quality issues we face through PDR.

While the government has this year taken steps to introduce minimum space and natural light standards, far more action is needed, and Shelter believes that PDR has no place in the delivery of new homes. However, rather than reducing the use of PDR in our housing system the government is proposing another dramatic expansion that would see entire commercial buildings demolished and replaced without the need for a developer to seek planning consent. This risks further instances of poor quality and poorly located conversions being delivered at a time when our focus should be on high quality, affordable housing.

COVID-19: Spending the pandemic in temporary accommodation



More than 18,000 of families living in temporary accommodation are accommodated by unregulated private companies in “self-contained” accommodation. This often consists of just one room with a basic kitchenette and a tiny ensuite. The accommodation will rarely have WiFi or laundry, and is almost always overcrowded.

For tens of thousands of families, the outbreak of COVID-19 has meant facing lockdown in cramped, poor-quality temporary accommodation. Much of this accommodation does not meet minimum space requirements, and many families are

confined to just a single room - often no bigger than a parking space. In the past, [we visited a family](#) of seven who had been accommodated in a 12 x 7 ft room. It is common for children to have to share beds with parents or siblings, and for families to share communal bathrooms with others in the block, making it impossible to self-isolate in. Overcrowding has also been linked to higher COVID-19 contraction rates, and those at the sharp end of the housing crisis are among those hardest hit by the virus.

In order to lift these families out of temporary accommodation, the government must take urgent action to end the housing emergency by:

1. [Strengthening the welfare safety net](#). COVID-19 and the resultant economic crisis threatens to make it even harder for families on low incomes to keep up with rent. The government must lift the benefit cap, reverse the freeze to Local Housing Allowance, and ensure that the LHA rates reflect at least the 30th percentile of local market rents to ensure private tenants can afford the rent.
2. [Bringing forward legislation to end Section 21 “no fault” evictions](#). Loss of a private tenancy remains a leading cause of homelessness and Shelter welcomes the government’s commitment to finally put an end to no fault evictions and give private renters security in their homes.
3. [Investing in a new generation of social homes](#), which will give children and their families stable, permanent homes they can afford. By introducing a new two-year New Homes Rescue Fund and then following this with a 10-year level up housing fund the government can ensure that the homes these families desperately need are delivered.

For further information, or statistics for your local area, please contact reshima_sharma@shelter.org.uk