

# SHELTER

## Social homes – building thriving communities and safer streets

Evidence repeatedly shows how housing insecurity can fracture communities and drive-up crime rates. The dire shortage of social rent homes in England has also exacerbated the vulnerability of those in the greatest danger of violent crime.

Investment in a new generation of social rent homes is an investment in our communities and in crime prevention. The delivery of 90,000 social rent homes a year will provide access to safe, well-managed and genuinely affordable homes, helping to build stable, supportive neighbourhoods which offer the security and autonomy for communities to flourish. It will also lead to billions in savings due to lower crime.<sup>1</sup>

### Street homelessness – not a lifestyle choice

The housing emergency has resulted in large numbers of people becoming street homeless. Over 3,000 people are recorded as sleeping rough and numbers are rising.<sup>2</sup>

The Criminal Justice Bill contains new powers for police and local authorities to enforce against so-called 'nuisance rough sleeping' in England and Wales. These powers include being moved on, a fine up to £2,500 and even imprisonment. [We support Crisis's campaign](#) opposing these new measures. Street homelessness is not a life-style choice and people shouldn't be punished or criminalised for their homelessness.

### Insecure housing – unsafe communities

The chronic shortage of social housing within England has forced many into housing insecurity, with 172 families a day served a 'no fault' eviction notice in the private rented sector<sup>3</sup> and a record number of families homeless living in temporary accommodation. Housing insecurity increases the risk of crime and violence within our neighbourhoods<sup>4</sup> which is threatening our safety and damaging the cohesion of our communities.

The lack of secure and genuinely affordable housing options has ripped apart communities and weakened the social bonds that hold them together. For instance, three in ten households (29%) are in temporary accommodation that is out of area – sometimes miles and miles away or even in another region altogether.<sup>5</sup> This has left many without the crucial support networks and made it harder to deter crime in many areas. Worse, recent research shows that housing insecurity often increases the risk of violence.<sup>6,7</sup>

Being homeless in temporary accommodation can be terrifying – according to [Shelter's recent survey of people who are homeless and living in temporary accommodation](#), we found that one in eight feel unsafe due to living with criminal activity and one in ten feel unsafe due to experiencing physical violence, threats of violence or verbal abuse.<sup>8</sup>

To build a better future where everyone has the foundation for a productive and happy life, people need the safety of a decent, secure and genuinely affordable place to call home. Only social rent homes offer genuinely secure, long-term tenancies. Building a new generation of social homes will help our communities to flourish.

### Exploiting young people – search for stability and belonging

As families in temporary accommodation are frequently moved around, this has forced thousands of homeless children into permanent instability. They are forced to leave familiar



neighbourhoods, where they feel safe, and the support of extended family and good friends, to enter new, scary environments and unfamiliar new schools. As well as disrupting their education and holding back their progress at school, this can put them at greater risk of youth crime, violence and grooming by organised criminal gangs (such as for 'county lines') who exploit young people's search for stability and belonging.<sup>9</sup>

Desperate parents ask for urgent moves to remove them from danger, but the acute shortage of social homes has resulted in young people getting pulled deeper into crime – or even being murdered – while waiting for a move.<sup>10</sup> Parents must be supported to help their children feel safe and secure at home and in their neighbourhood, flourish at school and foster healthy social lives. Well-managed social homes also help tackle and prevent crime directly.<sup>11</sup>

### **Anti-social behaviour - cuts to housing-related support**

Huge cuts to *Supporting People* funding have left people struggling with no access to housing-related support to address nuisance or antisocial behaviour.<sup>12</sup> This puts them at risk of eviction and homelessness, simply moving the problem on and failing to address the underlying cause.

We know from experience working with people in these situations, that with adequate support people can address their behaviour and that of their children, as well as supporting others in their community to do the same.<sup>13</sup> It is vital that government policy on anti-social behaviour and its implementation does not criminalise unmet support needs and disproportionately impact certain groups over others.<sup>14 15</sup> Investment in well-managed social homes and accessible support services (such as *Supporting People* and *Housing First*) will reduce instances of antisocial behaviour.<sup>16</sup>

### **Domestic abuse survivors – nowhere to go**

Domestic abuse is the third most common trigger of homelessness.<sup>17</sup> The lack of affordable social housing forces survivors of domestic abuse to make an impossible choice: become homeless, or be trapped with their abuser. In a forthcoming briefing, we will show how the housing emergency and benefit cap is preventing survivors from fleeing domestic abuse.

### **Social housing – providing the safety and security we need**

For too long we have failed to build anywhere near the amount of social rent homes we need, forcing millions into an insecure private rental sector and leaving a record number of households homeless in damaging temporary accommodation.

The housing emergency is not only ruining lives – but it is ripping apart the sustainability and cohesion of our communities. Too many people have been left with little control over where they live and for how long: trapped in dangerous living situations; pushed into unsuitable, unsafe, and insecure housing options; and forcibly displaced from their communities and impoverished by rising housing costs, no-fault evictions and homelessness.

Investing in a new generation of social rent homes will provide the safety and security we need to build back our communities and create thriving new neighbourhoods, addressing societal issues such as crime and violence at their roots.

In [research commissioned by Shelter and the National Housing Federation](#), we found that building 90,000 social homes could lead to £3.1 billion benefits over 30 years as social tenants are less likely to be victims of crime.<sup>18</sup>

**It is time to heal our society from the foundations up. Where we live and where we grow up is the place to start, by ensuring everyone has access to a safe, secure, and genuinely affordable place to call home.**



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<sup>1</sup> 'The economic impact of building social housing' Cebr for Shelter and the National Housing Federation, February 2024

<sup>2</sup> In 2023 there were 3,898 people recorded as rough sleeping on a given night in England. This has increased by 27% in the last year. DLUHC, Homelessness statistics, Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2023, Table 1

<sup>3</sup> YouGov survey of 1,910 private renters, including 489 private renting families. 22-30 June 2023, online, weighted to be representative of GB adults. Population figures have been calculated using English Housing Survey data.

<sup>4</sup> James, S., Pape, M., Crowe, M. 'Experiences with Housing and Violence' West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit, March 2023

<sup>5</sup> Statutory homelessness figures: DLUHC, Tables on homelessness, Statutory homelessness live tables, Table TA1

<sup>6</sup> 'Addressing the root causes of serious violence and exploitation of young people in West Yorkshire' Crest, June 2021

<sup>7</sup> Higgins, A., 'Safe as Houses?' The Police Foundation, August 2015

<sup>8</sup> Garvie, D., Pennington, J., Rich, H., Schofield, M. 'Still Living in Limbo: Why the use of temporary accommodation must end' Shelter England, March 2023

<sup>9</sup> Almquist, L., Walker, S.C. 'Reciprocal associations between housing instability and youth criminal legal involvement: a scoping review' Health Justice 10, 15, April 2022

<sup>10</sup> Garvie, D., 'Tenants at risk of youth violence shouldn't have to become homeless. It's putting young people's lives at risk' Shelter, January 2022

<sup>11</sup> Grant, H., 'It's incredible what they see': housing associations take on county lines crime. The Guardian, January 2020

<sup>12</sup> Cooper, K. 'Supporting People cuts leave housing sector unable to help most vulnerable' The Guardian, August 2011

<sup>13</sup> 'Addressing Anti-social Behaviour - An Independent Evaluation of Shelter Inclusion Project' by Kantar for Shelter, June 2006

<sup>14</sup> McClenaghan, M. 'Sent to jail for feeding the pigeons: the broken system of antisocial behaviour laws' The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, August 2022

<sup>15</sup> Taylor, H., 'Dominoes player wins case over 'racist' noise ban in London square' The Guardian, May 2022

<sup>16</sup> 'Community cohesion and resilience - acknowledging the role and contribution of housing providers' Centre for Local Economic Strategies for the Housing Diversity Network, February 2014

<sup>17</sup> Between July and September 2023, 12% of households found to be homeless or threatened with homelessness lost their last settled home due to domestic abuse. This is the third most common homelessness trigger after family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate (28%) and the end of an assured shorthold tenancy (25%). DLUHC, Homelessness statistics, Statutory homelessness live tables, Table A2P and A2R

<sup>18</sup> 'The economic impact of building social housing' Cebr for Shelter and the National Housing Federation, February 2024

