

Homeless and Forgotten: Surviving lockdown in temporary accommodation

December 2020

Until there's a home for everyone
[shelter.org.uk](https://www.shelter.org.uk)

The logo for Shelter, featuring the word "Shelter" in white, sans-serif font centered within a solid red rectangular background.

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SUMMARY

Being urged to stay home but having no home to go to. This was the reality for homeless people during 2020's lockdowns. Whole families forced to sleep, work, play and eat in one room. Kids sharing bathrooms with strangers with Covid19 symptoms, and no internet for school.

With economic storm clouds gathering and a pandemic ravaging our communities, today we reveal the total number of people across the country who found themselves in this situation. And we share the experiences of over 20 households, who told us what it was like to be homeless during a pandemic.

Our research uncovered that:

Over a quarter of a million people in England were homeless and stuck living in temporary accommodation (TA) during the first stages of the pandemic. This is also the highest number of people in TA for 14 years, and close to double the number a decade ago.

More than two-thirds (68%) of all homeless people living in temporary accommodation are in London – this equates to 1 every 52 people living in the capital.

Homelessness is accelerating fast outside of London. The number of homeless people from London has increased by 16% in the last five years. Meanwhile, numbers have more than quadrupled in the North West and more than tripled in the West Midlands.

One in six homeless households (17%) are in emergency B&Bs and hostels - where poor conditions and gross overcrowding are rife. The use of emergency B&Bs alone has increased by a staggering 371% over the last ten years.

The economic fallout of 2020 may turbo-charge this crisis. The number of people in temporary accommodation jumped by 6,000 in the first three months of the pandemic. This number also misses people sleeping rough, sofa surfing and some people helped by councils through the government's 'Everyone In' initiative.

People who lived in TA during lockdown reported to us that:

They didn't feel able to stay safe: nearly everyone living in shared accommodation said it was impossible to maintain social distancing. Three people reported sharing basic facilities with people who had tested positive for Covid-19, resulting in intense fear.

“There was one woman, she definitely had it.... she would be in the kitchen spitting in the sink and everything, and then she ended up going to hospital. It was just so awful.”

Accommodation lacked even basic facilities. In some cases this included any kitchen facilities at all, useable washing facilities, and laundry provision. A lack of internet access affected children's schooling.

“I kept having to buy takeaway every single day, I couldn't afford it. So, one of my friends bought me a little cooker to put in my room, and then the hotel said I had to turn it off because of health and safety.”

Living this way made life in lockdown particularly hard: over a third of those interviewed said they struggled to prepare food and eat properly during lockdown because of inadequate cooking facilities, with some reporting losing weight or suffering health problems as a result. Many people found it difficult to wash themselves and do laundry, a situation made worse as they couldn't visit friends, and launderettes and public buildings closed because of lockdown measures.

“I'm not going to lie, like, half of my, 80% of my clothes need to be washed.”

Living in TA in lockdown affected people's mental wellbeing: Almost everyone we spoke to said their own, or their partner's, mental health had been negatively affected by living in temporary accommodation.

“the mental (impact) is what really is lasting. (it) is something that will never leave you and I think it has scarred the three of us.”

“It's really, really stressful. It's just that it's not human like, where you don't have your own privacy. It lowers your self-esteem.... I might as well just go on the street and then lie down.”

Being homeless is harder than lockdown: People felt that the end of lockdown wouldn't resolve the difficulties they faced. Many of the issues that people shared were caused by them living in unsuitable accommodation, the impact of losing their home, or of having to move far away. In fact, as one woman shared, the start of lockdown made her feel that everyone's life was now as small, and isolated as hers had been since she had been homeless, rather than lockdown limiting her.

“when lockdown started it felt like the world took our approach and it felt very familiar... It felt like the world was experiencing what we experience on a daily basis.”

In response to these findings, we're calling for the following

- The government to commit to investment in a new generation of social rented homes that are genuinely affordable and stable for families on low and average incomes.
- The government to make sure that housing benefit is set at a level that covers local rents adequately, now, and into the future, and to scrap the benefit cap.
- The government to strengthen the Homelessness B&B regulations¹
- Central and local government to ensure that local authority homelessness services are adequately funded and underpinned by robust guidance
- This winter we're also asking the public to support Shelter to allow us to support our frontline advisers as they work tirelessly to help growing numbers of people to secure their right to a safe home.

INTRODUCTION

“Not only are you going through a pandemic. You're in a self-confined space where you might be sharing with other families or whatever. (And) your children, they don't have that outlet where they can go to school and have the resources, they're all of a sudden in this bubble, where they don't have anything. That's what I think, that's where the pandemic, it was just really gloomy.”

Being urged to stay home but having no home to go to. This was the reality for homeless people living in temporary accommodation during 2020's lockdowns.

In this report we reveal the full number of people who found themselves in this situation. And, through our research with over 20 households, share their words on what this experience was like for them.

What is 'temporary accommodation'?

Temporary accommodation (TA) is the name given to the accommodation that is often offered to people who seek help from their council as they are homeless, eligible for help and owed 'a rehousing duty'ⁱⁱ. A 'rehousing duty' means the local housing authority has a duty to provide them with suitable settled accommodation to ensure they do not end up on the streets. However, due to the current scarcity of suitable settled accommodation, councils can often only offer people temporary accommodationⁱⁱⁱ. Temporary accommodation can also be offered to people by council rough sleeping teams^{iv} or by social services departments^v.

We start by setting out our new findings on the number of people who were living in temporary accommodation during lockdown. We then describe what it is like to live in temporary accommodation, before moving on to people's experience of lockdown and the impact it had on them. We then set out the changes needed to ensure that, as life gets back to normal, everybody has the right to a safe home.

Details about the methods used, and full data tables are available in the appendix to this report.

HOW MANY PEOPLE LIVED IN TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION DURING LOCKDOWN?

There were over a quarter of a million (253,620) homeless people living in temporary accommodation in England during the first national lockdown

This works out as an estimated 1 in 222 people were homeless and living in temporary accommodation.

This number is the highest it's been in fourteen years

The number of homeless people living in temporary accommodation is the highest it's been in 14 years and has increased by 83% across England in the last ten years – equivalent to 115,000 more homeless people.^{vi}

In the last year alone the number of homeless people living in temporary accommodation has increased by 6%. This is equivalent to an additional 13,500 homeless people.

Since the pandemic started in March, the number of people living in temporary accommodation has grown by 6,000 (an increase of 2%).^{vii} This very recent increase could be partly explained by the government's 'Everyone In' initiative, which expected councils to offer emergency accommodation to people sleeping rough and in winter night-shelters at the end of March. However, not everyone placed in TA under 'Everyone In' will show up in the official homelessness statistics as it appears that many people were not assessed and recorded under the homelessness legislation – they were simply helped into budget hotels and hostels. So, if the many thousands helped in emergency accommodation under 'Everyone In' are added in, the full number of people living in homeless temporary accommodation during lockdown is likely to be even higher.^{viii}

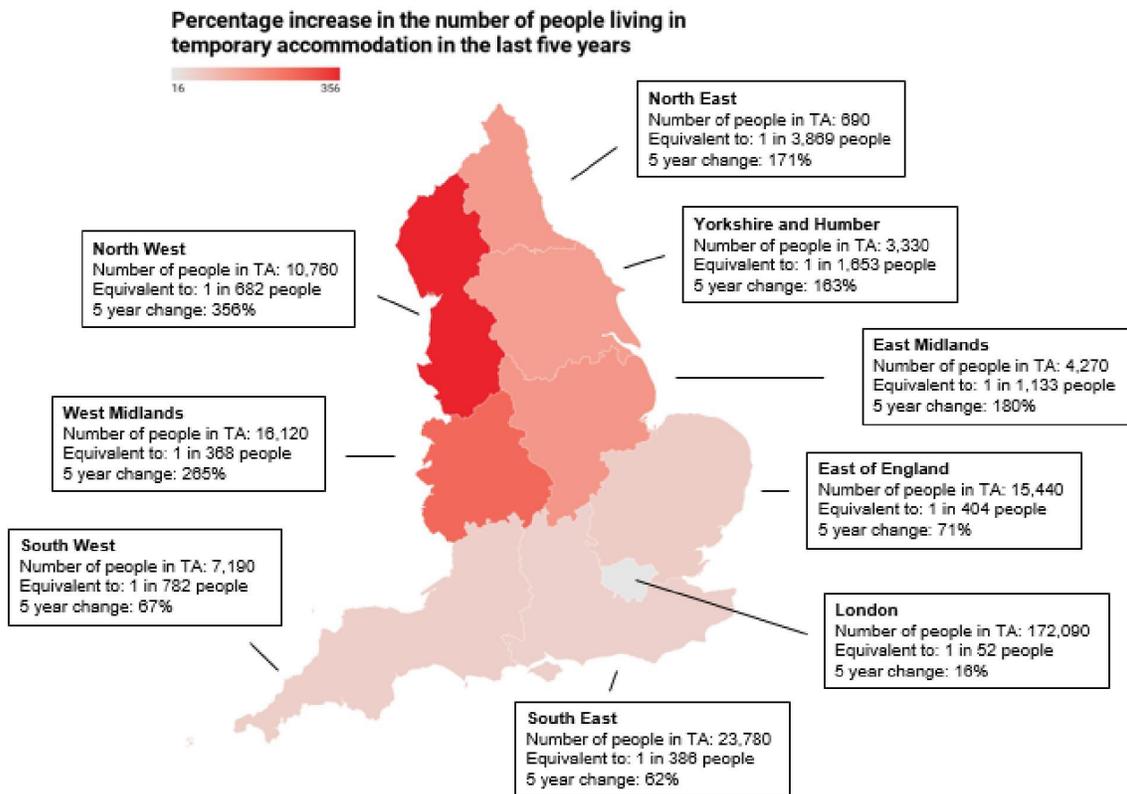
WHERE ARE PEOPLE LIVING IN TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION?

Temporary accommodation is most prevalent in London, but there are hotspots – and worrying increases – outside of the capital too

Homeless people live in temporary accommodation across the country, but more than two-thirds (68%) of all homeless people living in TA are in London – this equates to 1 in 52 people in London living in temporary accommodation.

However, there are concerning signs that other regions are catching up with London. The increase in homelessness in the last five years has been much higher outside of London. The number of homeless people from London has increased by 16%. Meanwhile, the North West has seen the biggest increase with numbers more than quadrupling in just five years (an increase of 356%). The West Midlands has seen the number more than triple (an increase of 265%).

Figure 1 People who are homeless and living in temporary accommodation by region



When we look at individual local authorities, London continues to dominate. Newham has the highest rate of homeless people in TA, with 1 in 23 people living in this type of homeless accommodation. This is followed by Haringey (1 in 28 people), Kensington and Chelsea (1 in 29 people) and Westminster (1 in 32 people).

Table 1 Top 10 areas with the highest rates of homeless people in temporary accommodation in England

National rank	Local authority	Number of homeless people in TA	Rate of homeless people in TA
1	Newham	15,548	1 in 23
2	Haringey	9,521	1 in 28
3	Kensington and Chelsea	5,406	1 in 29
4	Westminster	8,243	1 in 32
5	Enfield ^{ix}	10,243	1 in 33
6	Hackney	8,004	1 in 35
7	Tower Hamlets ^x	8,258	1 in 39
8	Lewisham ^{xi}	7,739	1 in 40
9	Waltham Forest ^{xii}	6,431	1 in 43
10	Barking and Dagenham	4,900	1 in 43

Looking at the local authorities with the highest rates in each region shows there are several areas outside of London with homelessness rates that are within the top 30 in England. These include: Luton (1 in 55 people), Brighton and Hove (1 in 78 people), Manchester (1 in 93 people), Birmingham (1 in 94 people) and Milton Keynes (1 in 109 people).

Table 2 Top 3 highest local rates of homeless people in temporary accommodation in each English region (excluding London)

Regional rank	Local authority	Region	Number of homeless people in TA	Rate of homeless people in TA	National rank
1	Stockton-on-Tees	North East	114	1 in 1,731	181
2	Darlington	North East	57	1 in 1,874	192
3	North Tyneside	North East	109	1 in 1,907	196
1	Manchester	North West	5,957	1 in 93	26
2	Salford	North West	592	1 in 437	80
3	Oldham	North West	441	1 in 538	93
1	Wakefield	Yorks & Hum	548	1 in 636	104
2	Rotherham	Yorks & Hum	311	1 in 853	128
3	Kingston upon Hull, City of	Yorks & Hum	245	1 in 1,060	144
1	Northampton	East Mids	810	1 in 277	50
2	Kettering ^{xiii}	East Mids	311	1 in 327	62
3	Nottingham	East Mids	986	1 in 338	63
1	Birmingham	West Mids	12121	1 in 94	27
2	Coventry	West Mids	1301	1 in 286	53
3	Solihull	West Mids	406	1 in 5,323	91
1	Luton	East of Eng	3887	1 in 55	14
2	Basildon	East of Eng	1217	1 in 154	34
3	Harlow	East of Eng	549	1 in 159	35
1	Brighton and Hove ^{xiv}	South East	3,708	1 in 78	24
2	Milton Keynes	South East	2,482	1 in 109	28
3	Epsom and Ewell	South East	579	1 in 139	33
1	Bristol, City of	South West	1,857	1 in 250	47
2	Gloucester	South West	363	1 in 356	69
3	Torbay	South West	329	1 in 414	76

It is common for homeless households to be placed in temporary accommodation in another local authority area

Homeless households are recorded according to where they applied for help, but it is common for them to be offered temporary accommodation outside this area. During lockdown, 28% of homeless households were living in TA in a different area to where they became homeless.^{xv} This accounts for 27,650 households and an estimated 41,000 homeless children.^{xvi} Eleven of the families we spoke to were living in TA in a different area from where they became homeless.

WHO IS LIVING IN TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION?

Families, especially single parent households, are overrepresented among homeless people in temporary accommodation

Almost two-thirds (64%) of households living in temporary accommodation in England are families with children. In the national population, families comprise just over a quarter (28%) of households. Children are similarly overrepresented. Half (50%) of homeless people living in TA are children, while children make up just over a fifth (22%) of the national population.^{xvii} This overrepresentation is in many ways unsurprising. Councils will usually only offer TA to those they have a duty to rehouse because they are deemed to be in 'priority need'. Households have a 'priority need' if they contain dependent children.



All families with children
64% of households in TA
(28% of all households in England)

Single parent families
42% of households in TA
(6% of all households in England)

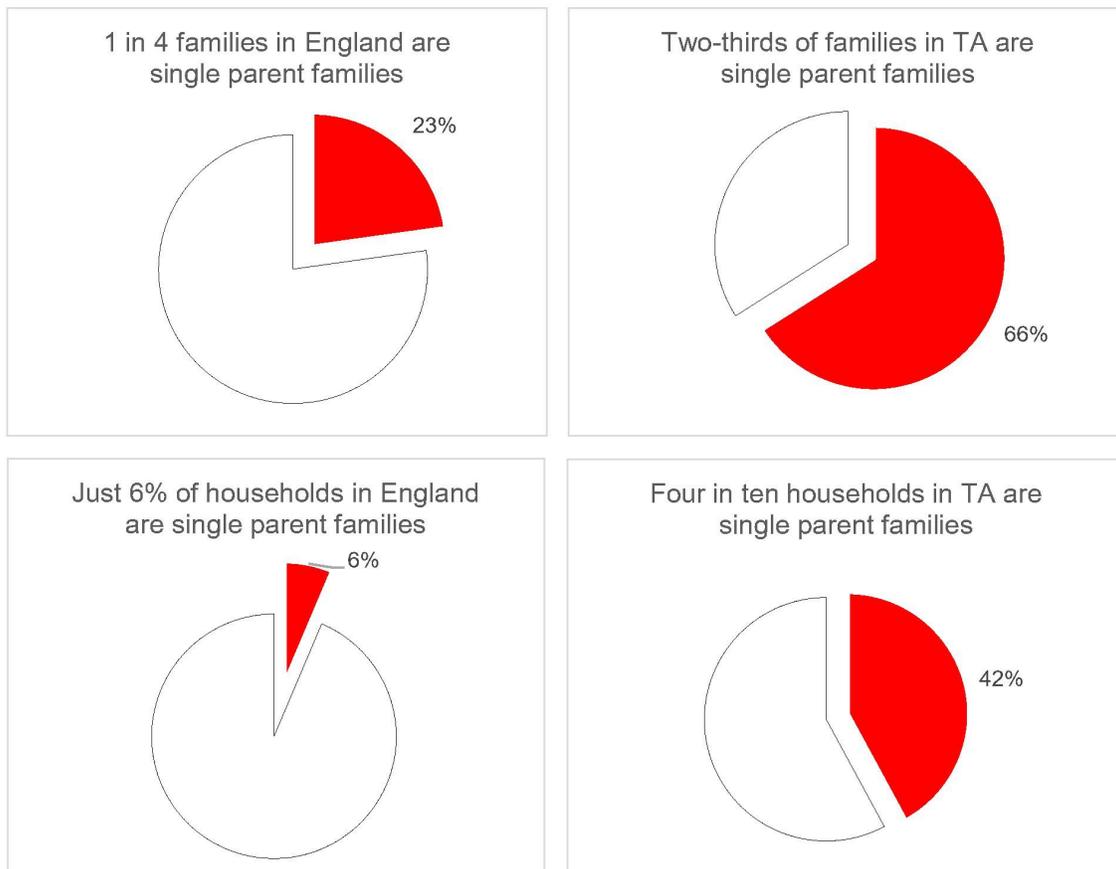
Single adults
29% of households in TA
(28% of all households in England)

Source: MHCLG homelessness statistics^{xviii} and English Housing Survey^{xix}

Single parent families are vastly overrepresented



What is more surprising is how the majority of families living in TA in England are single parent families – single parent families make up only 6% of households and 23% of families in the general population, yet comprise more than two-fifths (42%) of all households in TA, and two-thirds (66%) of all homeless families. The majority (92%) are single mothers.



Source: MHCLG homelessness statistics^{xx} and English Housing Survey^{xxi}

Single parents are overrepresented for a range of reasons. It may be partly related to relationship breakdown being a key driver of homelessness. It may be due to affordability – single parents are more likely to have only one income to cover the costs of a family home – and to struggle to find anywhere affordable, even on housing benefit. It may also be due to benefit restrictions. Single parent families are much more likely to be affected by the household benefit cap than other households.

There are more single people, and single parent families, than there used to be



All families with children
1% higher than a year ago
65% higher than ten years ago



Single parent families
2% higher than a year ago
75% higher than ten years ago



Single adults
51% higher than a year ago
158% higher than ten years ago

Source: MHCLG homelessness statistics^{xxii}

Families are overrepresented in temporary accommodation. But, the number of single adults is rising fast. In the last ten years the number of single adults living in TA has more than doubled (increased by 158%). In the last year alone, it has increased by 51%. Most of this increase has taken place since the end of March. Again, this could be explained, at least in part, by 'Everyone In'. The number of single parents has also increased – by 75% in the last ten years.

More than half of people in TA are women

Women make up 61% of homeless adults living in TA, but only half (51%) of adults in the England population.



Women
61% of adults in TA
51% of adults in England



Men
39% of adults in TA
49% of adults in England

Source: MHCLG homelessness statistics^{xxiii} and ONS mid-year population estimates^{xxiv}

Most families living in temporary accommodation are working



Shelter's analysis of government data shows that in 2017 over half (55%) of homeless families in TA were in work. This has increased by 25% since 2013 (from 44% of families). The absolute number of working families in TA has risen dramatically, from over 19,000 households in 2013 to over 33,000 in 2017.^{xxv}

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO LIVE IN TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION?

Temporary accommodation comes in many forms. It can be 'shared' accommodation where a household has one room and shares bathrooms and kitchens with other households or a 'self-contained' space where the household has a room or flat. Around one in five units of TA is directly owned by councils or social landlords like housing associations. The vast majority is owned, or owned and managed by private providers^{xxvi}.

During lockdown, one in six households (17%) lived in emergency B&Bs or hostels. This included 4,340 families with children. These typically provide one room, in which all of family life has to take place, with access only to facilities shared with others in a way that is highly Covid insecure.

We spoke to people who were living in a range of different situations to understand what temporary accommodation is really like from their perspective. The type of TA often had an impact on their experience. However, a few common themes emerged across households.

Missing amenities

Families in all types of TA frequently reported that essential parts of a home were missing. This included going without a fridge, a working cooker, in some cases there was no kitchen facilities whatsoever, due to them being in a repurposed hotel, or a communal kitchen being closed due to Covid.

"I kept having to buy takeaway every single day, I couldn't afford it. So, one of my friends bought me a little cooker to put in my room, and then the hotel said I had to turn it off because of health and safety. Yes, so everything was just really bad."

Lots of families did not have even the basics of a bed for each family member. Five of the families were forced to share beds. This led to poor nights' sleep and a lack of privacy for older children.

Many people were without facilities to wash their clothes. Half of the people we spoke to told us that the laundry provision in their TA was inadequate. This was either because there wasn't a washing machine in the accommodation, there were too many people needing to use them, or the washing machine was in such poor condition that it wasn't suitable for use.

"I had to catch a taxi to the laundrette every week, and do my laundry, and then catch a taxi back, and then I just decided that it was just not feasible to keep paying £30 to do laundry every week on what I was earning." Single mother, self-contained accommodation

More than a third of the people we spoke to reported that the internet provision was inadequate. This had an impact on various aspects of their lives, including children's ability to do their homework. It also often had cost implications as people had to use their mobile data to access the internet.

“I put it [the internet] in myself without the knowledge of anybody else, because I just thought you can't not have a telephone line and internet in this day and age, and it was costing me a fortune on data.” single parent, self-contained accommodation

Ten of the households had to share toilets, bathrooms and kitchens. Sometimes these were shared with such a high number of people that they became essentially unusable. One couple with children had to share a kitchen with 30 other people. One individual found that the only kitchen that was open in their accommodation was shared by up to 50 people. They felt it was impossible to use in a Covid-safe way.

Poor conditions

Poor conditions were common across both emergency and self-contained temporary accommodation. Two-thirds of the people we spoke to told us that the condition of the bathroom in their accommodation was poor. The main problems were related to damp and mould, but there were also problems with infestations.

“It was a tiled bathroom, but the problem was, there were slugs coming in through the plughole.” Single mother, self-contained accommodation

More than half of the people we spoke to told us that the condition of the kitchen was poor. Damp and mould were again common problems, but there were also problems with infestations and faulty or dangerous appliances. This meant that many of the people we spoke to were unable to use their kitchen to cook meals.

“The cooker wasn't working... I got an electric shock as well, and yes, we couldn't use anything in the kitchen, even the cupboards, because they were rotting. There were so much problems with insects and slugs coming into the house, and yes, it wasn't clean at all.” Single mother, self-contained accommodation

For people in studio-style self-contained accommodation there were different challenges maintaining conditions. Having your own mini-kitchen or en-suite could make it easier to self-isolate from others. However it could cause other issues because cooking, eating, bathing, drying washing and sleeping – not to mention play and studying – must all take place in one room, making it feel more cramped, more noisy and harder to deal with issues like condensation and damp.

Far from friends, support networks and school

More than half the people we spoke to were living in TA outside their home area, in a different local authority area to where they became homeless. This affects their ability to rely on support networks and can increase social isolation. It can

also result in long commutes to school, which can have an impact on children's tiredness and their ability to learn.

“They put me miles away from the school, from where she goes to school. They put me two bus journeys to her school away.” Single father, emergency accommodation

WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO LIVE IN TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION DURING LOCKDOWN?

“Not only are you going through a pandemic. You're in a self-confined space where you might be sharing with other families or whatever. (And) your children, they don't have that outlet where they can go to school and have the resources, they're all of a sudden in this bubble, where they don't have anything. That's what I think, that's where the pandemic, it was just really gloomy.” Single mother with three children

Lockdown was hard for all of us. But we all know that it posed different challenges for different households. Our interviews showed that being in temporary accommodation made lockdown particularly difficult. Not just difficult to work, or cope with home schooling or keep in touch with family. It made it difficult to stay safe from the virus when sharing a bathroom with 30 strangers, to entertain small children when spending all day in one room with hazardous electricals, difficult to eat when the only kitchen is locked due to virus transmission concerns and difficult to keep clean when laundrettes are closed, family are far away and there is no washing machine where you live.

This section sets out some of the ways in which being in TA affected people's experiences.

Difficult to keep safe due to physical proximity

Nearly all of the people living in shared accommodation said that it was impossible to maintain social distancing. Three people reported that they had been forced to share accommodation and facilities with people who were showing symptoms and who subsequently received a positive test.

“It was really difficult because there was not any social distancing in the kitchen. There were so many people in the place that they had the virus, and we had to share facilities with them.”

“There was one woman, she definitely had it. I kept complaining because she would be in the kitchen spitting in the sink and everything, and then she ended up going to hospital. It was just so awful. There was a time I just had to stop cooking from the place.” Single woman, emergency accommodation

People also shared stories of living with people whose mental health was suffering or who didn't respect the rules, making the living environment even more threatening and scary. This was particularly concerning for people with children.

“It's dangerous, even because a lot of people are, I don't know, people saying like, 'I'm going to kill somebody today', and they're shouting all the time. So, it's just bizarre. I cannot emphasise how bad it is.” Single man, emergency accommodation

Difficult to meet lockdown rules and stay safe

Many households found it hard to stay safe and stay home. Half of the people we spoke to said that they struggled to buy necessities. Some people said they had to go shopping more than they would have liked as they had nowhere to store food. Others struggled as they were far away from friends and family who could help them. One woman who was told she should be shielding found it impossible to get food deliveries and ended up going to the shops regularly.

“We had to go out, otherwise we wouldn’t eat.” Couple with children, self-contained accommodation

Difficult to meet basic needs

In previous research with people living in emergency accommodation we have seen that families often become more reliant on their friends, family and community groups to meet basic needs, like cooking nutritious food, washing bedding and clothes and even checking emails. Lockdown removed this vital lifeline, with people forced to make do with what they had in their accommodation. For many people this meant it was difficult to meet basic needs.

Over a third of the people we spoke to struggled to prepare food and eat during lockdown, with some people reporting they had lost weight, or suffered health problems as a result. The main issues were the lack of safe kitchen facilities, and lack of storage.

“I’ve lost a lot of weight, I don’t eat much anyway. I used to be a size twelve, I’m, like, a size four/ six now.” Single woman, emergency accommodation

Many people also found it difficult to keep clean. With laundrettes closed, no washing machines in the accommodation, and rules preventing people from being able to pop round to friends or family to use their facilities, this basic act became very difficult. People spoke about the effect this had on them.

“The hotel didn’t have any laundry facility. I would just have to go to laundry places, and then most of the laundrettes during the lockdown, they were all closed. So, I used to try and go to a friend or something to use their washer, and then they would even start refusing, because they didn’t want any guests during the lockdown.” Single woman, emergency accommodation

“I’m not going to lie, like, half of my, 80% of my clothes need to be washed.” Single woman, emergency accommodation

People also struggled with personal hygiene as communal bathrooms in the accommodation were so dirty they preferred to avoid them and they could no longer use showers in their workplaces as an alternative. Cleaner alternative toilets in cafes, restaurants or public spaces, like libraries or youth centres, were also unavailable. One man was a keyholder at his work and would let himself into the closed office to shower and use the toilet, potentially endangering his employment.

A lack of safe washing facilities was not only an issue for people in emergency accommodation. In one self-contained flat, a heavily pregnant woman with a child had to break lockdown to go to friends' houses to shower because there was no water in her flat – putting herself and her children at risk. Frustratingly, the council knew but didn't take action to resolve it before the family was moved on. Hard to 'stay home' in inadequate housing. People in self-contained accommodation also found it hard to cope. Accommodation that was small and in poor condition heightened the feeling of isolation or being on top of each other.

“(My son) sleeps in the living room and he sits in the living room and it's not like he sits in the living room and then he goes into his bedroom, he's just constantly in the living room... my son struggled a lot, I think he felt he was literally just in one room for the whole of lockdown.”

Others struggled more with lockdown because, as their housing was temporary, they had been refused the necessary adaptations that they or their children needed to safely cope with disabilities.

“I look at my daughter trying to get up the stairs and I'm standing behind her trying to lift her and I physically cannot do it anymore. You know, we asked for a stair lift to be put in, 'You're in temporary accommodation, we can't do that.’”

People felt that being homeless had the bigger impact than lockdown – so many problems will last beyond lockdown

Overall, many of the problems that people shared with us were caused by them living in unsuitable accommodation, the dislocation of losing their home, or of having to move far away. Therefore, people felt that the end of lockdown wouldn't resolve the difficulties they faced. In fact, one woman shared with us that the start of lockdown made her feel that everyone's life was now as small, and isolated as hers was since she had been homeless, rather than it limiting her.

“In this period of homelessness, it has made me quite reclusive, when lockdown started it felt like the world took our approach and it felt very familiar. I know it sounds terrible It felt like the world was experiencing what we experience on a daily basis, it wasn't a significant change for us.”

Many people with children who were settled in school talked about how disrupted this was by moving away. Schools being closed during lockdown had a secondary effect, but not as profound as the initial move. One woman had actually been unable to get her children a new school place since becoming homeless and offered temporary accommodation in a different part of the country.

The uncertainty of not knowing how long they would live there, and therefore the unwillingness (either by themselves or agencies) to invest the necessary time and money to fix problems meant that people felt their lives were put on hold. But that this was caused by being homeless, rather than lockdown.

“mentally it is feels like life will only begin once I get a proper home.”

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF LIVING IN TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION OVER LOCKDOWN?

We asked interviewees to tell us about the impact that living in temporary accommodation during lockdown had had on them and their families.

Impact on mental health

Almost all (20 out of 21) of the interviewees said that their or their partner's mental health had been negatively affected by living in TA. For some people this was particularly grave. One interviewee reported their partner 'on the verge of a nervous breakdown', and others reported considering taking their own lives. Some people had struggled with anxiety or depression before, and their current situation was worsening the way they felt. Others reported that poor mental health was new for them.

"Before I got moved here, I was perfectly fine. Now I'm here I feel really low in myself: just down in the dumps all the time. I'll be alright one minute then all of a sudden my chest goes tight and I find it difficult to get in enough air."

Living in poor conditions was an important factor. People described how feeling unable to improve their home left them feeling hopeless; 'even if I tidy up it's still ruined'.

Being unable to keep themselves or their children clean because of a lack of access to safe washing facilities had a particularly corrosive effect.

"it's kind of hard to, like, trying to shower and be 100% clean... I feel dirty most of the time."

Many people felt isolated, particularly during the initial lockdown period but also even when restrictions were loosened come the summer. This was due to being far away from friends and family, and due to poor conditions making them embarrassed about their situation and unwilling to socialise. Interviewees said this isolation had a particularly negative effect on mental health.

"I feel ashamed to invite people over. It's got to the point when I don't like people coming in because I feel it looks like a crack house and I don't want people to see that."

Although many people said that the stress of lockdown had heightened their feelings of isolation and uncertainty, one of the more important reasons given was the temporary nature of their whole situation. People talked about feeling like their life was on hold: 'there's the insecurity. Am I moving? Am I not moving?' People also felt particularly affected by the feeling of having no control over their home environment.

“There's no deadline, there's no time limits. You don't know how long you're going to be there. You don't know who's going to move in or out of the place either which is another big thing.”

Impact on physical health

Most people (20 out of 21) reported that their or their partner's physical health had also been negatively affected by living in the accommodation.

Three people mentioned losing weight and feeling faint as they struggled to eat enough.

“There were so many times that I kept falling and fainting just because I was too weak.” Single mother in self-contained accommodation

Other people reported that their living situation had aggravated respiratory issues, or skin conditions. One family had been badly affected by bed bugs, which left them physically unwell, and prevented them sleeping. It also compounded the feeling of not being able to stay clean and safe, and compounded the impact on their mental health.

“I've got very badly bitten with all these bedbugs. I didn't have bedbugs before, and I had swelling arms, face, neck, I couldn't sleep because the middle of the night, you could feel them, and you'd have to get up and, it was awful.” Single mother, self-contained accommodation.”

Impacts in the round

We asked people to tell us the 'one thing you would want people to know about the experience you have had being homeless during the lockdown'. Most people emphasised the mental health impact that being homeless had had:

“Feeling alone, feeling like, yes the physical is hard obviously being in a place like that, you know, you never know if I'm in bed and sleeping in the middle of the night, these people are going to come into my room and attack me I don't know. That's hard but I think also the mental, the mental is what really is lasting. The physical you can, kind of, you can get over so to speak after a while but the mental is something that will never leave you and I think it has scarred the three of us.”

“It can have a big impact on your mental health. It's really, really stressful. It's just that it's not human like, where you don't have your own privacy. It lowers your self-esteem.... I might as well just go and on the street and then lie down.”

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION ON CHILDREN?

As part of the investigation, we spoke to 16 people with dependent children. They told us about the impact that living in temporary accommodation can have on children's education, health and development.

Impact on education and development

Of those who had school age children (16 parents) – 7 reported that they were unable to complete schoolwork due to a lack of resources (including internet access) or a lack of space.

“He tried to [do his school work] but the internet was on the blink, so he did try. But it's hard for them because it's almost as if they're schooling themselves.” Single mother, self-contained flat

Even when schools were open, more than half of parents told us that their children experienced difficulties getting to school. This was often due to being accommodated a significant distance from their school. Living in poor conditions also affected children's attendance.

“Because the children were getting bitten in the night, I was getting bitten, the house was cold... lots of the time we were all not feeling well, even to get to school, so their attendance dropped quite a lot in that period, it was very bad.” Single mother, self-contained accommodation

Almost two-thirds of the parents we spoke to suggested that their children's education and development have been negatively affected by living in TA.

Lack of safe space to play

Several parents told us that they had to limit their child's play due to living in temporary accommodation. Half of parents told us that they had to limit play due to dangerous space, or a lack of space. Many parents said that the poor conditions had a particular impact on their ability to let their children explore their environment.

“There were insects everywhere, there was even glass doors in the living room, and the doors were actually cracked and broken... So, I had to constantly be making sure that they were safe, and that they weren't getting hurt or anything.” Single mother, self-contained accommodation

A lack of space was more common for families living in emergency accommodation. This prevented young children from moving or burning off energy, or older children from being able to play with toys as they would normally.

“Biggest impact on kids was not having any of their own stuff or their space.” Couple with children, emergency accommodation

Impact on mental health and behaviour

Eight in ten parents felt that living in temporary accommodation has had a negative impact on their children’s mental or emotional health. This included increased stress and anxiety due to living in overcrowded accommodation that was often in poor condition, moving away from their school and friends, not being able to play safely in their accommodation and struggling to complete their homework due to a lack of space or facilities. Three in ten parents spoke about the negative impact on their children’s behaviour.

“My son struggled a lot. I think he felt he was literally just in one room for the whole of lockdown with COVID... I think it has finally hit him that we are in temporary accommodation.” Single mother, self-contained accommodation

“It’s really affected my daughter’s mental health because obviously she’s at an age where she does want to go out and do things, and not only could we not take her to ball pits or swimming pools or anything, she couldn’t even go out and play in her own back garden.” Single mother, self-contained accommodation

Impact on physical health

Half of parents told us that living in temporary accommodation has had a negative impact on their children’s physical health. Parents mentioned increased respiratory problems due to poor conditions, children being bitten by bed bugs, the negative effects of sleep deprivation and even weight loss.

“I look at them now, and all of them have put on weight very well, are very happy, their outward appearance as well, everything. But, that time, looking back at those pictures, they all look quite tired, you know? I feel very bad for them.” Single mother, self-contained accommodation

“My son has serious health issues and needs a clean house as prone to respiratory conditions. Hard to keep it clean with bad wiring and plumbing and not enough space.” Single mother, self-contained accommodation

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

As this research shows, a large number of people were stuck in insecure, and sometimes unsuitable, temporary accommodation during lockdown and beyond.

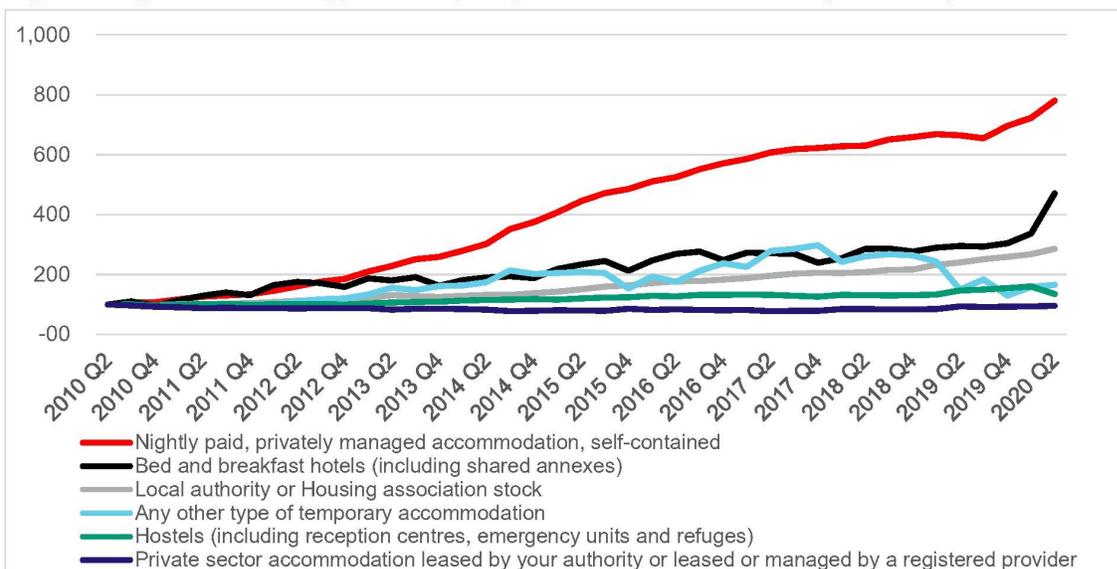
In some areas, this was how 1 in 30 people experienced lockdown. Living in TA made it even harder to stay safe, and to cope with life's everyday challenges, not to mention the upheaval of 2020. It is no wonder that the people we spoke to were so concerned about the lasting mental health impacts of homelessness on both their children and themselves.

Temporary accommodation is also big business. In 2019/20, councils in England spent £1.2 billion on accommodating homeless households in TA.^{xxvii} Of the total spent last year, 87% of it went to private landlords, letting agents or companies. More than a third (38%) of the money paid to these private accommodation providers was spent on B&Bs – the worst kind of accommodation for families with children.^{xxviii}

In the last ten years, the biggest increase in type of TA has been for accommodation supplied and managed by private providers and charged at nightly (e.g. hotel-style) rates (increased by 681%) and B&B accommodation (increased by 371%). The chart below shows this trend.

The increase in these two types is indicative of the emergence of an increasingly lucrative TA 'market', with unregulated private companies establishing themselves to make money from the growing need for TA.^{xxix} This can not only drive further homelessness – as landlords who would have let to benefit claimants switch to the more lucrative TA market – but it also push up the cost.

Figure 2 10-year increase in types of temporary accommodation – indexed (2010 =100)



Source: MHCLG homelessness statistics

Children don't have to live in this way. There is an alternative.

What needs to change

The government must commit to **investment in a new generation of social rented homes** that are genuinely affordable and stable for families on low and average incomes.

The government must make sure that **housing benefit is set at a level that covers local rents adequately**, now, and into the future. To ensure that everyone can access this support, the government must **scrap the benefit cap**.

The government should strengthen the Homelessness B&B regulations^{xxx} to **require that families with children under 18 years should not be accommodated in any form of one-room TA (with or without shared facilities) for more than six weeks**.

Central and local government must ensure that **local authority homelessness services are adequately funded and underpinned by robust guidance** to ensure they have enough staff to provide a tailored casework service to homeless households in TA

This winter we ask the public to **support us to support our frontline advisers** as they work tirelessly to help growing numbers of people to secure their right to a safe home.

We need to invest in social housing as a solution to the growing temporary accommodation crisis

The underlying reason that so many homeless households had to spend lockdown in temporary accommodation is because of the acute shortage of affordable housing in England.

There is now a strong expert consensus that investment to build at least 90,000 social rented homes in England a year for a sustained period is needed to properly tackle our housing emergency. This would be a step change from the current levels of building, which is fewer than 10,000 social rent homes a year. It's based on robust academic research and has the support of a wide range of leading homelessness organisations, businesses, housing providers and anti-poverty charities. In the immediate term, increased investment in social housing is also needed to sustain our housebuilding sector and contribute to the economy

Recommendation: The government must commit to investment in a new generation of social rented homes that are genuinely affordable and stable for families on low and average incomes.

We need to build an effective housing benefit system

Until we've built a new generation of social homes, homeless families need solutions that can help children out of temporary accommodation right now.

As we head into an unemployment crisis that may hit renters hard, losing your job should not also mean losing your home.

The government acted swiftly at the start of lockdown to restore housing benefit to cover the bottom third (30th percentile) of local rents. This certainly helped to prevent further homelessness and ensured more local homes were accessible to homeless households in TA. However, the benefit cap is preventing people from accessing this support. Hundreds of thousands of claimants are now benefit-capped, more than double the number before the pandemic^{xxxix}. The benefit cap makes private renting totally unaffordable across the country^{xxxix} including areas not normally considered 'expensive' such as Luton, Northampton or Leeds.

Fixing the housing benefit system would allow local authorities to reduce or avoid the use of TA and instead make them able to more readily assist people into a suitable, local private rental while they seek social housing. It would also ensure they can avoid the use of private B&Bs, as the law requires.

Recommendation: The government must make sure that housing benefit is set at a level that covers local rents adequately, now, and into the future. To ensure that everyone can access this support, the government must scrap the benefit cap.

We need to tighten rules on the use of one-room accommodation for families

However, the law should also be tightened on use of one-room accommodation for families. Currently, the law on children being accommodated in homeless B&Bs for a maximum of six weeks only applies to privately-owned and managed B&Bs where facilities are shared. It doesn't apply to self-contained one-room accommodation or that which is owned or managed by a local housing authority, a registered social landlord or a voluntary organisation. This can mean that families with children can be accommodated in some types of one-room accommodation for a lot longer than six weeks.

Recommendation: The government should strengthen the Homelessness B&B regulations^{xxxix} to require that families with children under 18 years should not be accommodated in any form of one-room TA (with or without shared facilities) for more than six weeks.

We need to introduce adequate regulation of temporary accommodation providers

As TA is used to accommodate homeless people, who are often already struggling to deal with a life event (bereavement, relationship breakdown, fleeing abuse and violence, illness, unemployment) which led to the homelessness, people are often huge amounts of stress. It's vital that there are high standards for the management and maintenance in their accommodation and that TA providers are held to account for meeting them.

But people told us about poor standards of maintenance, cleaning or other housing management in their accommodation, which compounded their stress. These included bed bugs and other infestations, lack of cleaning of communal facilities or nuisance behaviour by other residents.

Our previous research shows^{xxxiv} that private temporary accommodation providers are not usually registered with the Regulator of Social Housing, which means they are not required to meet consumer standards, such as having a responsive complaints procedure, that are required of social landlords. This means there is less scope for residents to hold them to account, despite the high nightly rates often charged.

Recommendation: The government should require all providers of temporary accommodation to be registered with the Regulator of Social Housing

We need to ensure people in temporary accommodation can access adequate information and services from local housing authorities

The people in TA we spoke to were trying to resolve their homelessness by searching for a new home, but found the process difficult to navigate. They struggled to make future plans and reported feeling their lives were in limbo because they didn't know when they might be moved on to alternative TA or receive a rehousing offer of settled accommodation.

In some cases, councils had provided some assistance to the families we spoke to, but in other cases, local authority staff were too over-stretched to pick up their case, or unable to act. This was a major cause of stress.

Recommendation: Government must ensure that local authority homelessness services are adequately funded and underpinned by robust guidance to ensure they have enough staff to provide a tailored casework service to homeless households in TA

We need to ensure Shelter can help homeless people in temporary accommodation

While living through lockdown, families relied on friends and family for support where they could. However, they really needed support from people who had the knowledge and expertise to help them navigate systems, to relieve the sense that they were at the mercy of a system that they did not understand.

Housing law is complicated, and the housing market is difficult to navigate. It is clear from our interviews that advice and support from a trained professional at such a traumatic time is vital in helping families both resolve their housing situation and avoid stress. Once the interview was complete, each participant we spoke to was offered a referral to a Shelter adviser to provide advice on their case.

Shelter help millions of people facing bad housing and homelessness each year. Our helpline is open every day, including Christmas day. Last year our telephone advice and face to face support services alone helped people to find a new home, stay in their current one or fix it so that it was no longer hazardous. We are only able to do this with the generosity of our supporters.

We urge the public to support us to support our frontline advisers as they work tirelessly to help growing numbers of people to find, or keep hold of, a home.

There is so much that can be done to help households in temporary accommodation to find a settled place to live. We need to act now, to ensure that in 2021, there are far fewer individuals and families living in this way.

ENDNOTES

i [Homelessness \(Suitability of Accommodation\) \(England\) Order 2003](#), Statutory Instrument 2003: No.3326

ii https://england.shelter.org.uk/legal/homelessness_applications/homelessness_duties

iii Temporary accommodation must be suitable in terms of its location, size and health & safety standards. However, families are often initially placed in one-room accommodation (in homeless B&Bs, hostels or budget hotels) before being moved on to something more self-contained:

https://england.shelter.org.uk/legal/homelessness_applications/suitability_of_accommodation/suitability_of_accommodation People can also be offered temporary accommodation while they wait for these decisions to be made: A local authority can provide interim accommodation while it makes inquiries if it has reason to believe that the applicant may be: homeless, eligible for assistance and in priority need. During the pandemic, some households have also been accommodated as part of local authority's power to provide emergency accommodation if they were rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping: See for example: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-rough-sleeper-accommodation-survey-data-may-2020>

iv This is how most people on the streets at the start of the first national lockdown were offered emergency accommodation under the 'Everyone In' initiative

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/928780/Letter_from_Minister_Hall_to_Local_Authorities.pdf These households would not show up in the official homelessness statistics.

v social services departments can offer accommodation under the Children Act 1989 or the Care Act 2014. These households would not show up in the official homelessness statistics.

vi We have compared data from 2020 Q2 with data from 2010 Q2. MHCLG, Live tables on homelessness, [Statutory homelessness live tables](#), Table TA1 and TA2

vii Between 31st March 2020 and 30th June 2020, the number of homeless people living in temporary accommodation increased by an estimated 5,910 people.

viii Some data that shows the potential scale of additional people helped through everybody in is available to view here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-rough-sleeper-accommodation-survey-data-may-2020>

ix Data from March 2020 is used – this was the most recent available data.

x Data from March 2020 is used – this was the most recent available data.

xi Data from December 2019 is used – this was the most recent available data.

xii Data from March 2020 is used – this was the most recent available data.

xiii Data from March 2020 is used – this was the most recent available data.

xiv Data from March 2020 is used – this was the most recent available data.

xv MHCLG, Live tables on homelessness, [Statutory homelessness live tables](#), Table TA1

xvi Shelter analysis of homelessness statistics as of Q2 2020. Shelter used Freedom of Information requests to the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government to estimate the total number of children housed in homeless accommodation outside of their local authority. MHCLG holds this information for c.35% of out of district placements. For the 8,160 households of which information is held there was an average of 1.49 children. Shelter has applied this multiplier to the total number of households placed out of district to estimate the total number of children placed out of area as of the end of June 2020.

xvii 22% of the England population are aged between 0 and 18. ONS, [Estimates of the population for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland](#), Mid-2019: April 2020 local authority district codes edition of this dataset, Table MYE2

xviii MHCLG, Live tables on homelessness, [Statutory homelessness live tables](#), Table TA1

xix English Housing Survey, [English Housing Survey 2018 to 2019: headline report](#), Annex Table 1.3

xx MHCLG, Live tables on homelessness, [Statutory homelessness live tables](#), Table TA1

xxi English Housing Survey, [English Housing Survey 2018 to 2019: headline report](#), Annex Table 1.3

xxii MHCLG, Live tables on homelessness, [Statutory homelessness live tables](#), Table TA2

xxiii We assume that there is an even number of men and women within couples with dependent children and other household types. MHCLG, Live tables on homelessness, [Statutory homelessness live tables](#), Table TA2

xxiv ONS, [Estimates of the population for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland](#), MYE2

xxv Pennington, J. and Weekes, T. *In work, but out of a home*, Shelter, 2018

xxvi The most common ways that TA is provided is: 29% - private accommodation leased and managed by the council or a housing association, 27% - accommodation supplied and managed by

a private provider and charged at nightly (e.g. hotel-style) rates, 22% - homes owned by councils or housing associations but used as TA, 17% - emergency B&Bs or hostels

^{xxvii} The amount spent on temporary accommodation (TA) by councils in England is published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG): Revenue outturn housing services, LA drop-down.

The 2019/20 annual spend data is published here: [Revenue outturn housing services \(R04\)](#). In 2019/20 councils in England spent £1,186,130,000 on TA.

^{xxviii} We have calculated the amount spent on TA that is managed or owned by private landlords, letting agents or companies by adding up the following spending lines in the R04 tables: private managed accommodation leased by registered social landlords (RSLs), private managed accommodation leased by the authority, directly with a private sector landlord, bed & breakfast accommodation and other nightly paid, privately managed accommodation.

^{xxix} Garvie, D. [Report: Cashing in - How a shortage of social housing is fuelling a multimillion-pound temporary accommodation sector](#), Shelter, February 2020

^{xxx} [Homelessness \(Suitability of Accommodation\) \(England\) Order 2003](#), Statutory Instrument 2003: No.3326

^{xxxi} https://england.shelter.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/2035364/Final_Infographic.pdf

^{xxxii} [https://england.shelter.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1939510/2020-09-21 -](https://england.shelter.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1939510/2020-09-21_-_Renters_at_risk_Final.pdf)

[Renters at risk Final.pdf](#)

^{xxxiii} [Homelessness \(Suitability of Accommodation\) \(England\) Order 2003](#), Statutory Instrument 2003: No.3326

^{xxxiv} [https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_and_research/policy_library/policy_library_folder/briefing_cashing_in - how a shortage of social housing is fuelling a multimillion-pound temporary accommodation sector](https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_and_research/policy_library/policy_library_folder/briefing_cashing_in_-_how_a_shortage_of_social_housing_is_fuelling_a_multimillion-pound_temporary_accommodation_sector)