

Far from alone

Homelessness in Britain in 2017

November 2017

FAR FROM ALONE

Homeless is not inevitable but remains an all too persistent problem in Britain in 2017. New evidence from Shelter sets out the full scale of recorded homelessness. While this shocking figure rises (4% since 2016), many households are stuck in Temporary Accommodation, where one in three will still be next Christmas. These worrying trends have prompted us to launch an emergency appeal and demands ambitious new direction from government to tackle the underlying causes of homelessness.

What is homelessness?

Rough sleeping is the most visible manifestation of homelessness and is what many people think of when asked to consider what it means to be homeless. The legal definition is, however, broader and captures the experience of many homeless families who are hidden away out of sight but without a home of their own or certainty as to where they will be sleeping in the near future.

Legally, someone is homeless if they do not have a right to occupy accommodation or if the accommodation is of such poor quality that they cannot reasonably be expected to stay there.¹ The legal definition dates back to the landmark Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 and applies to England, Scotland and Wales.

How many people are homeless?

Shelter has calculated that there are 307,000 people recorded as homeless in Britain. This includes people identified as rough sleepers, single people in hostels, households owed a statutory homeless duty by a local authority and homeless households being accommodated by social services (figure obtained by a Freedom of Information (Fol) request).²

¹ Current legal definition of homelessness in England (Housing Act 1996, s.175)

(1) A person is homeless if he has no accommodation available for his occupation, in the United Kingdom or elsewhere, which he—

(a) is entitled to occupy by virtue of an interest in it or by virtue of an order of a court,

(b) has an express or implied licence to occupy, or

(c) occupies as a residence by virtue of any enactment or rule of law giving him the right to remain in occupation or restricting the right of another person to recover possession.

(2) A person is also homeless if he has accommodation but—

(a) he cannot secure entry to it, or

(b) it consists of a moveable structure, vehicle or vessel designed or adapted for human habitation and there is no place where he is entitled or permitted both to place it and to reside in it.

(3) A person shall not be treated as having accommodation unless it is accommodation which it would be reasonable for him to continue to occupy.

² Compiled from official statistics on temporary accommodation (as at Q2 2017) and rough sleeping (Autumn 2016). TA figures adjusted to estimate total number of people (adults and children), rather than households. Figures on bed spaces in hostels obtained from Homeless Link. Freedom of Interest request submitted to Local Authorities for the number of individuals provided with TA under the obligations of the Children's Act (analysis by Shelter).

This is a conservative estimate, due to assumptions about household size, assumptions about how hostel beds are occupied, flaws with the rough sleeping count and a partial response by local authorities to our FOI.

In addition, there will be further households who are legally homeless but who have not been recorded by the authorities. Many of these will be sofa surfing with friends and family. Previous research suggests that 14% of the population has experienced homelessness themselves, including sofa surfing, at some point.³

Across the population as whole, this means that at least one in 200 people are currently homeless.

Table 1: National and regional results

People recorded as homeless, as at Q2 2017						
Region	Number of people living in TA [1]	Number of people rough sleeping [2]	Number of people in single homeless hostel (minus voids & overlap with statutory) [3] plus number of people in social services TA [4]	Total homeless people [1+2+3+4]	Total people [5]	Rate (1 in x)
North East	991	45	1,361	2,397	2,636,848	1,100
North West	6,355	313	2,686	9,354	7,219,623	772
Yorks & Hum	2,519	172	2,122	4,813	5,425,741	1,127
East Midlands	3,953	255	2,228	6,436	4,724,437	734
West Midlands	18,063	289	2,545	20,897	5,800,734	278
East	17,334	604	2,453	20,390	6,130,542	301
London	159,680	964	3,721	164,365	8,787,892	53
South East	23,547	956	3,108	27,611	9,026,297	327
South West	8,008	536	2,711	11,259	5,515,953	490
England	242,820	4,134	21,376	268,330	55,268,067	206
Great Britain	280,736	4,447	22,048	307,231	63,785,900	208

³ A poll of 2,000 UK adults commissioned by Homeless Link in December 2013, found that 32% of people have experienced homelessness (including sofa surfing and staying with friends) or know someone who has experienced homelessness. 14% had experienced it themselves, 20% knew someone else who had experienced it, 2% said they had both experienced it and knew others who had."

Sources: [1] Calculated from DCLG Homelessness statistics Q2 2017, Households that are homeless, owed a legal duty and living in TA, estimated as people (adults and children) [2], DCLG Homelessness statistics: Rough Sleeping, Autumn 2016 (latest available) [3] Single bed spaces in hostels, Homeless Link, 2016. 10% has been taken off the totals to account for voids and the number of single people in TA from the statutory figures are subtracted to ensure a conservative estimate with no double-counting. [4] Results of an FOI by Shelter requesting the number of families owed a duty by Social Services and housed in TA under Children's Act legislation. Less than 50% of areas responded, so this is a very conservative figure. People figure calculated by applying average family size from [1], [5] ONS mid-year population estimates for 2016. Estimates for Scotland and Wales calculated by applying average number of people per household in TA in England to respective figures. Figure has risen by 13,000 people in one year, when compared with an equivalent for Q2 2016.

The risk of homelessness varies considerably by geographical location. In the worst affected areas, one in 25 people are homeless. London has the highest proportion of homeless households but pressure zones are also apparent in Luton, Birmingham and Manchester.

Figure 1: rate of homelessness ranked by local authority area

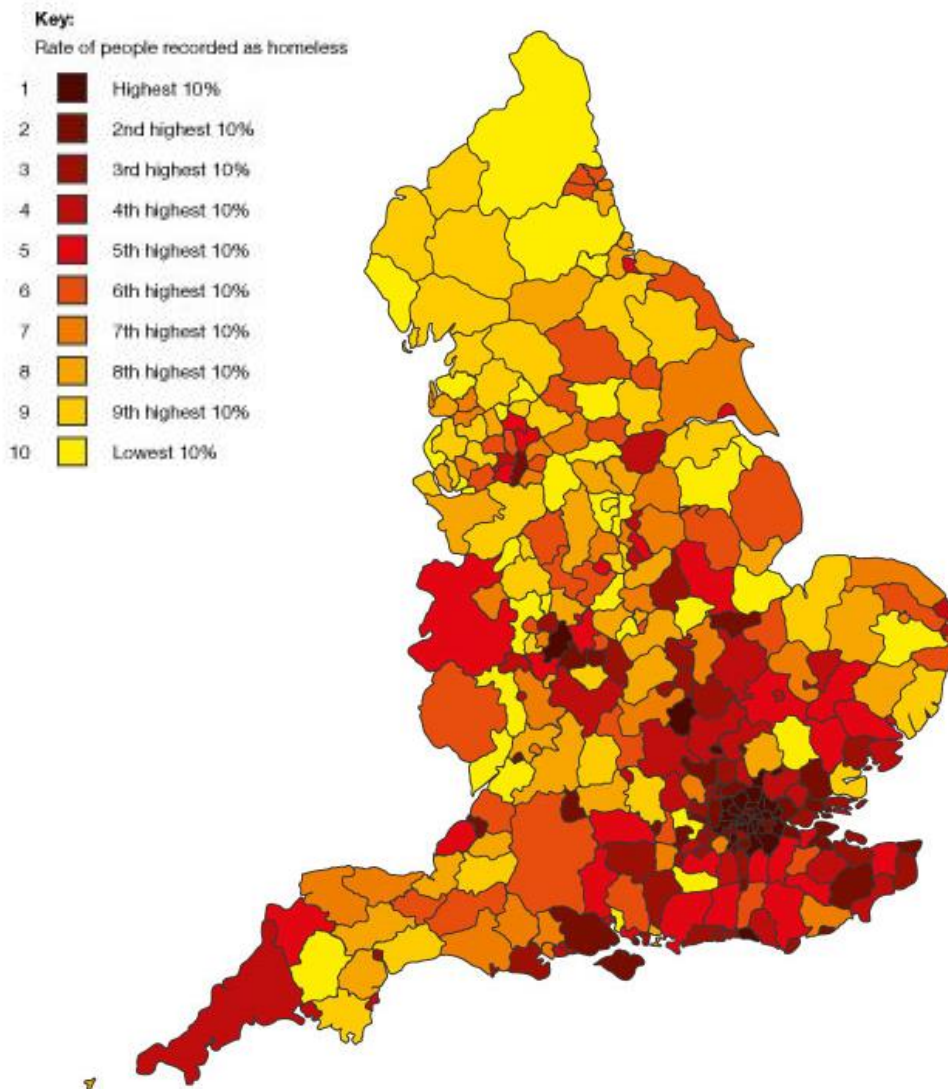


Table 2: Top 50 areas with highest rates of recorded as homelessness (comprises temp. accommodation and rough sleeping figures only)

Local Authority	Region	Number of people living in TA	Number of people rough sleeping	Total homeless people	Total people	1 in x people are homeless	National Rank
Newham	London	13,566	41	13,607	340,978	25	1
Haringey	London	9,688	29	9,717	278,451	29	2
Westminster	London	7,794	260	8,054	247,614	31	3
Enfield	London	10,051	6	10,057	331,395	33	4
Kens & Chels	London	4,387	14	4,401	156,726	36	5
Waltham Forest	London	7,587	47	7,634	275,843	36	6
Brent	London	8,881	24	8,905	328,254	37	7
Barking & Dag	London	5,573	5	5,578	206,460	37	8
Tower Hamlets	London	7,417	11	7,428	304,854	41	9
Hackney	London	6,150	17	6,167	273,526	44	10
Redbridge	London	6,197	60	6,257	299,249	48	11
Lewisham	London	6,198	16	6,214	301,867	49	12
Hamm & Fulham	London	3,515	6	3,521	179,654	51	13
Luton	East of England	4,113	76	4,189	216,791	52	14
Ealing	London	6,529	27	6,556	343,196	52	15
Croydon	London	7,007	68	7,075	382,304	54	16
Barnet	London	7,011	22	7,033	386,083	55	17
Lambeth	London	5,656	17	5,673	327,910	58	18
Southwark	London	4,955	32	4,987	313,223	63	19
Brighton & Hove	South East	4,074	144	4,218	289,229	69	20
Wandsworth	London	4,590	5	4,595	316,096	69	21
Bromley	London	4,478	3	4,481	326,889	73	22
Broxbourne	East of England	1,301	3	1,304	96,779	74	23
Bexley	London	2,918	11	2,929	244,760	84	24
Birmingham	West Midlands	12,730	55	12,785	1,124,569	88	25
Kingston	London	1,910	23	1,933	176,107	91	26
Hounslow	London	2,744	34	2,778	271,139	98	27
Harrow	London	2,358	10	2,368	248,752	105	28
Milton Keynes	South East	2,358	38	2,396	264,479	110	29
Islington	London	1,916	11	1,927	232,865	121	30
Harlow	East of England	681	20	701	85,995	123	31
City of London	London	25	50	75	9,401	125	32
Havering	London	1,932	24	1,956	252,783	129	33
Slough	South East	1,092	25	1,117	147,181	132	34

Hillingdon	London	2,166	28	2,194	302,471	138	35
Watford	East of England	662	13	675	96,773	143	36
Sutton	London	1,331	8	1,339	202,220	151	37
Manchester	North West	3,433	78	3,511	541,263	154	38
Gosport	South East	527	6	533	85,363	160	39
Dartford	South East	633	9	642	105,543	164	40
Reading	South East	956	22	978	162,666	166	41
Bristol, City of	South West	2,600	74	2,674	454,213	170	42
Basildon	East of England	1,062	17	1,079	183,378	170	43
Dacorum	East of England	867	6	873	152,692	175	44
Epsom & Ewell	South East	425	3	428	79,588	186	45
Peterborough	East of England	1,021	21	1,042	197,095	189	46
Camden	London	1,254	17	1,271	246,181	194	47
New Forest	South East	886	4	890	179,236	201	48
Greenwich	London	1,379	8	1,387	279,766	202	49
Chelmsford	East of England	817	14	831	174,089	209	50
Compiled from official statistics on temporary accommodation (as at Q2 2017) and rough sleeping (Autumn 2016). TA figures adjusted to estimate total number of people (adults and children), rather than households.							

This is placing a considerable burden on local authorities, who have a duty to rehouse homeless households who are unintentionally homeless and in priority need. The number of statutory homeless households in temporary accommodation waiting for a permanent home has increased by 43% in the past seven years, although is still slightly below its peak in the mid-00s.⁴

For many households, temporary accommodation is far from temporary: additional new analysis by Shelter estimates that 35 per cent of households in statutory TA now will still be there in a year.⁵

Why are so many people homeless?

There is now consensus that England is in the grip of a housing crisis. One consequence of this is the recent rise in homelessness.

Local authorities record the reason why statutorily homeless households lost their last settled home. This provides insight into the pressures facing homeless people. The single leading cause of homelessness is the loss of a private tenancy. Three in ten homeless households have sought statutory assistance for this reason.⁶ The number and proportion of households presenting as homeless

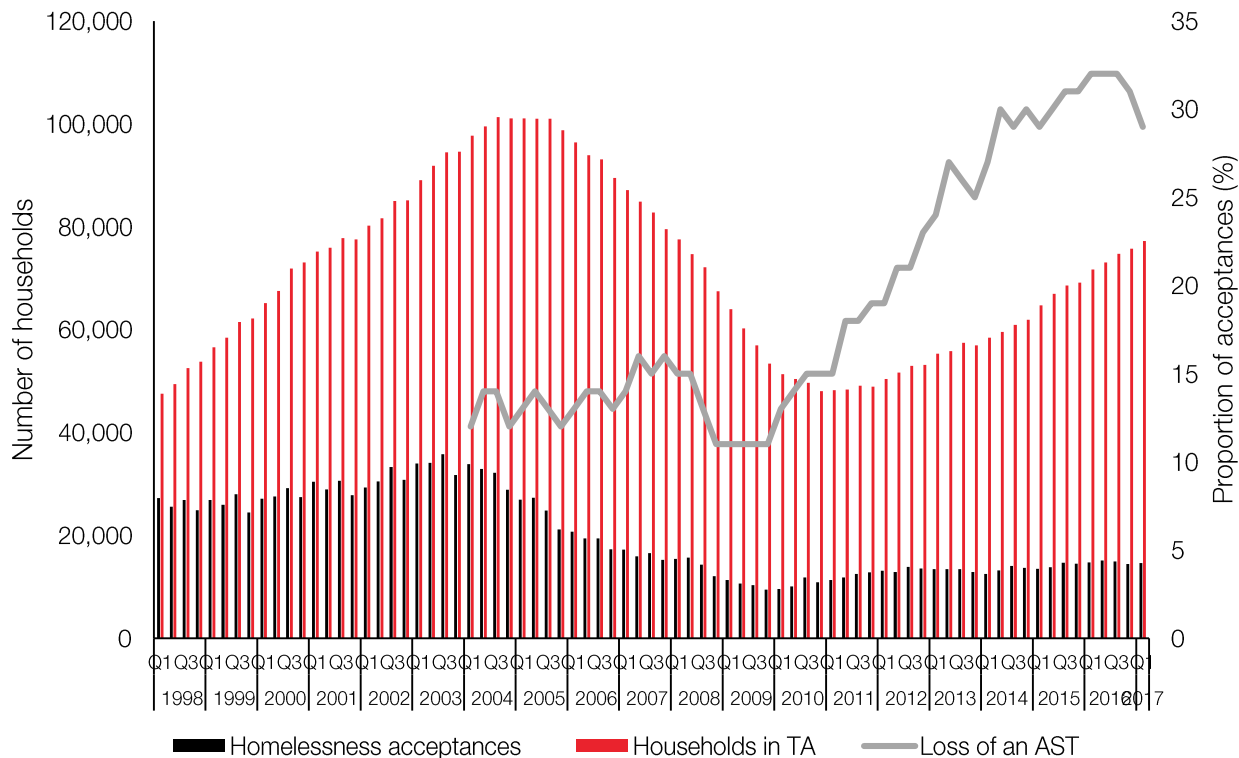
⁴ DCLG live tables on homelessness, table 775

⁵ Proportion of households that will be in temporary accommodation (TA) one year from now calculated using TA duration and stock data from DCLG live tables on homelessness, tables 775, 777 and 779

⁶ DCLG live tables on homelessness, table 774

due to the loss of a private tenancy has soared since cuts to housing benefit began in 2011.

Figure 1: Homelessness and loss of home triggered by the end of a private tenancy



Source: DCLG Live tables on homelessness

The National Audit Office recently completed its own investigation into the rise in homelessness. Its report concluded that affordability in the private rented sector is “likely to have contributed to the increase in homelessness”. Affordability has been directly effected by successive reforms to Local Housing Allowance. The NAO concluded ‘changes to Local Housing Allowance are likely to have contributed to the affordability of tenancies for those on benefits, and are an element of the increase in homelessness’.⁷

What needs to change?

Shelter can help households facing homelessness to stay in their own home or can provide advice and support to ensure that homeless households are rehoused appropriately. The charity has launched an emergency appeal to ensure it is able to help many more people to ensure no one faces homelessness alone.

⁷ National Audit Office, Homelessness report, September 2017

But the government must play its part in tackling the underlying causes of homelessness:

- A shortage of genuinely affordable homes must be addressed by supporting investment in homes for social rent in the areas where they are needed most.
- Affordability for low income households must be improved by ending the freeze to Local Housing Allowance and re-linking support to the 30th percentile of actual rents.
- Insecurity in the private rented sector must be tackled through the provision of longer tenancies and end to no fault evictions.

Next April sees the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in England. This is a major shake-up of the legislation which will ensure that many more people have a right to local authority assistance to help relieve or prevent their homelessness. This provides an opportunity to reduce the number of homeless people, but legislative good intentions will be stymied without strategic efforts to tackle the root causes of homelessness.

Shelter helps millions of people every year struggling with bad housing or homelessness through our advice, support and legal services. And we campaign to make sure that, one day, no one will have to turn to us for help.

We're here so no one has to fight bad housing or homelessness on their own.

Please support us at shelter.org.uk

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