

Bleak houses

Tackling the crisis of family homelessness in England

AUGUST 2019



Contents

Foreword from the Children’s Commissioner for England	2
Lucy and Jake’s story.....	4
How big is the problem?	5
Temporary accommodation is frequently not fit for children.....	8
Poor quality temporary accommodation presents serious risks to children	12
Not all homeless families have a right to accommodation from the Housing Department	16
The housing shortage and welfare reform are driving the crisis.....	18
Prevent families from becoming homeless in the first place	20
Develop better housing solutions for homeless families	22
Improve the support available to children housed by children’s services, who are often the most vulnerable	23
Summary of recommendations	24
Technical appendix	26

Foreword from the Children's Commissioner for England



Growing up in a stable, healthy and secure home is so important for any child. Yet we know there are thousands of children in England who are living in homeless families, stuck in poor quality temporary accommodation, often with low prospects of finding something permanent. There are many others who are at risk of ending up homeless.

This report shines a light on this homelessness crisis and shares the experiences of some of those children.

Earlier this year, we visited children and families living in temporary accommodation, and spoke with them and some of the frontline professionals who work with them. We also carried out new data analysis to identify the scale of the problems.

As ever, I was struck by the resilience of the children we met, as well as being shocked by their stories. A nine-year-old girl told us 'we have to eat on the floor as there's not enough space ... when we sleep, water drips on us which we don't like'. A teenage boy described living in a hotel for 8 months alongside sex workers. We spoke with children who are spending hours every day having to get to and from school because they have been housed far away from where they are taught. Others told us that being homeless can lead to bullying and causes stress and tensions within their families. Some are unable to do their homework and feel cold, dirty, sad, embarrassed, worried and unsafe in the place they live.¹

The laws are already in place to make sure that children are protected from living in dangerous or unsuitable accommodation. Under section 11 of the Children Act, local authorities must act in a way that safeguards children and promotes their welfare. The homelessness code of guidance reminds local authorities of these duties and sets out what is expected from councils when housing homeless families in temporary accommodation. However, as we heard from children and families themselves, this guidance is not always met and doesn't go far enough.

Some of the places children are being forced into calling 'home', often for months or years at a time, are simply inappropriate places for a child to be growing up. It was sad, though not unexpected, to find that B&Bs continue to be used by some councils. It was more surprising, but just as sad, to learn about the growth of new developments which councils have turned to in recent years to deal with the continued flow of homeless families coming through their doors: office block conversions, in which whole families live in single rooms barely bigger than a parking space, and shipping containers which are blisteringly hot in summer and freezing in the winter months.

Most incidents of family homelessness in England are not the result of personal circumstances like mental health problems – primarily it is a result of structural issues, including the lack of affordable housing and welfare reform.² There is very little these families can do to escape the cycle of homelessness without outside help. The children growing up in B&Bs, shipping containers and

¹<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Childrens-Commissioners-Business-Plan-2018-19.pdf>

²https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/793471/Homelessness_-_REA.pdf

converted office blocks have a right to a decent home to grow up in. In this prosperous country of ours, it is a scandal that many thousands of children are growing up without one.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Anne Longfield." with a horizontal line underneath.

Anne Longfield, OBE

Children's Commissioner for England

Lucy and Jake's story

"It's wrong how they treated me. I wouldn't like someone else to go through this."

Lucy is in her early twenties; her son Jake is 2. When she became homeless they were placed by her local authority in a converted office block far from home. Although this was considered an emergency placement, they were there for 11 months.

On the day Lucy was offered the flat, she was given one hour to travel across London to collect the keys by 5pm. The flat had no basic furniture: Lucy had to borrow a blow-up mattress and a cot.

"They put me in a small room in an office block which had been converted into flats. It was in an industrial estate in the middle of nowhere. The cars and lorries would whizz round really fast. It was very noisy and it felt unsafe to walk to the shops."

"There were a lot of people congregating at the entrance who didn't live there and I felt unsafe. I was approached to buy drugs during the day on the way to the shops with my son."

It took six months and a formal complaint before Lucy's local authority completed its assessment and found that it had a duty to find the family a permanent home – but that did not mean she got one straight away.

Far from it: she was placed on a waiting list and asked to express an interest in properties she wanted to live in by "bidding" online, even though she was too low on the list to be offered any of them any time soon. And she couldn't even start bidding until a dispute about her temporary accommodation, which was clearly inadequate in Lucy's view, was resolved – a process that took months.

"No one in the council replies to my emails and I couldn't bid on permanent properties for six months while they were assessing my case."

This experience began to take its toll on Lucy and her son. When she was in her previous place Lucy's mum would come and help her with Jake, but moving away meant she was isolated and she struggled to cope. Lucy had to go to her GP for treatment for stress. One of the main worries Lucy faced was concern about Jake's living conditions. By now Jake was crawling and he didn't have much space to play inside the small studio flat. She couldn't gate off the kitchen and was worried he'd burn himself on the oven.

Playing outside wasn't possible as there was nothing appropriate nearby and she wanted to limit the number of times she had to walk past the people congregating at the entrance.

Lucy then had to submit yet another complaint in order to be moved back to her local area. This took a further three months.

Eventually Lucy was able to move back to her local area, where she was offered a self contained flat with its own bathroom and kitchen. But the flat is up 3 flights of stairs with no lift. That being said, she prefers carrying the buggy up the stairs than avoiding drug dealers on her doorstep. She still does not know when she and her son will be offered a permanent home, what it will be like or where it will be.

"They need a higher standard of care; they failed me in so many ways. The fact that they get away with it is so, so bad."

*"We have to eat on the floor as there's not enough space.
(Daisy, aged 9)*

*"The journey to school takes too long and I'm tired."
(Ruby, aged 6)*

How big is the problem?

The government statistics show that there were 62,000 homeless families living in temporary accommodation in England at the end of 2018. Among these families were 124,000 children. This means that there are 80% more children living in temporary accommodation than in 2010.³

This increase has caused widespread concern. Stability and security at home is crucial to children's education, health and wellbeing – all things which must be protected if children are to go on to lead happy and successful lives. The fact that more than a hundred thousand homeless children are living in unstable and often poor quality housing amounts to a crisis. But the true scale of the problem is even greater than these official figures suggest.

Firstly, the government statistics are an underestimate of the number of homeless children in England today. They do not include hidden homeless families who are "sofa surfing" rather than living in temporary accommodation – staying with friends or family, often in cramped conditions. New analysis conducted for the Children's Commissioner's Office using the English Housing Survey estimates that in 2016-17 there were 92,000 children living in sofa surfing families. It says a lot about the state of temporary accommodation that for these families, the prospect of living in such overcrowded conditions can be better than turning to the council for emergency help, which may be a poor quality single room in a B&B miles from home.

Official figures also fail to capture a small but highly vulnerable group of homeless children who have been placed in temporary accommodation by children's services rather than by the council's housing department. This includes families who have been deemed to have made themselves "intentionally homeless", and therefore are not entitled to a permanent home from the housing department, and those ineligible as a result of their immigration status. There is no publicly available data on how many families are being housed in this way.

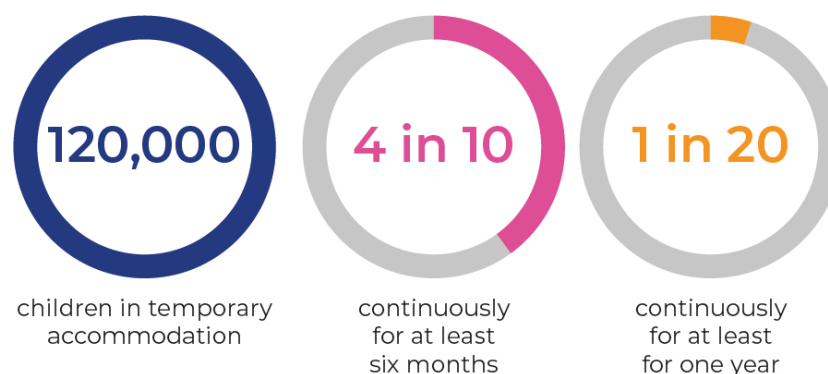
"Temporary accommodation" is too often a misleading term – many children end up living in their temporary accommodation for months, if not years. The longer the child is in the accommodation, the longer they must live with the insecurity and the more impact this has on their childhood.

Until very recently the temporary accommodation figures were just a snapshot – they simply showed how many children were in temporary accommodation on a particular date. They could not be used to tell how long children had been in temporary accommodation for. This will gradually change with the introduction of a new data collection system,⁴ but in the meantime, the Children's Commissioner's Office commissioned analysis to create national estimates of the numbers of children living in

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

⁴ On 1 April 2018 the Homelessness Case Level Information Collection (H-CLIC) data system was introduced. Under H-CLIC, local authorities are required to collect more detailed data on households, including the ages and gender of household members and their employment and benefit status.

temporary accommodation for extended periods.⁵ This analysis suggests that in 2017 around 2 in 5 children in temporary accommodation – an estimated 51,000 children – had been there for at least 6 months. Furthermore, around 1 in 20 – an estimated 6,000 children – had been there for at least a year. For children in these situations, it would be difficult to describe their accommodation as “temporary”.



Taken together, the data suggests that there could be more than 210,000 homeless children in England. This consists of the more than 120,000 children who are officially homeless and living in temporary accommodation, and the roughly 90,000 children in sofa surfing families; there is also an unknown number housed by children’s services, for which no data is available.⁶



Finally, the government figures say little about the number of families *at risk* of becoming homeless.⁷ Analysis for the Children’s Commissioner’s Office suggests that around 375,000 children live in households that have fallen behind on their rent or mortgage payments, putting them at financial risk of becoming homeless in the future.⁸

⁵ The analysis used Housing Benefit databases from a sample of LAs (c. 20-25), which includes data about all the families in temporary accommodation in those areas and tracks their housing status over time. For more information, see technical appendix.

⁶ This calculation assumes that there are presently around 90,000 children living in ‘sofa-surfing’ families – i.e. that the level has not changed significantly since 2016/17 (to which the estimate of 92,000 applies). It also assumes no overlap between these children and those currently living in temporary accommodation.

⁷ The Government statistics give only the number of households threatened with homelessness within 56 days.

⁸ Estimates based on new analysis of Wealth and Assets Survey 2014-16. For more information, see technical appendix.

Based on the figures on the previous page, we estimate that there could be between 550,000 and 600,000 children in England who either are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless.⁹



⁹ This calculation uses the previously-calculated figure of 210,000 children (at least) who could presently be homeless. It adds on to that the estimated 375,000 children living in households that are behind on rent or mortgage payments, assuming that this number has not changed significantly since 2014-16 (the date of the most recent data). Finally, the calculation assumes no overlaps between these groups.

Temporary accommodation is frequently not fit for children

The government requires that temporary accommodation must be “suitable”.¹⁰ As set out in guidance for local authorities, suitability depends on “the relevant needs, requirements and circumstances of the homeless person and their household”.¹¹ Key factors include space, arrangement and affordability to the household.

But our findings show that despite the guidance around suitability, many families are forced to stay in accommodation that is wholly inappropriate to their needs. Due to the level of demand and shortage of permanent council accommodation, families frequently spend long stretches living in this “temporary” housing, suffering desperately poor conditions for months if not years.

At one end of the spectrum, temporary accommodation can be a conventional self-contained flat or house, with its own kitchen and bathroom – the same kind of place that a family could eventually be offered as permanent housing. If the family is lucky then it will be well-maintained and spacious, giving children the room they need to play, study and grow up.

Unfortunately, good quality, self-contained temporary accommodation is costly and in short supply. As a result, many families are placed in accommodation which is poor quality and simply too small. Some types of accommodation are particularly concerning:

> B&Bs

For many years families have been placed in B&Bs. This type of housing is not self-contained – the bathroom is shared with other residents in the building, along with the kitchen (if there are any cooking facilities at all). The other residents might be families, but might also be vulnerable adults, such as those with mental health or drug abuse problems, creating intimidating and potentially unsafe environments for children.

This practice has been eradicated in some areas but lingers on in others. This is despite the introduction of a legal limit in 2003 which means that families can only be housed in a B&B in emergencies when no other accommodation is available, and even then for no longer than six weeks, after which the family must be moved on to suitable accommodation.

In December 2018 there were 2,420 households with children living in B&Bs according to government statistics. Of the 2,420 families known to be living in B&Bs last December, a third had been there for more than 6 weeks, meaning that the councils involved were breaking the law. The National Audit Office (NAO) have heard of families being housed illegally in this way for as long as 30 months.¹²

Once again, the government statistics do not tell the full story. The six week legal limit on B&B use applies only to families housed in private B&Bs, not council-owned B&Bs.¹³ In 2018, CRAE found through FOI requests to councils that 1,641 families were living in council-owned B&Bs.¹⁴ Of these, nearly two thirds had been there more than 6 weeks – a much higher proportion of families than in private B&Bs. Furthermore, these figures are likely to be a significant underestimate as only 58% of

¹⁰ Section 206 of the Housing Act 1996

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities>

¹² <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmpubacc/462/462.pdf>

¹³ The Children’s Commissioner’s Office was unable to identify the reasons for the limit applying to private B&Bs only and not council-owned B&Bs.

¹⁴ http://www.crae.org.uk/media/126985/B3_CRAE_POVERTY-WEB.pdf

councils responded to the FOI request.

> Office block conversions

A more recent and deeply worrying development has been the conversion of former office blocks and warehouses into temporary accommodation. In 2013, the Government changed planning rules so that under permitted development rights, developers no longer need to seek planning permission from the council in order to convert office blocks to residential use. Councils can only object on limited grounds including environmental issues and flooding problems, not on the basis of the size or quality of the accommodation.

Some areas have become hotspots for conversions like these, in particular Harlow, where more than half of all new homes being created are office block conversions.¹⁵ The council has identified at least 13 office blocks that have been converted, creating more than 1,000 individual flats. There is high demand for temporary accommodation in these blocks from central London councils seeking alternatives to higher cost rents within their own boroughs. This has led to accusations that areas such as Harlow are being used to “socially cleanse” the capital, with families being required to move far from home.¹⁶

Many of the flats are small, single rooms which do not come close to meeting national space standards. For example, it has been reported that some of the flats in Templefields House in Harlow measure as little as 18 square metres – a space which may be shared by a whole family, with parents and children living and sleeping in the same single room also containing their cooking facilities.¹⁷ The cramped conditions are in stark contrast with the Government’s own “Nationally Described Space Standards”, according to which the minimum size for a one bedroom, one person home should be 37 square metres.¹⁸ In Newbury House in East London, the flats reportedly measure even smaller at just 13 square metres – barely larger than a standard car parking space.

Crime and antisocial behaviour is a constant problem. As with B&Bs, homeless families may find themselves living in close proximity to vulnerable adults also being housed by the council, including people recently released from prison, exposing children to possible harm. The Children’s Commissioner’s Office has heard from children that they are sometimes afraid to go home at the end of the day. Terminus House in Harlow, a large office block located above a car park, was converted in April 2018. In the first 10 months after tenants moved in, crime in the area rose by 20% to more than 500 incidents, including violence, burglary, arson and drug-related incidents. Within the block itself, crime rose by 45%.¹⁹

Office block conversions are often located on or near industrial estates, presenting even more risks. These are often far away from shops and other amenities. Siobhain McDonagh MP has drawn attention to Connect House in her constituency of Mitcham and Morden – located adjacent to an industrial estate. Families have been affected by heavy dust and fumes which have caused breathing problems for some. Lorries and machinery are continually navigating the same roads where children walk and play, and which parents have to use to pick up basic supplies as there are no shops on the

¹⁵ <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/one-10-new-homes-was-former-office>

¹⁶ <https://www.yourharlow.com/2019/01/29/harlow-mp-robert-halfon-calls-to-meet-minister-of-office-block-s-turned-in-to-homes/>

¹⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/mar/16/is-harlow-being-used-to-socially-cleanse-london>

¹⁸ Note that the standards are currently applied only to new-build homes and are not compulsory – they apply if they are adopted by councils as part of their local housing plans.

¹⁹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-essex-47720887>

estate itself.

Living in the developments can also be a stigmatising experience for children and families. There are reports of children being referred to “office block kids”, compounding their sense of isolation and difference to their peers.²⁰

The quality of accommodation built under permitted development rights was recently criticised by the Public Accounts Committee, with particular concerns raised about office block conversions. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government accepted that there can be problems with these blocks, with inadequate space standards and build quality. It has committed to a review of permitted development rights, and it is vital that this review addresses these issues. It has also been suggested that new legislation which gives tenants additional rights if they believe their property is not fit for human habitation could be used to challenge the growth of office block conversions.²¹

> Shipping containers

In some council areas they are even using shipping containers as temporary accommodation for families, including Brighton, Cardiff, Ealing and Bristol. Often they are located on “meanwhile sites” – land that is earmarked for future development but currently not in use. (Bristol City Council has clarified it does not direct families to these containers and only provides land for them which are operated solely by a charity).

An advantage of the units is that they are self-contained – they each have their own front door, kitchen and bathroom facilities.

However, the units are typically one or two-bedroom and small in size, meaning that overcrowding can be an issue. The containers become very hot in summer - one mother told us she had to sleep with the front door wide open and that her baby got heat rash - but are too cold in the winter. They are often not properly designed with children in mind. Ovens and other dangers can be too close to the ground so that they are in reach of very young children.

As with some office block conversions, antisocial behaviour has been a problem, leaving some parents worrying about letting their children play outside, forcing them to stay in cramped conditions inside instead.

Despite the problems posed to families housed in these containers, they continue to be an attractive option to councils. They are less costly than repeatedly paying for B&Bs, with a one bedroom shipping container costing approximately £35,000 to set up. Anecdotally the Children’s Commissioner’s Office has heard of increasing numbers of councils looking to install shipping containers as temporary accommodation within their areas.

Some families are forced to move away

In addition to quality, a big problem with temporary accommodation can be its location, with many families forced into temporary accommodation away from their local area. That can mean moving to different jobs, schools and being isolated from friends and family, with a deeply disruptive impact on children’s lives when they have already lost their former home.

²⁰ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-essex-47720887>

²¹ <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2019-07-23/debates/69580106-62F9-489E-B7F2-707A7F86C075/HousingPermittedDevelopmentRights>

The government's guidance on homelessness addresses the issue of moving homeless households away, stating that they should be housed within the local area "so far as is reasonably practicable". But with such large numbers of people needing temporary accommodation and so little housing available, it is routine for some local authorities to require families to move away. In December 2018, over 23,000 households in temporary accommodation had been moved to a different area²² – the vast majority from London, who might have been sent to a neighbouring borough, to the outskirts of the city, or even as far away as Birmingham.

Sometimes when a council moves a family away to a different area, they do little to ensure that the move is a success and that the family settles. Sometimes they do not inform the new council that the family has moved in, meaning that the new council cannot provide the support the family might need. This is despite the fact that when a family moves to a new area, it is their new council that is responsible for providing them with the education, health and social services they need. Vulnerable children in need of help can begin to fall through the gaps under these circumstances.

It appears that certain families could be more likely to be moved to a different area than others. For example, government guidance states that when considering location, councils should minimise the disruption to children's education, "particularly (but not solely) at critical points in time such as leading up to taking GCSE (or their equivalent) examinations". It also requires councils to consider the impact on the family's employment. In effect this means that workless families with very young children, below school age, are often those who are required to move away – such as single mothers with toddlers, who are often placed far away from family and become isolated as a result.

²² Note that this number is not specific to families but to all homeless households, as the data specific to families is not publicly available

Poor quality temporary accommodation presents serious risks to children

To shed light on the impact of homelessness on families, the Children's Commissioner's Office visited three local areas to speak to children and parents about their experiences (note that names have been changed to protect the anonymity of participants). We also spoke to frontline professionals including a specialist health visitor team working exclusively with families in temporary accommodation.

Our research found that when children are denied their right to adequate housing this has a significant impact on many aspects of their lives, as set out below.

Too far from home

Many families face the double problem of poor temporary accommodation and no choice but to move out of their local area. Moving away from an area can have a deeply disruptive impact on family life. For children, moving area might mean a new school, no longer being able to see their friends or go to the places they are used to.

"I don't like it here"
(Susie, aged 3)

Friends and family can be an important source of support for parents. Grandparents or others who might have been able to help with childcare might no longer be able to due to the distances involved. In addition to increasing loneliness and isolation, parents might be forced to pay for childcare.

One mother told us she became so stressed and isolated after moving away from home that she had to see her GP about it. Some councils offer support when they place a family in accommodation away from home, such as helping to sort a new school place or connecting parents with employment opportunities, but some offer very little or no help.

"They left me to deal on my own with no support or updates"
(Alexa, mother of two year old son)

"We have had no support from the council since being put in TA... [the council] moved us to [another area] for 8 weeks, this was very isolating as it is quite far from where we were used to living"
(Mila, mother of 4 year old)

Travel costs might increase as children have to travel further if they stay at the same school.

"We are spending 80 quid per week for travel to get the kids to and from their school"
(Anne, mother of four children)

Problems can arise when families are placed out of area and the new council is not made aware of this. The specialist health visitors we spoke to said that they were at the will of building owners letting them know that a new family had moved in. This meant that they had no background knowledge of any issues within the family:

"Last week we walked into a family with disruptive teenagers and a family on a child protection plan" (Specialist health visitor)

Education

Unsurprisingly, a child's education can suffer, even if they stay at the same school. The cramped, noisy and sometimes disruptive environments children find themselves in can make it difficult to do homework and to get a good night's sleep, impacting directly upon their school results – especially if they have to travel far the next morning.

"My daughter has to take two buses to school. By the time I am home it's time to leave and pick her up again."

"My eldest daughter has to read her school books in the toilet so she doesn't wake the little one."

(Chinwe, mother of two children)

There is also an impact in the lead up to critical times, such as GCSEs – as recognised in the government's guidance. But the impact on younger children is just as important. Their initial educational development might be delayed, risking them falling behind at the very beginning of their education and finding it difficult to catch up.

There can also be practical challenges. Teachers have told the Children's Commissioner's Office that they have done laundry for some children who would otherwise be forced to attend school in dirty clothes, owing to the lack of facilities at their accommodation.

Children tell us that bullying can be an issue for those affected by homelessness.

"If people who are homeless go to school they'd be bullied for what they are."
(Priya, aged 14)

Research from Shelter has found that particularly in areas of mixed levels of affluence and deprivation, children from homeless families can stand out compared to their peers – e.g. if they arrive late or not in the correct uniform, adding to their sense of isolation.²³ Children can experience extreme emotional trauma, resulting in stress and anxiety. Younger children become withdrawn, while older children can be angry or aggressive. These problems can lead to deteriorations in a child's behaviour which may impact upon their ability to participate at school if the causes of their behaviour are not identified and addressed.

Health, wellbeing and safety

Temporary accommodation can present serious risks to children's health and safety. This was particularly the case for families living in B&Bs, who were often forced to share facilities with adults engaged in crime, anti-social behaviour or those with substance abuse issues.

"I used to open my door to find drug dealers and men just standing there. People would cook up crack in the kitchen so I could never eat there. I had to eat out all the time."

(Mia, a pregnant young woman speaking of her time in a B&B)

"I lived in a hotel for 8 months ... it's like where all the prostitutes live."

(Matthew, aged 14)

²³https://england.shelter.org.uk/data/assets/pdf/file/0011/1474652/2017_12_20_Homelessness_and_School_Children.pdf

*"I was next to an alcoholic neighbour who would scream all night."
(Arabella, mother with baby under 1 year old)*

*"Cigarette smoke would come in under my door and a man threatened to kill me when I asked him about it."
(Danielle, mother of 3 year old)*

*"There can be a lot of teenagers hanging around at night playing loud music. Around firework night we cannot go out at night as there are always teenagers throwing fireworks below our flat. I have had to call the police a few times as it has been quite close and scary."
(Alina, mother of 4 year old)*

Families have to adapt to minimise the risks involved in these situations, by not using certain facilities or spending more time away from the accommodation and treating it only as a place to sleep.

*"I'd hold in needing the toilet till morning because the toilet was down the corridor and I didn't want to leave my child alone in the room"
(Amaya, mother of 1 year old)*

The Children's Commissioner's Office visited a shipping container site and was told by one mother that she much preferred living in the container than a B&B, where she had previously been placed, simply because the unit was self-contained. However, many families were much more critical of the accommodation. One family said that condensation dripped down the walls of their container and had to be collected. As the containers are made out of metal, noise travels very easily which means that the children find it difficult to sleep at night.

*"When we sleep water drips on us which we don't like"
(Daisy, aged 11)*

As the specialist health visitor team we spoke to made clear, there can be an extremely significant impact on children's development arising from poor quality temporary accommodation. The team described one case in which a mother was afraid to allow her daughter to play on the floor of their accommodation:

*"We've been working with a mum who won't put her 18 month old baby on the floor to play because of a mice infestation so she spends a lot of time in her high chair. But children need floor play. As she's been placed out of borough the mum has to do the school run with her older child which takes 2 hours, and so her baby is in the push chair for much of the day. Her baby can stand up and balance but has only really been standing up in her cot."
(Specialist health visitor)*

The team have also seen the impact on children's emotional development. They spoke of a three year old whose play space was the size of a cot in the main walkway of the room, so that she was never out of view of her mother. The child had formed an insecure attachment – she became extremely upset whenever she could not see her mother, and had not developed the confidence to be out of reach, leading to concerns as to how she would cope when starting nursery.

Unable to play

The cramped, overcrowded conditions (particularly in B&Bs where families often share one room) leave little room for furniture and possessions, let alone space in which children could play.

"It's hard for my brother to run around."

(Max, aged 8, whose brother has special educational needs)

"There is no space to play."

(Jade, aged 4)

Many children want to escape the conditions inside and get out to play, but are forbidden by their parents as it is not safe to do so – whether because of the environment they are in or the people they might encounter. As a result, families can find themselves cooped up inside. The school holidays can be challenging as families lack space inside, are reluctant to play outside and may be miles away from friends or leisure facilities. Even if there are activities close by for the children to attend, the prices can be prohibitive.

"School holidays are very tight. It's very scary allowing the children to play downstairs in the communal playground – it is risky because of drug dealers, it is very hard to let my children out"

(Sophia, mother of children aged 14, 11 and 8)

Lack of security and stability

Even when a family is provided with decent temporary housing in the right location, the threat of being moved on somewhere else always hangs over their heads, depriving children of a sense of stability and security. There is a lack of data on the number of times children living in temporary accommodation are forced to move, but the Commissioner has heard of cases of families being pulled from pillar to post: one family in Cornwall with 4 children under 8 were rehoused by the council 13 times in 18 weeks.²⁴

"Day to day can be quite stressful for me as we could get a call any day telling us that we need to move again. My daughter is too young to understand most of what has happened but she has been in temporary accommodation for most of her life and knows we will have to move from the home she has known for most of that time soon..."

"Life has been pretty difficult as when we were put into a hostel we lost most of our furniture and possessions... We could not afford storage for all our furniture when we moved from our previous property so we had to leave it behind... We had to contact a charity that provided beds, wardrobes and other furniture items."

(Chloe, mother of 4 year old)

Temporary accommodation is tough on children and families but it is also costly. Councils spent nearly £1 billion on temporary accommodation in 2017-18.²⁵ The social costs associated with homelessness put pressure on other public services, including healthcare. Homelessness can also be a barrier to a child's parents being able to work, leading to further costs to the state in the form of welfare benefits.

²⁴ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cornwall-46152587>

²⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/jan/01/councils-ripped-off-by-private-landlords-experts-warn>

Not all homeless families have a right to accommodation from the Housing Department

Many families who are homeless are placed in temporary housing by the housing department while they wait for permanent accommodation, which is provided under the Housing Act. However not all families are eligible for accommodation under the Act. Families with No Recourse to Public Funds (those subject to immigration control) are not eligible for housing – only advice and information.

Families might also be judged to be “intentionally homeless” if they left their home when they could have stayed, if they failed to pay their rent despite it being judged affordable, or if they were evicted because of their behaviour. The line between intentional and unintentional homelessness can be blurred: a case was brought to the Supreme Court in January 2019 after a single mother was treated as intentionally homeless because she could not afford to use her non-housing benefits to cover the £35 weekly shortfall between her Housing Benefit and her rent²⁶. Families found to be intentionally homeless are also not entitled to long term housing under the Housing Act.

When a family is found ineligible for accommodation under the Housing Act, the housing department is required to provide emergency accommodation for a reasonable period (normally a few weeks) to give the family time to find somewhere to go, and to provide advice and assistance with this process.

If the family is still homeless after that point, their case will likely be referred to children’s services. Under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, it is the general duty of a local authority to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need. Children’s services can therefore assist families with housing problems in order to fulfil section 17 of the Act and ensure that children do not end up on the streets.

In theory the Children Act provides an important safety net for homeless families, but whether it operates as such in reality is another question:

- > Councils are not required to report on families housed by children’s services, so there is no central data to monitor whether the numbers of children in this group are increasing or what type of accommodation they are housed in.
- > The regulations setting out the kind of accommodation homeless families should be housed in do not apply to families accommodated by children’s services, so councils can decide what counts as suitable housing.²⁷ For example, there is no legal limit on the length of time a family can be housed in a B&B.
- > Children’s services lack expertise in housing, and some do not work closely with housing departments. Without this expertise and contacts with local landlords children’s services are more likely to place children in substandard (and often expensive) accommodation such as B&Bs.
- > Some councils are reportedly ignoring their duty to help and only complying when

²⁶<http://www.cpag.org.uk/content/single-mother-forced-homelessness-housing-benefit-shortfall-goes-supreme-court>

²⁷https://england.shelter.org.uk/legal/housing_options/young_people_and_care_leavers/social_services_duties_to_children_in_need/accommodation_under_section_17#_edn3

forced by legal action.²⁸

- > Although the Department for Education is responsible for Children in Need, there is not a clear focus at a national level on children whose needs are housing-related. There is no central collection of data about these children and there was no mention of housing or homelessness in the Department's recent Children in Need review.

²⁸ London charity Project 17 found that of the families they assisted who had been denied support from the council, 90% were then offered accommodation once legal action was taken citing the Children Act. In the meantime families found themselves sleeping on the streets, in A&E waiting rooms, night buses and police stations

The housing shortage and welfare reform are driving the crisis

A family can become homeless for many reasons, whether they be personal circumstances such as mental health problems or because of wider economic issues which affect people's opportunities. Family homelessness in England today is primarily a result of these structural factors, including the lack of affordable housing and recent welfare reforms.²⁹

A lack of affordable housing

It is no secret that England is facing a housing crisis. The social housing sector has been in decline for many years: between the early 1980s and early 2010s, the proportion of Britons living in social housing halved – a result of Right to Buy and a drop in the amount of social housing being built.³⁰

The decline in social housing has forced many households, including families, into the private rented sector. High rents are a major problem: between 2011 and 2017 rents in England grew 60% quicker than wages.³¹ Simply put, many families cannot afford their rent. It is telling that over half of homeless families in England are in work.³²

The point at which a family leaves one tenancy and tries to secure a new one is a critical time. There has been an explosion in the proportion of homelessness cases caused by the end of an assured shorthold tenancy (AST)³³: from 15% in 2010/11 to a peak of 31% in 2016/17.³⁴ Families may be unable to find another property in their local area that is affordable given how quickly rents are rising. In addition, landlords frequently discriminate against Housing Benefit claimants – half say they would not let to someone in receipt of Housing Benefit.³⁵

The Government recently announced that section 21 no-fault evictions³⁶ are to be banned, which will mean greater security for families who are able to afford their rent and stay in their home. However, for families who are unable to keep up with their rent payments or tolerate rent hikes, the financial costs of moving will remain, putting them at risk of homelessness.

Welfare reform

As the NAO noted, the rise in family homelessness is likely to have been driven by the Government's welfare reforms.³⁷

In 2017 around 1 in 4 private tenants were receiving Housing Benefit to help them meet the cost of

²⁹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/793471/Homelessness_-_REA.pdf

³⁰<https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/bns/BN178.pdf#page=9>

³¹<https://blog.shelter.org.uk/2018/08/flatlining-wages-surgings-rents-and-a-national-affordability-crisis/>

³²https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_releases/articles/over_half_of_homeless_families_in_england_are_in_work_shock_new_figures_show

³³ An AST is the most common type of tenancy for people renting from a private landlord or letting agent.

³⁴<https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN06856>

³⁵<https://www.moneywise.co.uk/news/2019-03-01/half-landlords-wouldnt-let-to-tenants-housing-benefits-the-government-plans>

³⁶ Section 21 notices allow landlords to evict renters without a reason after their fixed-term tenancy period ends.

³⁷<https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Homelessness.pdf>

renting.³⁸ The amount received in Housing Benefit (or the housing costs element of Universal Credit) is determined by the Local Housing Allowance (LHA), which varies by area to reflect local rent levels. In 2011 LHA rates were capped, and a four year freeze in LHA began in 2016. This has meant that as private rents have continued to rise, the amount of Housing Benefit families access has not risen accordingly.

Another factor has been the benefit cap, which limits the overall amount a household can claim in benefits each year. Research has shown that tenants on the benefit cap are two-thirds more likely to be in rent arrears than all other tenants receiving Housing Benefit.³⁹

Further challenges are being posed by Universal Credit. The delay experienced by claimants before they receive their first payment is pushing some into arrears. Analysis for the Children's Commissioner's Office shows that the 5 week wait for their first UC payment pushes 70% of families from a cash surplus to cash shortfall.⁴⁰

³⁸ <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Homelessness.pdf>

³⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/nov/03/benefit-cap-leaves-poor-families-with-mounting-debt-study-shows>

⁴⁰ [https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/welfare%20publications/Managing%20Money%20on%20Universal%20Credit%20\(FINAL\).pdf](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/welfare%20publications/Managing%20Money%20on%20Universal%20Credit%20(FINAL).pdf)

Prevent families from becoming homeless in the first place

What more needs to be done

The best outcomes for children, families and wider society are achieved when families are prevented from becoming homeless in the first place and councils do not have to place them in expensive temporary accommodation.

Recent action by government

A cross-government Ministerial Taskforce was created in 2017, focusing initially on rough sleeping. It has been stated that the remit will be expanded to drive progress across all forms of homelessness and homelessness prevention.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, includes:

- > A stronger prevention duty - councils must help a household threatened with homelessness within 56 days, regardless of their priority need status, local connection or intentionality.
- > A new relief duty – requiring councils to take reasonable steps for 56 days to relieve homelessness, regardless of whether the household is in priority need.
- > A duty to provide advice and information about homelessness to everyone within the area.
- > A Duty to Refer - a range of public bodies (including children’s services and youth offending teams) must notify local authorities of people they think are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

What more needs to be done

In the medium and long term the Government must invest properly in house-building so that there are more affordable homes. Shelter has called for 3.1 million new social homes to be built over the next 20 years, including 1.27 million for homeless households and others in the greatest need.⁴¹ Analysis shows that the economic benefits of this programme would outweigh the initial costs, through recouped Housing Benefit and increased tax revenue.

8 in 10 councils have seen an increase in homelessness presentations since the Homelessness Reduction Act came into effect. 6 in 10 said it had increased the number of people in temporary or emergency accommodation, and the same proportion said it had increased the length of time spent in that accommodation.⁴² Although it is positive that more households are receiving homelessness support, it is yet to be seen whether the ultimate aim of the reforms to reduce the number of people needing support in the first place will be achieved. Structural forces such as welfare reform and the housing shortage mean there are very few levers for councils to pull in order to prevent a family from becoming homeless.

In the short term, the Government should provide more funding to help councils to fulfil their stronger

⁴¹https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_releases/articles/three_million_new_social_homes_key_to_solving_housing_crisis2

⁴²<https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/lga-councils-warn-rise-temporary-accommodation-use-homelessness-reduction-act>

prevention duties.⁴³ It should immediately address welfare changes which are tipping too many families into rent arrears. LHA rates must be unfrozen and increased to match rising rents and the benefit cap lifted. Families on Universal Credit should receive their first payment straight away, not after 5 weeks.

Although funding is a crucial piece of the puzzle, more needs to be done to make homelessness prevention for families a success:

- > As the key cross-government body charged with reducing homelessness, the Ministerial Taskforce should undertake a specific programme of work focused on children and families.
- > A formal target for government to reduce the number of children in temporary accommodation should be introduced.
- > The Duty to Refer, which requires certain public bodies to notify local authorities of people they think are homeless or at risk of homelessness, should be extended to schools and GPs. The duty should also be triggered earlier than 56 days before homelessness is anticipated as often that is too late for anything meaningful to be done.
- > Frontline staff across family care and support agencies should be given the training and resources they need to spot the early signs of homelessness.

Good practice by councils

> Using data to target prevention services at the local level

Some councils, including Bristol, are using predictive analysis to target prevention services. An evaluation of this work indicates it is cost-effective,⁴⁴ but that some councils are unable to access the necessary data.

It has become increasingly difficult to access Housing Benefit data as DWP is now responsible for this data under Universal Credit. DWP should review its approach to these requests and MHCLG should help councils to access data from additional sources to further improve the analytics, e.g. the prison and probation service.

> Working with other agencies to prevent homelessness

Many Trailblazer areas helped families receive support from a range of different local authority teams and external partners, like charities, reflecting the often complex causes of homelessness. For example, Newcastle launched a multi-disciplinary team consisting of a Jobcentre Plus work coach, a welfare rights advisor and a debt advisor. Southwark have also increased access to independent advice and information through co-locating Shelter within their Housing Options service reception area to improve residents' access to advocacy. More housing authorities should try to work with other agencies in this way.

⁴³ In the first three years of the Homelessness Reduction Act, a total of £72.7 million is being provided to councils to help them deliver on the new stronger duty to prevent homelessness, but two-thirds of council chiefs think it is insufficient to meet the requirements. So far there has been no guarantee that further funding will be made available after 2020. <http://www.nlgn.org.uk/public/2019/new-survey-on-the-one-year-anniversary-of-the-homelessness-reduction-act-councils-reveal-they-lack-the-funding-to-fulfil-their-new-statutory-duty-to-prevent-homelessness/>

⁴⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/791585/Evaluation_of_Homelessness_Prevention_Trailblazers.pdf

Develop better housing solutions for homeless families

What more needs to be done

The Localism Act 2011 allows councils to fulfil their duty to provide long-term housing to a family by finding them a private tenancy with a landlord, rather than adding them to the list for social housing and placing them in temporary accommodation in the meantime. With temporary accommodation and long-term social housing in short supply, placing families in the private sector through PRSOs can be an attractive solution to local authorities seeking to ensure that all homeless families have roofs over their heads. However, they are too often a short-term fix: the instability and unaffordability of the private rented sector means that many families offered a PRSO simply become homeless again after their 12-month tenancy expires. The Government should increase the minimum tenancy that can be offered under a PRSO from 12 to 24 months to give children more stability. More local authorities could introduce measures to ease access to the private sector, such as acting as a guarantor for families and maintaining lists of landlords who meet good standards and accept tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit.

The Government must use its review of permitted development rights, which allow office blocks to be converted to residential use without planning permission, to reverse the policy with immediate effect.

The current guidance on suitability does not go far enough. The Nationally Described Space Standards should be made compulsory, and should apply to all new temporary accommodation – new-build or otherwise. There should be new requirements on councils to inspect the quality of accommodation before they place families there so they can be assured of its suitability, and new funding provided to councils for them to do so. The guidance needs to be clear that the needs of all children must be considered paramount when determining suitability – not just the educational needs of children about to sit their GCSEs. Children should not be housed in the same accommodation blocks as vulnerable adults if kitchen and/or bathroom facilities are shared.

Finally, bed and breakfast accommodation is never an appropriate place for children to call home – not even for 6 weeks. Some councils have all but eliminated the use of B&Bs to house families altogether. Now is the time for all councils to put children first and do the same, and the Government should extend the current regulations limiting the use of private B&Bs to council-owned B&Bs too.

Good practice by councils

> Eliminating B&B use

Some councils have been able to reduce their use of bed and breakfast accommodation by developing alternative sources of accommodation. Southwark Council also emphasise the importance of cultural change, whereby booking a family into a B&B is understood by staff at all levels as a matter of last resort.

13 London boroughs have launched Capital Letters – a not-for-profit company which will procure temporary accommodation and private sector tenancies on behalf of all member boroughs. Joining forces reduces competition between boroughs, which helps contain costs as competition drives up prices.

PLACE Ltd is a not-for-profit company created by a group of London boroughs to deliver modular temporary accommodation on meanwhile sites. It is building on the success of Place/Ladywell in Lewisham: a pop-up village of 24 modular homes, created in 2016 to house homeless families who would have otherwise been accommodated in B&Bs. In contrast to most shipping containers, the two-

bedroom homes exceed the London space standard, are brightly lit and well insulated. The development incorporates shops and community spaces, including a café, providing a positive environment for children.

> Enabling families placed in the private sector to access long term social housing – not just those in temporary accommodation

Sometimes the way a local authority allocates its social housing can incentivise families to become statutorily homeless and enter temporary accommodation in the hope that they will eventually be offered a council house. This can result in worse outcomes for children, who experience the negative impacts previously described for months or years.

Camden has removed the incentives to enter temporary accommodation. Families doing so receive 100 points, whereas families who accept a homelessness prevention offer in the private rented sector and stay there for 6 months receive 200 points, meaning they have a better chance of accessing social housing than families who simply become statutorily homeless.

Improve the support available to children housed by children's services, who are often the most vulnerable

What needs to be done

Firstly, these children need to be made more visible to government. Local authorities should be required to report the number of children being housed by children's services, just as they are required to report the number being accommodated by the housing department. Similarly, the numbers being housed in B&Bs (including for longer than 6 weeks) and the numbers being housed out of area should be reported. Unless the Government begins to collect this data, the Children's Commissioner's Office will use its powers to collect it ourselves.

The standards of protection for these children also need to be strengthened. The requirements around suitability should mirror those applicable to children being housed under homelessness legislation, including the limit on using B&B accommodation only in emergencies and for a maximum period of 6 weeks.

The Department for Education must pay specific attention to children whose needs are housing-related, as a distinct group within its responsibility for Children in Need. It should work in close collaboration with MHCLG and additional relevant government departments such as DWP to ensure they receive the support they need.

Summary of recommendations

The crisis of family homelessness can no longer be ignored. Taken together, the recommendations made in this report would not only improve the state of temporary accommodation for families who need it, but reduce the number of families becoming homeless in the first place, ultimately delivering the best outcomes for children. Below is a summary of the recommendations.

Prevention

1. In the medium and long term the Government must invest properly in house-building.
2. Councils must be given clarity on future funding for the implementation of their new duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act after current funding runs out in 2020.
3. LHA rates must be unfrozen and increased to match rising rents and the benefit cap lifted.
4. Families on Universal Credit should receive their first payment straight away, not after 5 weeks.
5. The Ministerial Taskforce should undertake a specific programme of work focused on children and families.
6. A formal target for government to reduce the number of children in temporary accommodation should be introduced.
7. The Duty to Refer, which requires certain public bodies to notify local authorities of people they think are homeless or at risk of homelessness, should be extended to schools and GPs. The duty should also be triggered earlier than 56 days before homelessness is anticipated.
8. Frontline staff across family care and support agencies should be given the training and resources they need to spot the early signs of homelessness.
9. DWP must make it easier for councils to acquire the data they need to identify families at risk of homelessness in their area. MHCLG should help councils to acquire data from other sources.
10. Local authorities should improve their joint working arrangements, whether through greater contact between the housing department and other service providers (benefits teams, third sector organisations, Jobcentre Plus, etc.) or by the creation of multi-disciplinary teams.

Improving experiences in temporary accommodation

11. The Government should increase the minimum tenancy that can be offered under a PRSO from 12 to 24 months.
12. More local authorities could introduce measures to ease access to the private sector, such as acting as a guarantor for families and maintaining lists of landlords who meet good standards and accept tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit.
13. The Government must use its review of permitted development rights, which allow office blocks to be converted to residential use without planning permission, to reverse the policy

with immediate effect.

14. The Nationally Described Space Standards should be made compulsory, and should apply to all new temporary accommodation – new-build or otherwise.
15. Local authorities should be required to inspect the quality of accommodation before placing families and be given new funding to do so.
16. Guidance on suitability needs to be clear that the needs of all children must be considered paramount, not just the educational needs of children about to sit their GCSEs.
17. Children should not be housed in the same accommodation blocks as vulnerable adults if kitchen and/or bathroom facilities are shared.
18. Local authorities must eliminate the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for housing children and families – not even in emergencies. The Government should extend the current regulations limiting the use of private B&Bs to council-owned B&Bs too.

Families housed by children's services

19. Local authorities should be required to report the number of children being housed by children's services, just as they are required to do so for children housed by the housing department. Unless the Government begins collecting this data, the Children's Commissioner's Office will use its powers to do so.
20. The standards of protection for these children should be brought in line with the protections for children housed under homelessness legislation.
21. The Department for Education must pay specific focus to children whose needs are housing-related, as a distinct group within its responsibility for Children in Need. It should work in close collaboration with MHCLG and additional relevant government departments such as DWP to ensure they receive the support they need.

Technical appendix

1. Tracking the numbers of children and families who are officially homeless longitudinally

New analysis we commissioned provides an indication of what levels of homelessness – as measured by numbers in temporary accommodation (TA) – look like when measured longitudinally. The analysis used monthly Housing Benefit records⁴⁵ from a sample of 25 local authorities, which provide information on every household in that local authority who is claiming Housing Benefit in that month, as well as a flag for whether that household is living in TA at that point in time.⁴⁶ Importantly, these monthly snapshots can be stitched together, thereby showing how many families spend how long in TA.

Using records from the 2017 calendar year, the analysis found that across the 25 local authorities:

- > Roughly 55,000 children (in 28,000 households) were in TA at a specific point in 2017.⁴⁷ This is equivalent to 2.7% of the dependent children in those LAs.
- > Around 62,000 children (in 30,000 households) had been in temporary accommodation at some point in the last 12 months. This works out to 3% of the dependent children in those areas.
- > Around 23,000 children (in 11,000 households) had been in TA for period of at least 6 months, and 2,700 children (in 1,300 households) had been in TA for at least 12 months.

These figures are from a small sample of local authorities (around 1 in 6), but can be extrapolated to provide an indicative sense of how many children in England as a whole ever lived in TA in the last 12 months, or have done so continuously for at least 6 or 12 months. This is done by scaling up the above figures in proportion to the snapshot number of children living in TA in those 25 local authorities. Thus this analysis assumes that the *ratios* between the numbers of children living in TA any point / continuously and the number living in TA at a point in time, can be applied across England more generally.

The table below shows these potential national estimates.

Estimated national total of:		
Dependent children who have lived in TA:	Children	Households with children
At any point in last 12 months	137,000	65,000
Continuously for at least 6 months	51,000	25,000
Continuously for at least 12 months	6,000	3,000

Note: Estimates are for 2017 and are rounded to nearest 1,000.

⁴⁵ Specifically, the data were combined Single Housing Benefit Extract records along with Council Tax Reduction records

⁴⁶ All households in temporary accommodation who claim support for housing costs will do so via Housing Benefit. Therefore this data source, while not the official source of statistics on TA, should capture all households in TA in a given local authority.

⁴⁷ This is an average of the monthly snapshots in 2017.

From this analysis, we learn that a potential total of around 137,000 may have been living in temporary accommodation at some point in the last 12 months (based on data from 2017). If so, then this represents roughly an extra 10,000-15,000 children in temporary accommodation, over and above the snapshot number who are living there at a given point in time.

The estimates also suggest that a potential national total of around 50,000 children in 2017 had been living in TA for six consecutive months – this works out to around 2 in 5 children in TA at a given point. And a smaller group of around 6,000 children in 2017 had lived in TA for 12 consecutive months – this works out to around 1 in 20 children in TA at a given point.

These estimates are extrapolations from a sample of 25 local authorities, so they are only an informed guess about what the actual national figures could be. The analysis would be improved by using Housing Benefit records from a wider sample of local authorities.

Despite that, it is also likely that some of these figures could actually be an underestimate, due to underlying data quality issues (namely an issue with how TA status was recorded in the Housing Benefit databases). This particularly affects the estimation of how many children were continuously in TA for 6 or 12 months. Those figures should therefore be treated as lower bounds: they could be considerably higher, although the exact magnitude of the bias is unknown.

2. Children facing homelessness risks

Other analysis we commissioned looked at the numbers of children and families not officially homeless, but perhaps hidden homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless in future.

The analysis used surveys of households – namely the Wealth and Assets Survey or the English Housing Survey – so the numbers presented below are effectively best guesses by extrapolating from those samples, rather than official exact figures. There will be margins of error around all of these estimates, which (for brevity's sake) are not shown here. Nevertheless we believe these to be the best available estimates.

2.1 Children and families who may be hidden homeless

This analysis used the English Housing Survey 2016-17.⁴⁸ It considered how many children and families in England might show signs of being homeless, or at risk of being homeless, without being officially homeless and living in temporary accommodation.

The analysis indicated that in 2016-17:

- > 1.1% of households with children reported that were living in another household's accommodation as an additional family, and could not afford to buy or rent their own housing. We describe these families as 'hidden homeless'. Across England as a whole, this would equate to 71,000 households with children, containing 92,000 children.
- > 3.2% of households with children reported that they had approached the local council with concerns about becoming homeless. Across England as a whole, this would equate to 217,000 households with children, containing 414,000 children.

⁴⁸ Source: Department for Communities and Local Government. (2018). *English Housing Survey, 2016-2017: Household Data: Special Licence Access*. [Data collection]. UK Data Service. SN: 8386, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-8386-1>. For more information about this survey and its findings, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-housing-survey-2016-to-2017-headline-report>.

- > 2.9% of households with children reported that they had asked the local council to accept them as homeless. Across England as a whole, this would equate to 193,000 households with children, containing 369,000 children.
- > Around 23% of these households that their homelessness application had not been accepted by the council. Across England as a whole, this would equate to 45,000 households with children, containing 74,000 children.

It should be borne in mind that these figures come from analysis of the English Housing Survey 2016-17, and therefore are not current (but are the most recent available).

2.2 Children in families at financial risk of becoming homeless in future

This analysis used the Wealth and Assets Survey 2014-16.⁴⁹ It considered how many children and families in England faced significant financial risk of becoming homeless in future, by estimating how many children are in households which are struggling to keep up with housing or living costs.

The analysis indicated that over this period:

- > 2.7% of households with children had reported having fallen behind with rent or mortgage payments. Across England as a whole, this would equate to 184,000 households with children, containing 375,000 children.
- > 3.0% of households with children reported that they spent at least 60% of their income on rent or mortgage payments. Across England as a whole, this would equate to 199,000 households with children, containing 336,000 children.
- > 2.2% of households with children reported that they had applied for insolvency proceedings in the last year. Across England as a whole, this would equate to 147,000 households with children, containing 265,000 children.
- > 6.3% of households with children reported that they had sought advice regarding debt concerns. Across England as a whole, this would equate to 422,000 households with children, containing 816,000 children.
- > 7.3% of households with children reported that they “always ran out of money before the end of the week or month”. Across England as a whole, this would equate to 491,000 households with children, containing 913,000 children.
- > 11.7% of households with children reported that they “would last for less than a week if their income dropped”. Across England as a whole, this would equate to 841,000 households with children, containing nearly 1.6 million children.

It should be borne in mind that these figures come from summary analysis of a survey carried out between 2014 and 2016. These estimates are not current, therefore, but they are the most recent available.

⁴⁹ Source: Office for National Statistics, Social Survey Division. (2018). *Wealth and Assets Survey, Waves 1-5, 2006-2016*. [Data collection]. 8th Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 7215, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-7215-8>. For more information about this survey and its findings, see <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/incomeandwealth/bulletins/wealthingreatbritainwave5/2014to2016>



Children's Commissioner for England
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Tel: 020 7783 8330
Email: info.request@childrenscommissioner.gov.uk
Visit: www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk
Twitter: @ChildrensComm