

SHELTER

Briefing: Protecting social housing tenants at risk of violence

Shelter's advice and legal teams support families at the sharp end of the housing emergency every day. One of the most heart-breaking problems we encounter is social tenants who need urgent rehousing because they and/or their children are at serious risk of youth violence, criminal exploitation, harassment, or threats of domestic violence.

These families face an impossible choice: stay put and risk their family's safety or give up a secure social home at a time of severe shortage and apply as homeless. Every year thousands of households become homeless or are threatened with homelessness because of the threat of violence, and our dwindling supply of social housing is accelerating the problem – making it harder to offer urgent moves to safely and permanently rehouse families fleeing violence.

No one should face homelessness because they are threatened with violence. The government must work with social housing providers to protect families at risk of violence:

- 1. Social landlords should urgently cooperate in circumstances where a social tenant needs to move to another area to protect their family.**
- 2. In the event that social tenants have to move because of a risk of serious violence, their tenancy rights must be protected.**
- 3. The government must invest in a new generation of social housing, to ensure that every family has access to a safe, secure, affordable home.**

Social Housing (Emergency Protection of Tenants Rights) Bill

On Tuesday 1st February, Helen Hayes MP will be presenting a Ten Minute Rule Bill to address a gap in social housing regulation which means social housing tenants who need to flee violence can end up threatened with homelessness.

The bill proposes measures to protect the secure tenancy of social tenants forced to move into temporary accommodation due to a threat of violence to them or a member of their household, and ensure social landlords are required to offer an alternative safe, permanent home as soon as possible.

Currently, if a social tenant moves in an emergency due to a risk to the safety of someone in their household, the family can lose their secure social housing tenancy – which they may have waited years to be offered.

Families that temporarily leave their home because of fear of violence can in some cases claim [housing benefit on two homes](#) for up to 52 weeks, if they can prove there is an intention to return. After this point, they face the impossible choice of either returning to a property where they feel unsafe or giving up their secure tenancy and remaining homeless and in insecure temporary accommodation at a time when social housing supply is severely depleted. This can have tragic consequences, including incidences of young people being exploited, attacked or murdered while their family waits to be safely rehoused.



Shelter advisers see this problem regularly

Our advisers regularly speak to families who have to apply as homeless and move to expensive, and often unsuitable, temporary accommodation because they have been threatened with violence. Below is a summary of some of the families at risk of violence that our advisers have supported in the last year:

- One mother spoke to Shelter last year after making the difficult decision to remain in her social home in order to keep her secure tenancy status, despite the fact her son was at identifiable risk of serious violence. A severe shortage of social homes means she has been waiting since 2020 for a managed transfer to another social home, and she fears for her family's safety while she remains in the property.
- Another mother contacted us last year after giving up her social home due to targeted violence. With Shelter's support, she made a homeless application and obtained temporary accommodation, but this means further insecurity for the children.
- One family of five had to flee their home of twenty years because of targeted violence. For the family's safety, and after much evidence from the police and social services, they were placed in emergency accommodation in another area. The family is nearing the end of their 52 week limit for dual housing benefit and will soon have to make the difficult decision about returning to a home they do not feel safe in or remaining homeless, further destabilising their children.
- One mother contacted her local council for assistance, after her abusive ex-partner was released from prison. She feared for her safety because her ex-partner knew where she lived, and her council placed her in temporary accommodation outside of the local area. After reaching the 52 week limit for dual housing benefit, she fell into severe rent arrears on her social home and her housing association brought possession action against her. She was forced to give up her social housing tenancy and still has no permanent place for her and her family to live.

Protect social housing tenants and build more social housing

Everyone has the right to live in a home that is safe and secure, and no family should be left with the impossible choice of living in fear in order to keep their children in a permanent social home, or fleeing violence only to spend years of insecurity in temporary accommodation.

Across the country, a lack of genuinely affordable social housing has accelerated our housing emergency. Last year alone, [more than 29,000 social homes were sold or demolished](#) across England – and less than 7,000 were built. For social tenants at risk of serious violence, the severe shortage of social housing makes a difficult choice even harder, as it means there is no guarantee families will be safely and permanently rehoused. As well as putting measures in place to ensure social housing tenants at risk of violence have their right to a secure tenancy protected, the government must also urgently invest in a new generation of genuinely affordable, secure social homes – so that every family has a safe, affordable place to call home.

