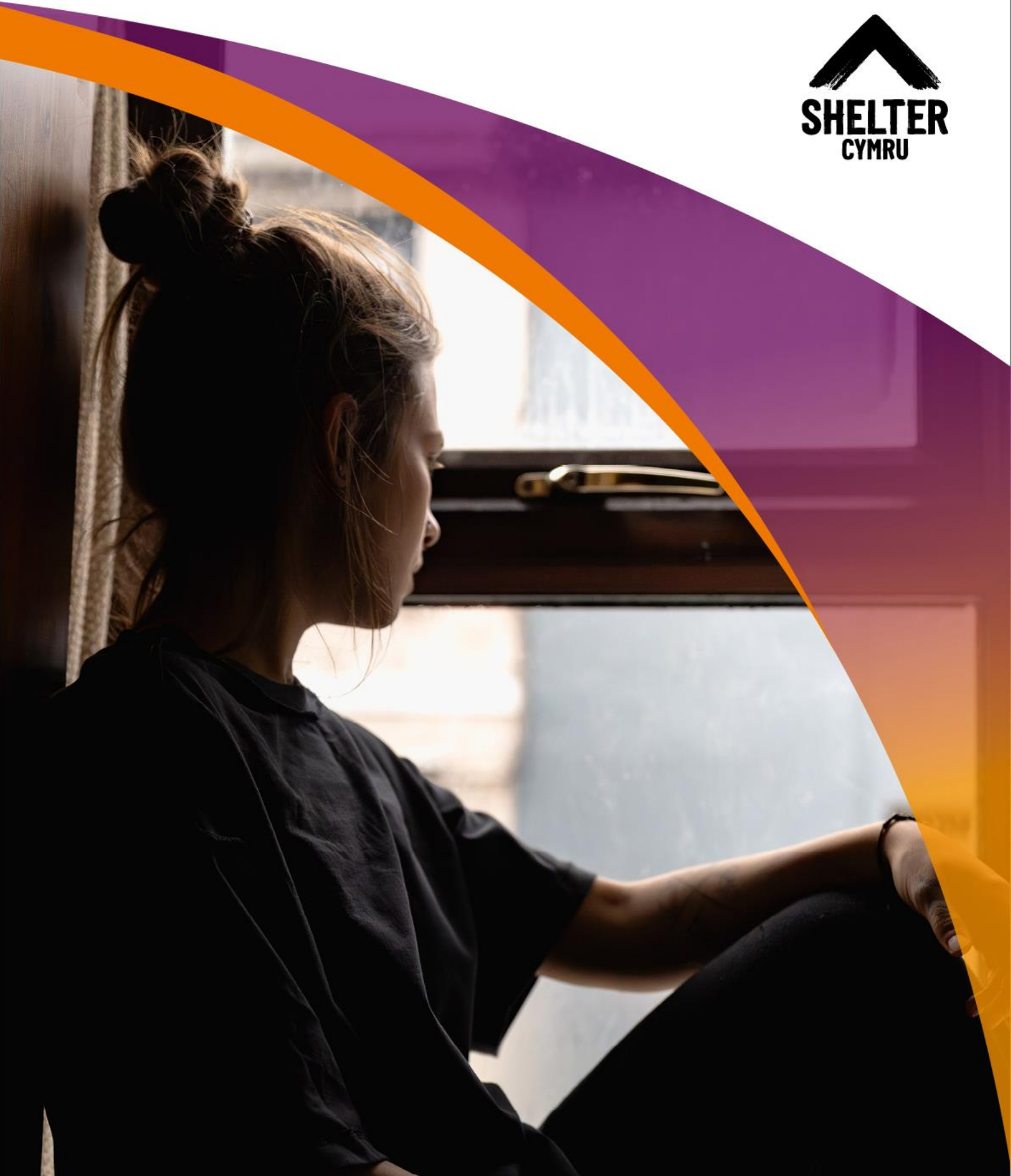


Nowhere to call home: Understanding our housing crisis. Living in temporary accommodation

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September 2024


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About the author

Wendy Dearden is Senior Policy and Research Officer at the Bevan Foundation

Acknowledgements

The research has been conducted in partnership with Shelter Cymru, Wales's nation homelessness charity

Shelter Cymru help thousands of people each year across the country who are affected by the housing emergency by offering free, confidential and independent advice.

They also campaign to defend the right to a safe home and fight the devastating impact the housing emergency has on people and society.

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Executive Summary

The housing crisis in Wales continues to hit hard, with the record numbers of households in temporary accommodation being clear evidence of its human cost. Latest figures show that one in every 215 households in Wales now live in temporary accommodation. This includes over 3,000 children - nearly six in every 1,000 children in Wales. Local authority services are buckling under unprecedented demand.

Whilst temporary accommodation is an important lifeline at a time of crisis, it can never be a place to call home. We often see and hear about the numbers of people in temporary accommodation, but the impact on daily life for those living there is less well heard.

In this report, we bring together government statistics, local authorities' views and findings from Shelter Cymru's casework to bring to the fore the realities of living in this limbo to give a full picture of temporary accommodation in Wales today. Our intention is to demonstrate why more permanent, affordable and suitable housing is needed to enable people to move on out of temporary accommodation and into a stable, long-term home.

Who lives in temporary accommodation

In March 2024, 6447 households lived in temporary accommodation – one in 2015 of all households in Wales. In those households were 3,143 children – six in 1,000 of all children. Over the last year, the largest increase has been amongst single person households, who now comprise two-thirds of placements in temporary accommodation.

Four out of ten households in temporary accommodation are placed in bed and breakfasts (B&B). It is especially used for single person households.

The main reasons that people become homeless and enter temporary accommodation are loss of a rented home or being unable to live with family or other relatives, along with housing being unsuitable or unaffordable. Given that the offer of temporary accommodation depends on being in priority need, which includes being vulnerable due to mental or physical ill-health, it is not surprising that Shelter Cymru's casework shows that poor mental health is a significant contributing factor and that the vast majority of people living in temporary accommodation have support needs.

Life in temporary accommodation

Temporary accommodation is far from the luxurious image of a hotel. Local authorities are struggling to find and secure suitable accommodation and are often unable to comply with guidance on its provision.

Life in temporary accommodation is often not "temporary" - four out of ten people who lived in living in temporary accommodation at the end of March 2024 had been there for over 6 months and nearly one in five had been there for over a year.

Standards of accommodation are frequently low. Shelter Cymru report clients living without proper facilities for cooking and staying clean, sharing bedrooms, and damp and disrepair. Accessibility can be an issue for the large number of households with mobility needs. The cost of living in temporary accommodation can be high, as well as bringing unexpected costs such as storage of belongings. The shortage of accommodation can lead to people being placed some distance from family, schools and employment.

Living in temporary accommodation can worsen people's mental health. Restrictions on freedom of movement, concerns about personal safety and uncertainty about where and when the next move all affect people's wellbeing. Little is known about the impact of living in temporary accommodation on the increasing number of children placed there.

Moving on

During 2023-24, just 30 per cent of households were successfully moved out of temporary accommodation and into a suitable long-term home. A move into a permanent home is hindered by a shortage of social housing and affordability issues in the private rental sector. A significant minority of households (29%) leave temporary accommodation without permanent accommodation, either voluntarily or because they are asked to leave.

There appears to be a revolving door into and out of temporary accommodation, with one in five people entering temporary accommodation in June 2024 having had a placement in the previous 12 months.

Access to social housing

Improving access to social housing must underpin the step change in needed to move people out of temporary accommodation and into a long-term home. Social homes provide long-term security, have affordable and regulated rents, and provide peace of mind for the future.

A social home is the most popular choice of people in temporary accommodation. Many people had experience of renting in the private sector and were worried that the offer of a tenancy there would not provide the longer term, affordable housing that they needed to be able to get on with their lives. Some spoke from experience of having had their tenancy ended by the landlord through a no-fault eviction, or having the rent increased to an unaffordable level.

Conclusion and next steps

It is clear that too many people live in temporary accommodation that is unsuitable for their needs, and that they live there far too long. Placing ever-increasing numbers of people in temporary accommodation is also not sustainable for local authorities.

The Bevan Foundation and Shelter Cymru consider that the best way to move people on from temporary accommodation is to provide more social homes that are available to people living in temporary accommodation. Yet progress creating new social housing is falling short of the 20,000 target and is not sufficient to meet needs.

This report is the part of a wider project which aims to reduce the number of people in temporary accommodation. Over the course of three years, we will be looking at how to increase the availability of move on accommodation, covering housing supply, making best use of the existing stock, allocations policy, the planning system and access to land. Our aim is to develop a route map for Welsh Government, outlining the actions that must be taken to solve Wales' homelessness crisis.

1. Introduction

The last four years have seen people in Wales face challenges that few could have imagined at the turn of the decade. Between Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis, people and communities have come under significant pressure.

Against this context it's unsurprising that Wales is in the midst of a housing crisis. Individuals and families are being let down by our housing market, with a lack of affordable homes and wider cost of living pressures among the factors that mean many people have nowhere to call home.

New data gathered by YouGov on behalf of the Bevan Foundation found that almost one in ten (9 per cent) of the Welsh population are likely to need to move in the next six months. Over a third of them would be moving due to issues with their home, being unable to remain in it and its affordability. Reasons included the cost of bills, rent and mortgage payments, the home being in a poor state of repair and being asked to leave by their landlord¹.

Welsh Government aspires for homelessness to be rare, brief and unrepeatable², but we found that this aim is a long way from current reality. Across Wales, latest figures show that 6,447 households had been placed in temporary accommodation by their local authority (March 2024). They may have a roof over their heads but behind each number is an individual's or family's experience, often far from the luxury which some people might associate with a stay in a hotel room.

Whilst temporary accommodation is an important lifeline at a time of crisis, it is not a substitute for a permanent home. The Bevan Foundation and Shelter Cymru have been working together to increase understanding of what life in temporary accommodation is really like and why its record use is unacceptable. Annex 1 sets out how this report was prepared.

Statutory homelessness services provided by local authorities provide an essential safety net for those who are threatened with or experiencing homelessness. Depending on the circumstances they may have a duty to provide temporary accommodation until permanent housing has been found. However, the growing number of people facing homelessness has inevitably put pressure on services and the accommodation that they can provide.

This report explores the use of temporary accommodation across Wales, covering:

- the scale of its use, the accommodation used and the pressure on local authority services;
- the people who live in it and the practicalities of not having a long-term home;
- the difficulties of moving on into permanent housing.

This report is intended to raise awareness of the current situation and is part of a wider research project which will provide recommendations at a later date.

2. Setting the context

This section looks at the background for our research, trends in homelessness and the use of temporary accommodation. We also explore the pressures which local authorities are facing.

2.1 Homelessness in Wales

According to the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, a person is homeless in Wales if they, together with anyone who normally resides with them:

- Have no accommodation in the United Kingdom or elsewhere, which they have a legal right to occupy.
- Have accommodation but cannot secure entry to it, or the accommodation is a moveable structure, vehicle or vessel adapted for human habitation (such as a caravan or houseboat) and there is no place where it can be placed to provide accommodation.

The 2014 Act also specifically provides that it is not reasonable for a person to occupy accommodation if it is probable that this will lead to the person, or a member of the person's household, being subjected to abuse.

This broad definition of homelessness encompasses those who may be sofa surfing, i.e. staying temporarily with another household. In the context of preventing homelessness occurring, it also includes any households who may currently be housed but are threatened with eviction or repossession.

2.1.1 Statutory services

Following devolution, the Welsh Government's Housing (Wales) Act 2014 set out the first Welsh-specific legislation which required local authorities to assist people who are homeless with a strong emphasis on preventative action. The Act requires that local authorities assist homeless applicants who are eligible for assistance (broadly, those whose immigration status is not restricted) by:

- assessing to determine whether they are homeless or threatened with homelessness;
- taking reasonable steps to prevent homelessness or providing "relief" by help to secure accommodation;
- if homelessness has not been prevented or no suitable accommodation has been found, securing suitable accommodation for those found to be unintentionally homeless and priority need with a local connection to that authority (full duty).

Several policy changes have amended the statutory duties of local authorities, which have affected the number of households being able to ask for assistance over recent years:

- The "no one left out" approach during the pandemic – from March 2020, anyone without accommodation could expect to be temporarily housed.
- An additional priority need category – introduced in 2022 to include street homelessness and people who are vulnerable due to a health emergency.

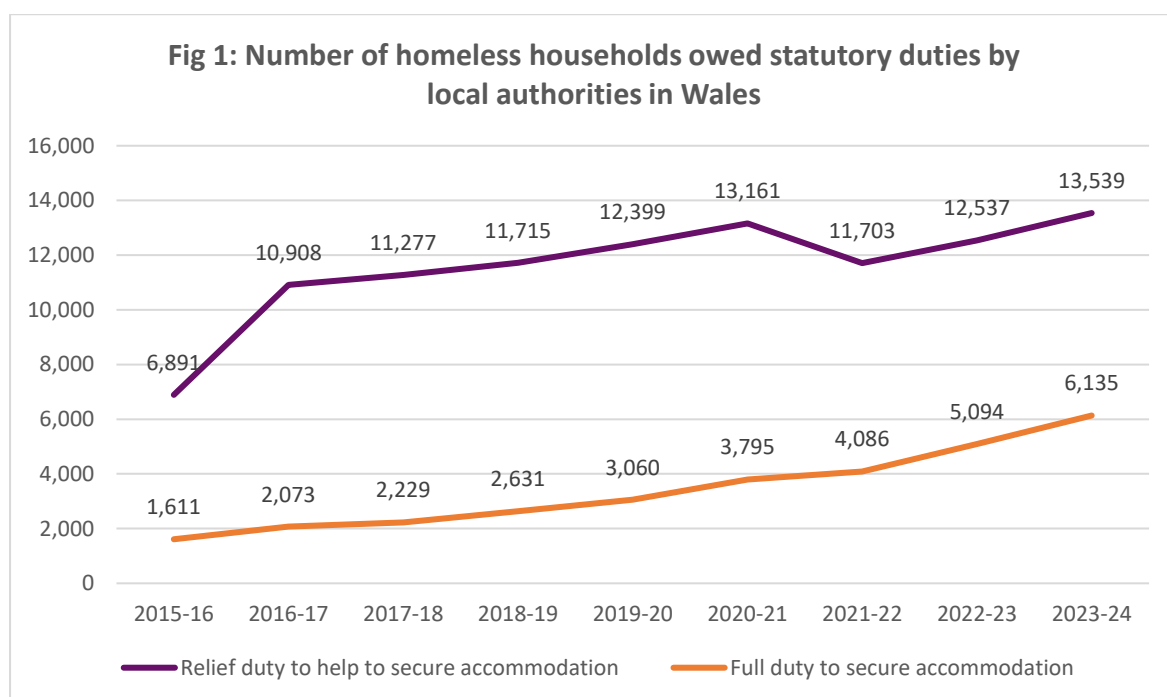
The recent Welsh Government White Paper on Ending Homelessness³ has proposed further reforms. These include removing the current "tests" that determine what duties are owed – priority need, intentionality and local connection – to ensure that everyone facing homelessness can receive support, regardless of their situation.

2.1.2 Numbers and trends

The number of households assessed as homeless and owed a relief duty to help secure accommodation increased by 8 per cent during 2023-24 to 13,539, the highest figure since the legislation began in April 2015. Overall, there was a 96 per cent increase over this eight-year period.

To put the numbers into context, local authorities owed a duty to help secure accommodation for the equivalent of one for every 100 households in Wales.

In 2023-24, 6,135 households were identified as unintentionally homeless and in priority need and being owed a full duty to accommodate, an increase of 20 per cent on the previous year. The number of households owed a full duty has increased each year since the legislation was introduced, with an overall increase of 281 per cent.



Source: StatsWales, Households for which assistance has been provided by outcome and household type
Available at - [Households for which assistance has been provided by outcome and household type \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/households-for-which-assistance-has-been-provided-by-outcome-and-household-type)

Reviewing trends in homelessness is complex due to the multistage assessment process and the potential for households to enter the homelessness system at different stages. This report therefore focuses on data from the relief and full duty stages to illustrate numbers and trends in actual homelessness.

Some households may have also received assistance from the local authority to try to prevent their homelessness. To be recorded at this stage, prevention has not been successful.

2.2 The use of temporary accommodation

A local authority must ensure that suitable temporary accommodation is available for an applicant and their household if it has reason to believe that the applicant may:

- be homeless
- eligible for help, and
- have a priority need for accommodation

This is initially for 56 days under the relief duty. If permanent accommodation has not been secured during this time, a full duty is then owed for priority need households. The local authority is therefore responsible for providing temporary accommodation, if taken up, until suitable permanent accommodation has been secured or the duty has ended for other reasons such as refusal of accommodation.

Most local authorities will also provide additional emergency accommodation for rough sleepers during periods of cold or severe weather.

2.2.1 Numbers and trends

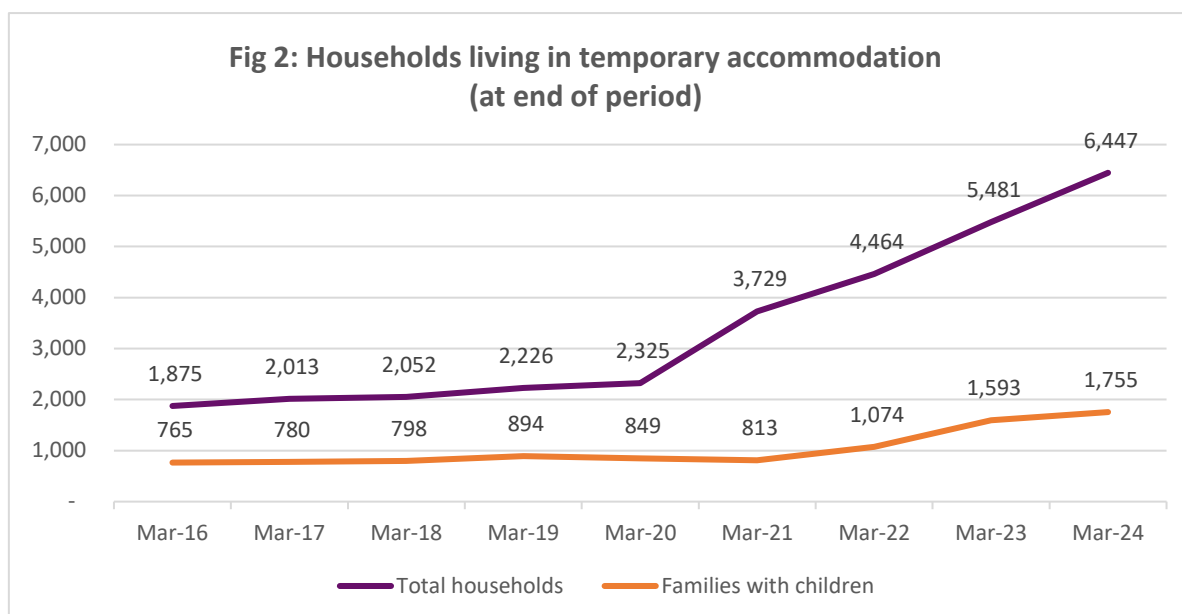
At the end of March 2024, there were 6,447 households placed in temporary accommodation by local authorities. This is an increase of 18 per cent on the numbers at the end of March 2023 (5,481). The figure represents one in every 215 households nationally. It is the highest figure recorded since the introduction of the current legislation in April 2015, having increased by 4,572 households (244 per cent) since March 2016. Key observations on data at a local authority level are:

- Cardiff reported the highest number of homeless households in temporary accommodation (1,041 at the end of March) followed by Newport (533) while Denbighshire reported the highest rate at 8.1 per 1,000 households.
- The number of households in temporary accommodation increased in 17 of the 22 local authorities between 31 March 2023 and 31 March 2024. The biggest increases were seen in Cardiff (339 households), Vale of Glamorgan (147 households) and Neath Port Talbot (138 households).
- Blaenau Gwent reported the lowest number of households in temporary accommodation (48) with Rhondda Cynon Taf reporting the lowest rate (1.4 cases per 1,000 households).

The number of families with children living in temporary accommodation across Wales also continues to grow, accounting for 1,755 households. 162 more families were in this situation at the end of March 2024 when compared to March 2023.

The actual number of children living in temporary accommodation at the end of March 2024 was 3,143. To put this into perspective, this is the equivalent of six in every 1,000 children across Wales.

More detail on the characteristics of households living in temporary accommodation is provided later in this report.



Source: StatsWales, *Households accommodated temporarily by accommodation type and household type (post 2015-16)*

Available at - [Households accommodated temporarily by accommodation type and household type \(Post 2015-16\) \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/households-accommodated-temporarily-by-accommodation-type-and-household-type-post-2015-16)

2.2.2 Types of accommodation

Generally, the following types of accommodation are used by a local authority:

- Bed and breakfasts – individual rooms in a premise otherwise used for holiday accommodation, or a room in a hotel which has been leased entirely by the local authority. Rooms may be ensuite or have shared facilities.
- Caravan parks or similar holiday accommodation –likely to be self-contained in terms of facilities but may only be available to the local authority on a seasonal basis.
- Hostels - including reception centres and emergency units which may have shared sleeping arrangements.*
- Women’s refuge – providing accommodation and support for women and children escaping domestic abuse.
- Local authority stock - accommodation owned by the local authority itself.
- Housing association stock – accommodation owned by a housing association.
- Private sector accommodation – accommodation owned by a private landlord. The arrangement to occupy may be directly with the landlord or there may be a leasing agreement between the landlord and the local authority or a housing association.

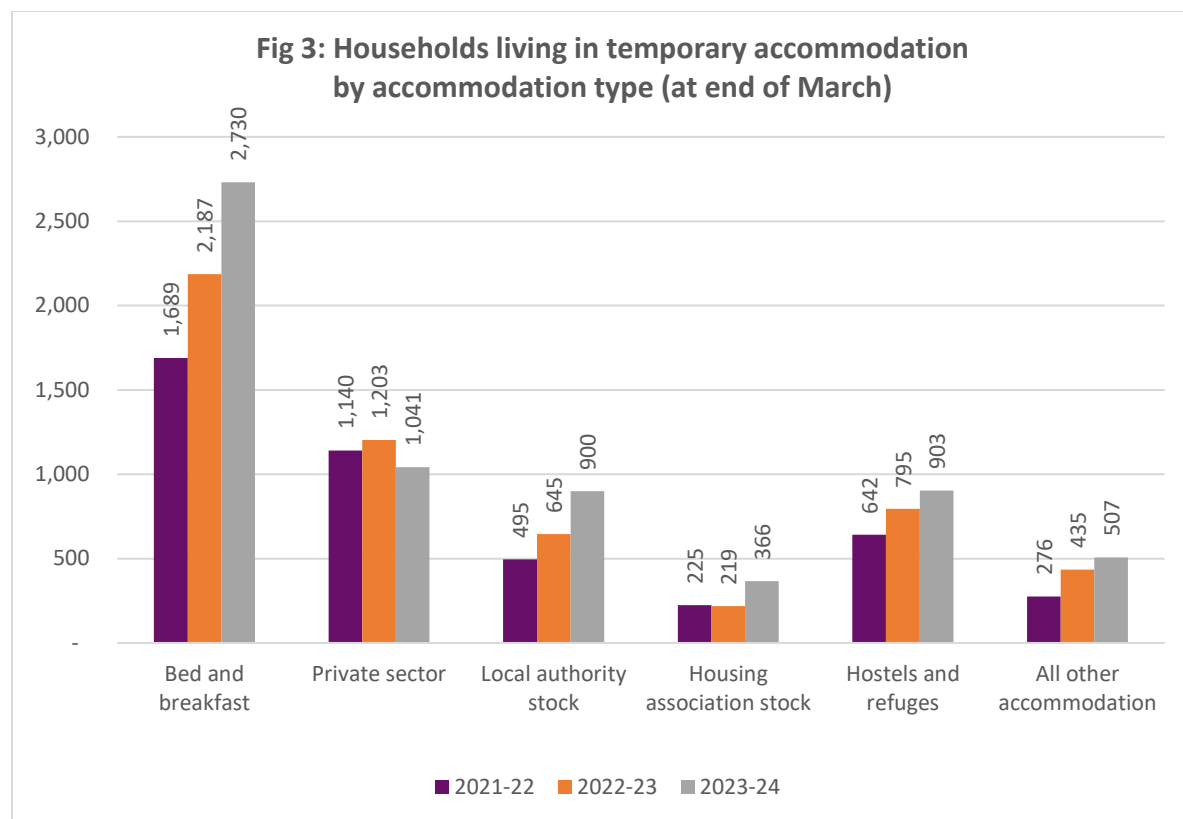
*Some hostel accommodation may be direct access and so does not require a homeless application to have been made. Others will have a specific purpose and be classed as supported accommodation.

Some temporary accommodation placements will be made in one location until permanent accommodation has been secured. Other people will find that they are moved around different types of temporary accommodation over time.

Despite Welsh Government commitments to minimise its use, bed and breakfast accommodation continues to be the main form of temporary accommodation with the number of placements in this

type of provision increasing. 42 per cent of households living in temporary accommodation at the end of March 2024 (2,730) were living in bed & breakfast accommodation. This was an increase of 543 households compared to the end of March 2023, a 25 per cent increase.

Compared to the end of March 2023, decreases were only seen in the number and proportion of households placed in the private sector.



Source: StatsWales, Households accommodated temporarily by accommodation type and household type (post 2015-16)

Available at - [Households accommodated temporarily by accommodation type and household type \(Post 2015-16\) \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/households-accommodated-temporarily-by-accommodation-type-and-household-type-post-2015-16)

2.2.3 Suitability and restrictions on use

The current Code of Guidance⁴ (2016 with updates) states that all accommodation used in respect of local authority homelessness duties must be considered suitable and reasonable to occupy for the applicant and all members of their household.

Key factors the local authority should consider include:

- the existence of hazards in the establishment and the effect they may have on the health and safety of the potential occupants;
- the appropriateness of the accommodation in terms of size;
- any medical and/or physical needs;
- any cultural, religious and social considerations;
- the location of the accommodation and ease of access to schools and other services;
- any risk of abuse or hate crime.

The use of bed and breakfast accommodation is further restricted by the Suitability (Accommodation) Order (Wales) 2014⁵ which asserts that it should only be “*used on an exceptional basis and for a limited period of time for any individual or household.*”

The order stipulates that bed and breakfast accommodation must meet minimum standards and sets time restrictions for stays by families with children, pregnant women and 16- 17-year-olds. Generally, this is a maximum of two weeks in accommodation which meets a basic standard (minimum legal requirements), and six weeks in accommodation of a higher standard (conforming to defined sizes, sharing arrangements and facility requirements).

2.3 Service pressures

Local authorities are experiencing unprecedented demand on their homelessness services and are struggling to find suitable accommodation for everyone. Shelter Cymru caseworkers told us that they are seeing a pattern of local authorities reporting that they are unable to meet the suitability requirements due to a lack of available accommodation.

Local authorities say that they’ve just got nowhere to put everyone

Shelter Cymru caseworker

Analysis of local authority responses to the recent White Paper on ending homelessness in Wales⁶ gives us a clear indication of the service pressures that they are currently experiencing.

2.3.1 The difficulty finding suitable accommodation

Some authorities were very open in the challenges they were already facing in finding accommodation placement which met the required standards.

Standards of accommodation and suitability is of course important, but we are working within a broken housing system that has been broken for decades.

Flintshire

Rural authorities such as Powys, Monmouthshire and Gwynedd also reflected on the difficulties in providing accommodation across a wide geographical area whilst realising that the ideal is to accommodate people within local communities.

There needs to be a recognition that we can only provide accommodation where we have it... clients are asked to widen their choices and have it explained that there simply may not be the housing options they require available in the area they want.

Powys

Case Study – Cardiff Council

Cardiff was proud not to have to utilise B&B type accommodation for many years. In the current housing climate however, it would be impossible to accommodate all that require it in accommodation that meets the higher standard in the short- to medium-term.

Cardiff Council declared a Housing Emergency in December 2023¹ as record numbers were seeking help from homelessness services. At that time:

- All 1,699 units of temporary accommodation in Cardiff were full, with 707 families, 806 single people, and 186 young people housed across the city.
- 28 more families were entering temporary accommodation than were exiting into permanent accommodation each month
- 88 single people were presenting to the homeless Out of Hours service each night for emergency accommodation

The Council reported that it had exclusive use of four hotels, offering 326 units of accommodation for homeless households, mainly families. A further hotel for single people was being sourced and other emergency accommodation options were being considered. The report recognised that *“the use of hotels is not ideal and therefore work has also commenced to increase the supply of more appropriate temporary accommodation”*.

Two new schemes had opened during 2023 and 2 further schemes were due to open shortly, offering 117 units in total. In addition, an extensive development would deliver 154 modular units at the Gas Works site in Grangetown.¹ *“While this is good progress there is a need to rapidly provide further temporary accommodation to address the housing emergency and to reduce the reliance on hotels.”*

2.3.2 The reliance on bed and breakfasts

Many local authorities are pragmatic that policy commitments to move away from the use of bed and breakfast accommodation would take a long time to be realised.

We agree and recognise that the use of bed and breakfast is unsuitable. However, in the current housing crisis, we know it is the form of temporary accommodation which is most readily available and most commonly used by many local authorities in order to meet the high service demand.

Rhondda Cynon Taf

Other respondents reflected on the challenges of developing alternative provision.

....the right building in the right location, community opposition, planning and funding any new support arrangements. In order to meet any new and emerging support needs existing Housing Support Grant funded services have to be reviewed and decommissioned.

Vale of Glamorgan

2.3.3 The cost of provision

The cost of temporary accommodation is a significant challenge for local authorities at a time when public sector budgets are stretched. Some local authorities also reflected on the inadequacy of funding support from Welsh Government.

The Council has operated predominantly in a “priority need blind” way since the pandemic, given WG’s [Welsh Government’s] requirement that No One Left Out continues, this has resulted in huge demands on the requirements for temporary accommodation both within community landlord stocks and within B&B type accommodation, at huge cost. Whilst additional funding has been forthcoming from WG ... the allocation was exhausted within around 6 months, leaving a burden on the local authority.

Powys

Case Study – Conwy

Conwy has been an area with significant housing pressures for some time, exacerbated by the pandemic. Since the Covid pandemic there has been an increase in households requiring temporary accommodation.

Local Housing Market Assessment 2022-27¹

The number of households moving into temporary accommodation (all types) increased 102 per cent from 237 in 2019-20 to 479 in 2022-23.

The authority’s Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan¹ reflects that the majority of Conwy’s temporary accommodation portfolio is made up of properties leased from private owners and RSLs but there is also a heavy reliance on costly bed and breakfast/hotel accommodation sourced from private providers on a flexible basis. Most of which also cater for the tourist market. There have also been a small number of occasions when temporary accommodation has been required and there has not been anything available. To resolve this, the authority have had to source holiday accommodation via the internet and pay market rates.

The cost of providing emergency accommodation has increased dramatically, from £671,000 in 2019-20 to £4.8 million in 2022-23.

2.4 Conclusion

Homelessness and the use of temporary accommodation are at record levels. Local authority services are at breaking point with spending spiralling. It appears that reality is moving in the opposite direction to the Welsh Government commitments to minimise the use of bed and breakfast accommodation and improve standards of temporary accommodation. While wider interventions are needed in the economy and housing market to address the growth in homelessness numbers as a whole, more can be done to address the acute shortage of affordable permanent accommodation and reduce the growing numbers living in temporary accommodation.

3. Living in temporary accommodation

What is it like to live in temporary accommodation and who is living there? This section hears directly from the people who have been placed there and those supporting them.

3.1 The households involved

A duty to accommodate is owed to households that are found to be, or are likely to be, in priority need. The Housing (Wales) Act 2014, with an amendment in 2022, set the following categories of priority need:

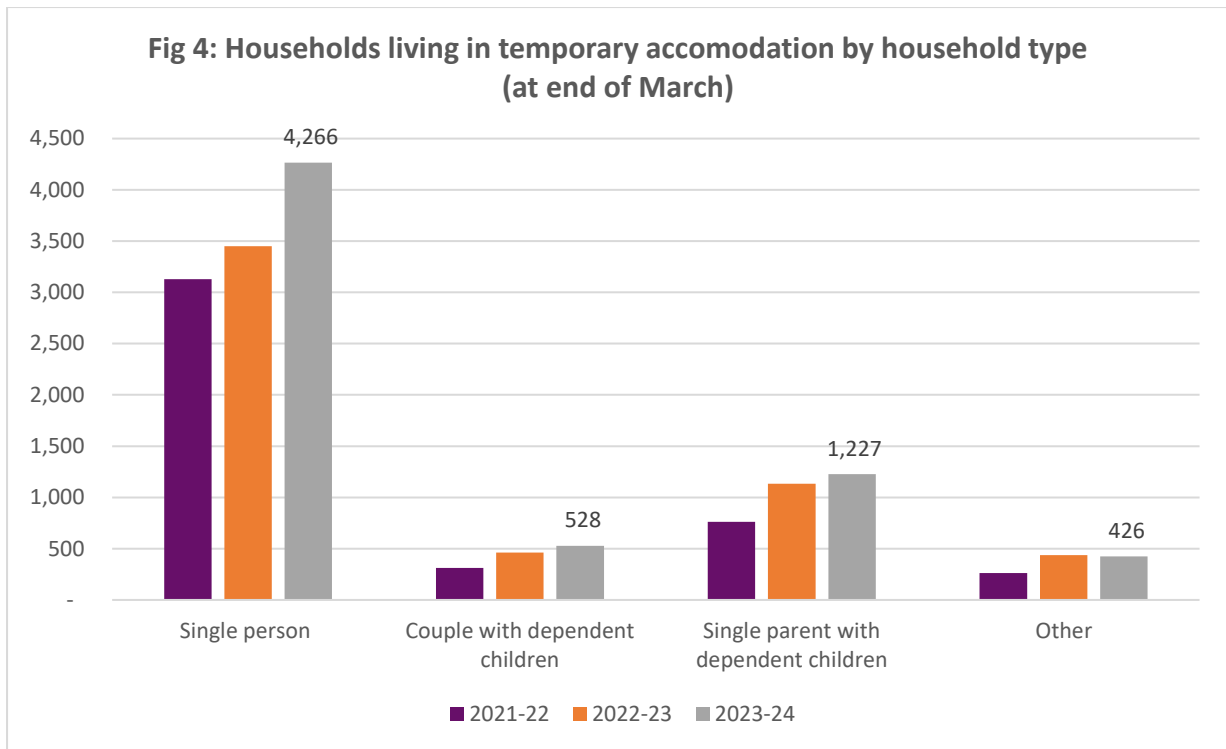
- someone who is pregnant or responsible for dependent children;
- people made homeless by flood, fire or other disaster;
- a young person aged 16 or 17, or aged 18 to 20 at risk of exploitation;
- victims of domestic violence;
- armed forces personnel who have been homeless since leaving the forces;
- someone vulnerable due to time in prison;
- someone vulnerable for some other reason, e.g. old age or disability;
- someone who is street homeless or vulnerable due to a public health emergency (added 2022).

During 2023-24, 31 per cent of homeless households owed the full duty to accommodation were found to be priority need due to having dependent children. Priority need status was granted to a further 29 per cent due to the vulnerability of a member of the household due to mental illness (11 per cent), physical disability (5 per cent), old age (2 per cent) or any other reason (11 per cent).

The number of single people living in temporary accommodation has risen the most dramatically. 4,266 single people were living in temporary accommodation at the end of March 2024, an increase of 24 per cent from the year before compared to the 18 per cent increase across all households. They accounted for 66 per cent of all households in temporary accommodation at that time. Single person households accounted for 80 per cent of bed and breakfasts placements at the end of March 2024 and 63 per cent of placements made into hostels and refuges.

1,755 of the households in temporary accommodation were households with children with 159 more households at the end of March 2024 than March 2023. This represents a 10 per cent increase. Lone parent households accounted for 19 per cent of the total accommodated, an over-representation compared to 12 per cent in the population as a whole.

Households with children were more likely to be housed in housing association accommodation (65 per cent) or local authority housing (48 per cent). A further 38 per cent were living in the private sector and 15 per cent in bed and breakfast accommodation.



Source: StatsWales, *Households accommodated temporarily by accommodation type and households type (post 2015-16)*

Available at - [Households accommodated temporarily by accommodation type and household type \(Post 2015-16\) \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/households-accommodated-temporarily-by-accommodation-type-and-household-type-post-2015-16)

3.1.1 The journey into temporary accommodation

Amongst cases where a full duty to accommodate has been accepted, 23 per cent of cases (1,425 out of 6,135) were due to losing rented accommodation and 19 per cent (1,182) were following the breakdown in a relationship. Other significant reasons included parents no longer being able/willing to accommodate (14 per cent) and other relatives or friends no longer accommodating (14 per cent).

Welsh Government statistics⁷ also give us an insight into the housing history of people who have moved into temporary accommodation (It should be noted that this data is available for people rather than households).

39 per cent of the people moving into temporary accommodation during June 2024 (537 out of 1,371) had been living in other unsuitable accommodation. 9 per cent (123) were prison leavers, 6 per cent (78) had previously been sofa surfing and a further 6 per cent (84) had moved off the street.

Shelter Cymru casework provides further details on the reasons why households in temporary accommodation may have become homeless. Analysis by peer researchers found that unsuitable housing was a recurring theme, especially for households who had been living in the private rented sector. This included homes which could no longer meet someone's physical health or mobility needs and, to a lesser extent, a lack of action from landlords to resolve serious repair concerns.

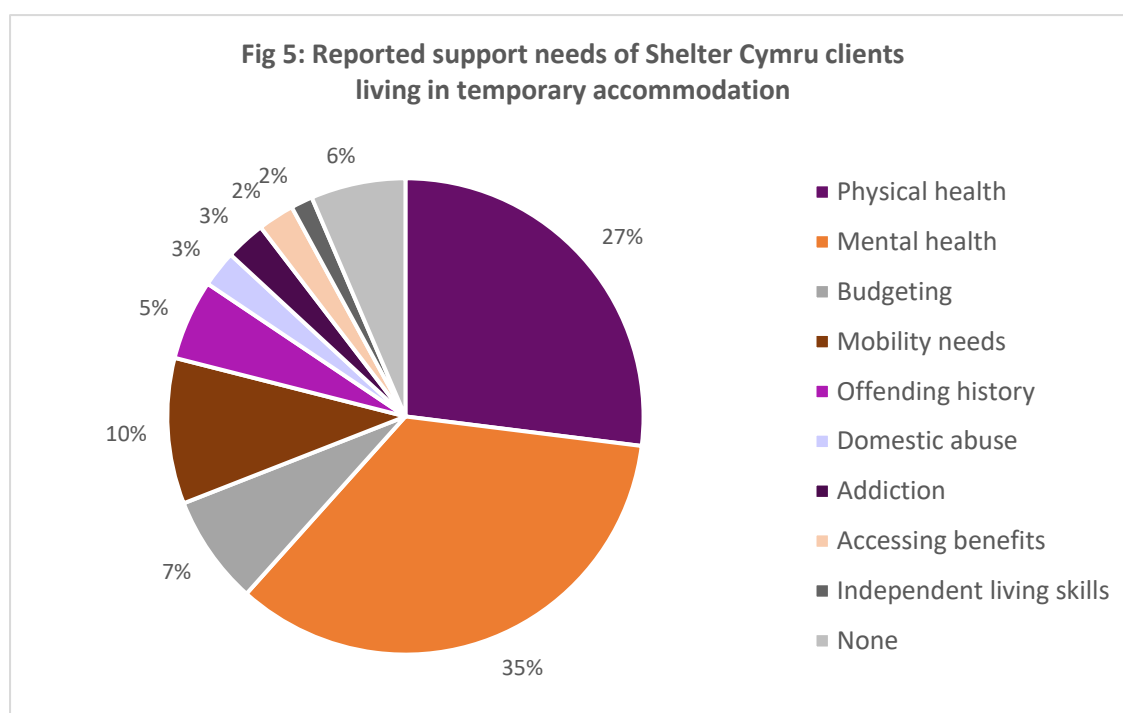
With regard to affordability, the significant majority of examples from the review were related to homes which were rented privately. Where further detail was available, rent increases, inability to secure funds for deposits and growing families being unable to afford larger properties were all highlighted as a concern

Poor mental health was a significant contributing factor that in most cases appeared in parallel with other factors such as budgeting and affordability concerns, experiences of abuse or violence, and periods of substance misuse or anti-social behaviour. Shelter Cymru caseworkers confirmed that these factors can also become barriers to finding a new home, something that will be considered further in future work.

3.1.2 Support needs in temporary accommodation

Analysis by peer researchers of Shelter Cymru’s casework with people living in temporary accommodation gives a picture of the extent to which they have support needs and the nature of these needs. Key observations are that:

- Only 26 of the 261 clients (10 per cent) did not report a support need.
- The most common support need was for mental health, 140 of the cases (54 per cent), followed by physical health, 109 of the cases (42 per cent)
- Other support needs were, in order of prevalence, mobility (15 per cent), budgeting (11 per cent), offending history (8 per cent), domestic abuse (4 per cent), addiction (4 per cent), accessing benefits (4 per cent) and independent living skills
- 121 (46 per cent) declared multiple support needs.



Source: *Shelter Cymru casework database*

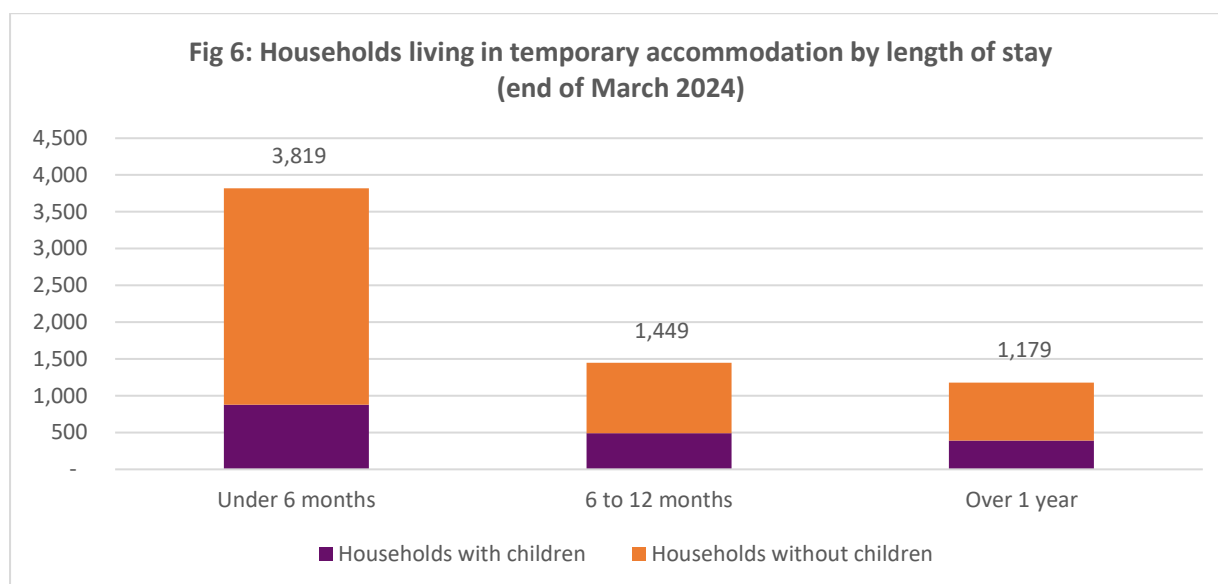
3.2 The realities of living in limbo

As Cymorth Cymru’s research⁸ highlighted, some people speak very highly of their temporary accommodation, particularly when they were receiving support while living there. Others feel a sense of community where they share accommodation with people who had similar experiences and could provide each other with peer support. However, some people made the point that even the highest quality temporary accommodation “*did not feel like a home*”.

3.2.1 Length of stay

Temporary accommodation all too often is not temporary, with prolonged stays of months and in some cases years. Out of the 6,447 households placed in temporary accommodation at the end of March 2024, 3,819 had been in temporary accommodation for under 6 months (59 per cent). A further 1,449 had been in temporary accommodation for 6 to 12 months (22 per cent), with the remaining 1,179 being placed for over 1 year (18 per cent).

23 per cent of households accommodated for under 6 months were families with children, however larger proportions of families were accommodated for 6 to 12 months and for over 1 year (34 per cent and 33 per cent respectively).



Source: *Welsh Government, Homelessness: April 2023 to March 2024*

Available at - [Homelessness: April 2023 to March 2024 | GOV.WALES](#)

Welsh Government statistics for length of stay are only available by accommodation type for single person households aged 16 to 17 and care leavers aged 18 to 21⁹. Both groups fall under the Suitability (Accommodation) Order (Wales) 2014¹⁰ for stays in bed and breakfasts to be for a maximum of six weeks. During the last quarter of 2023-24 (January – March), 162 single 16-17-year-olds and 180 care leavers were placed into bed and breakfasts, 342 people in total. More than half (52 per cent) stayed there for over 6 weeks.

The peer researchers also found six Shelter Cymru cases where families with children who had lived in bed and breakfast for longer than six weeks. Three families had been living in their accommodation for 6 to 12 months and one for 1 to 2 years.

3.2.2 Accommodation standards and facilities

While legislation aims to regulate the standards of accommodation being used and facilities provided to households, our analysis of Shelter Cymru casework reveals that there are clear cases where the standards are not being met.

- Eating

Bed and breakfast and hotel rooms are not necessarily designed to provide cooking facilities, being intended as short-term holiday accommodation rather than for longer stays. Accommodation with shared facilities can also bring challenges.

Shelter Cymru caseworkers reported a high number of clients in temporary accommodation without proper cooking and food storage facilities. This particularly affected those with specialist diets e.g. due to diabetes, or Crohn's disease or pregnant women.

There is a kettle in the room and a shared microwave that they can access in a communal area. These are the only cooking facilities. Her midwife has expressed concerns over the living conditions due to difficulty maintaining a healthy diet when pregnant.

Shelter Cymru caseworker

A lack of a fridge in the room can be an issue for those who need to store medication, while shared fridges in communal spaces can lead to food being eaten by other residents. Many families rely on costly convenience or take away food or having meals provided by family members.

There are no cooking facilities in the hotel We're spending around £500 per month on take away and convenience food

Family with 4 older children being advised by Shelter Cymru

Case Study

Sara has been homeless for two years. She currently lives in a hotel and before that, lived in a bed and breakfast for nine months following a period of sofa surfing. She is 57 years old.

Sara is diabetic and is prescribed insulin and follows a food management plan. She was recently hospitalized for four days due to a diabetic episode where her blood sugar was dangerously low.

There are no cooking facilities in the B&B where Sara is living so she's been provided with a fridge for her room so she can safely store her insulin. She regularly spends a night or two at her sister's when she's unwell so that she can rest and eat well.

"I usually go to my sisters for food. She cooks for me and gives me sandwiches in case I need to eat in the night. She worries that I won't be able to find food when I need it and I'll have a diabetic attack."

- Washing

The casework analysis also identified challenges related to hygiene and cleanliness. Cases were found where getting clean could be a challenge due to insufficient water supplies, or the shower being located in the bedroom with little privacy from other family members.

There isn't enough hot water throughout the building, so she has taken to showering at 2am in order to try to have a warm shower.

Shelter Cymru caseworker

Washing clothes was also difficult without a costly trip to a laundrette or support of family and friends.

- Sleeping

We've already highlighted the Welsh Government proposals to ban shared sleeping arrangements, which are mostly found in emergency hostel provision, due to concerns about personal safety and privacy. In their casework analysis, peer researchers identified frequent cases of families sleeping in one hostel or hotel room for lengthy periods and larger families experiencing overcrowding in their temporary accommodation.

- Damp and disrepair

The Ending Homelessness White Paper accepted that some people are experiencing accommodation which poses health and safety hazards, and we found a number of cases to confirm this.

Conditions in temporary accommodation are very poor and we need to highlight this to dispel myth of 'luxury living in hotels'.

Shelter Cymru caseworker

The researchers identified multiple instances of mould and damp in privately owned hotels, bed and breakfasts, and other properties being used as temporary accommodation. There were often difficulties in negotiating who has the responsibility for the remedial work. Inadequate ventilation, the need to dry washing or overcrowding are all contributing factors, as well as more general disrepair of the property.

Case study

"We're in a dump at the moment, we've been here three years already."

Steve lives with his eleven children, partner and their dog. The children's ages range from a toddler to twenty-one years old. They currently live in two local authority owned flats that are joined together. Despite being far too small, there are several other problems with the property. A ceiling has collapsed, all rooms have black mould which the council tried to clean but the mould returned in a few weeks. In winter, they had to bin clothes due to damp.

They had reported a crack on the back of the house and a leak in the roof that was letting water into the fourth bedroom where the kids were sleeping. The split is now through the wall, water has been coming through and part of the ceiling has collapsed so that the bedroom is no longer usable.

- Accessibility

The accessibility of the accommodation provided can be an issue for the large numbers of households with physical health and mobility needs living in temporary accommodation. We saw temporary accommodation placements that were unsuitable for residents with mobility impairments, for example with stairs, broken lifts and bathrooms that were not adapted for disabled people.

Their family were carrying them upstairs due to their disabilities, as the hotel lift is broken with no immediate plans to repair

Shelter Cymru caseworker

I interviewed an elderly disabled gentleman, he'd been put in a ground floor hotel room with a wet room which was helpful, but the fire doors to the room were too heavy for him to open

so he couldn't go out without support. He was worried about what would happen in an emergency.

Peer researcher

3.2.3 Affordability

The cost of temporary accommodation and utilities can be unaffordable as well as having other unexpected costs such as storage of belongings.

We've been helping a large family who've been housed across two flats in the same building. This has increased their bills with gas and electric costing £210 per week. School transport is costing £100 per week.

Shelter Cymru caseworker

I spoke with a woman and her daughter who were living in a caravan. She said that each month it costs them more to be in the caravan than it did in their privately rented house. The Council pay housing benefit but there is also a surcharge which she has to cover and she pays £120 a month to store her and her daughter's belongings.

Peer Researcher

Practice based feedback suggests the costs and service charges associated with this form of accommodation can result in people being faced with the choice of giving up work (in order to receive benefits which better cover these costs) so they can stay in accommodation that is intended to be a temporary step on their housing journey.

Welsh Government, White Paper into ending homelessness in Wales¹¹

3.2.4 Location

Although location is a key factor in the suitability of accommodation, the shortage of accommodation can lead to people being placed at a distance from family, schools and employment.

Their hostel is too far from the 12-year old's school for transport to be provided. She has not been issued a bus pass for public transport and family cannot afford this, so she is missing school.

Shelter Cymru case worker

Shelter Cymru caseworkers reported a small number of out of county placements and cases from north Wales who had been placed in Manchester or Birmingham. We have been told that in southeast Wales, people have been placed in Bristol.

3.2.5 The impact on mental health

Many people will have mental health support needs before entering temporary accommodation, however their stay can cause their mental health to worsen. Restrictions on freedom of movement, concerns about personal safety and uncertainty about where and when the next move will be all impact on people's wellbeing.

Living in temporary accommodation can strip a person of their dignity and leave them with little autonomy and control over their own lifestyle and future. This is particularly tough when the temporary accommodation is unsuitable and the stays are prolonged.

Expert review panel into ending homelessness

The people we see talk about their life being on hold and a feeling of being in limbo. Employment opportunities, education, relationships, and health and wellbeing are adversely affected. People have told us about their feelings of loneliness and isolation and the limits it places on their ability to socialise, find or keep work, and access services.

Shelter Cymru Policy Officer

- Freedom of movement

Often temporary accommodation which is not self-contained will have “house rules” intended to manage the behaviour of people living closely together. These are set at the discretion of the landlord and there is no formal guidance on what is deemed to be acceptable. Such rules can include no pets, no visitors and curfews.

Peer researchers identified a number of cases where Shelter Cymru clients who reported that their accommodation’s rules were isolating, unsupportive and affected someone’s ability to live independently. Work and family connections can all be adversely affected.

I have a shared custody agreement for my daughter and should have her two nights a week. She can’t stay in my place and I’ve been told I can’t stay with her at relatives those two nights. I’m worried that my custody agreement is going to breakdown.

Shelter Cymru client living in a hostel

The ability for residents in temporary accommodation to work can also be affected by restrictive curfew times – if shifts do not enable a person to make curfew, they are forced to make a choice between keeping their job or their accommodation.

Expert review panel into ending homelessness

Caseworkers reported to us that warnings of evictions from temporary accommodation for breaching rules are fairly common. Rules could include spending a night away from the accommodation to stay with a family member.

A member of staff at the bed and breakfast has told her that if she can stay with her sister than she’s not technically homeless. When she stays with her sister she sleeps on a sofa as her sister only has one bed.

Shelter Cymru caseworker

As the Expert Panel report highlights, homeless applicants can feel compelled to stay in unsuitable temporary accommodation rather than making informal arrangements to stay with family and friends for a short period until settled accommodation could be arranged. These applicants are worried that in passing up an offer of temporary accommodation, their application might be unlawfully dismissed or that they may be deprioritised for social housing.

Case Study

Amber has been living in temporary accommodation with her twenty-year-old daughter for several months. She had to move out of her private rented home as her landlord wanted to sell, so she received a no-fault eviction notice.

She is currently in a caravan on a very busy holiday site. It's open to the public with excessive noise and strangers knocking at their door. They feel unsafe living here and are staying confined to their caravan.

They have two therapy dogs but have been asked to rehome their pets. She has already had to rehome her cats.

"My pets are my life. My care coordinator and therapist wrote letters outlining the importance of my pets to me. The council told me to put them in kennels if I wouldn't rehome them and I'd have to pay. They just expect you to cast them aside."

Amber was advised by the local authority not to tell other people on the site that they were homeless so she feels unable to talk to people or make friends.

- Personal safety

Several Shelter Cymru clients reported concerns about personal safety while staying in temporary accommodation. This may be due to the concentration of people living together, the behaviour and support needs of other residents or the previous experiences and needs of the clients themselves.

The B&B is stressful, particularly at night when there are no council staff available, and it gets quite noisy

Shelter Cymru client living in a bed and breakfast

Other stakeholders have reported to us that single females experiencing homelessness are less likely to take up an offer of temporary accommodation due to concerns about their personal safety. Transgender people are also concerned about facing bullying and harassment in a mixed gender setting.

Temporary accommodation can be a chaotic environment, which leads to retraumatisation. As a result of these conditions, some people told the panel that they felt safer sleeping on the streets than staying in temporary accommodation.

Expert review panel into ending homelessness

Case Study

"I lost my home. I lost my kids. I lost everything."

Jack is forty-two years old and has been living in a hotel for sixteen months. He is not allowed visitors and has no cooking facilities. Jack suffers from anxiety and depression. He left his last home in 2021 and spent some time sofa surfing, but also stayed in a refuge due to experiencing domestic violence. However, this meant he was far away from the support of his family and trusted GP and found himself unable to stay where he was due to a lack of local connection. Some of the hotel residents have substance misuse issues. Jack previously lost a relationship through alcohol so doesn't like to be around it. At times he has witnessed violence and threatening behaviour from other residents, and this makes him feel very vulnerable.

- Uncertainty

Possibly the hardest thing about living in temporary accommodation is not knowing how long you are going to be there. It is commonplace for people to be moved frequently between placements as

vacancies arise elsewhere. Accommodation availability can also change across the year due to the holiday season or major events.

We had one client who was moved through seven different placements in one year

Shelter Cymru caseworker

There is also the uncertainty of not knowing when an offer of accommodation might be made.

It's like a prison sentence without knowing the length of the sentence. If you knew the timescales you could be more prepared and see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Person living in temporary accommodation talking to Cymorth Cymru

3.2.6 The impact on future generations

Prolonged stays in temporary accommodation are a reality for an increasing number of children in Wales and there needs to be greater understanding of the impact that this may have on them in future life.

Many may be traumatised from past events in their lives, some of which may have contributed to their homelessness occurring. The review of Shelter Cymru casework revealed disturbing cases where health visitors are worried about the impact of living conditions on children's health and education. Children with experience of sexual assault found it very difficult to cope with shared facilities.

It's not fair on the kids. My daughter doesn't want to go to school anymore. She was having issues with other kids [...] and she's embarrassed about how we're living. The kids can't have friends over to this."

Dad of family living in temporary accommodation with school-age children

My daughter's asthma has gotten worse since being in the caravan. She saw the asthma nurse who said it's because of the mould and have adjusted her inhalers and given her peak flow meter to assess herself.

Mum with older daughter living in temporary accommodation

There has been recent press coverage of the practicalities of parenting young children in a single bedroom with older siblings, as well as the difficulties undertaking everyday tasks such as bottle sterilising or potty training. Some¹² question the adverse impact that a stay in inappropriate temporary accommodation could have on a child's development.

Cymorth Cymru's research reports on the negative impact on their children and the feeling that they could not be the best parent in temporary accommodation.

3.3 Conclusion

Life in temporary accommodation can be challenging. Even the basics such as cooking and washing facilities cannot be taken for granted and there are often restrictions on normal life. People's needs and disabilities are not always adequately met. Life really does go on hold as people wait for the promised move into permanent housing, but don't know when that will happen.

Improving the quality of temporary accommodation, making sure it is appropriate to their needs, and making the stay as short as possible are key.

4. Moving on

Moving out of temporary accommodation and into a long-term home the desire of people in temporary accommodation, but it is not easy. This section looks at the barriers to getting a permanent home and also considers the risk of returning to temporary accommodation at a later date.

4.1 The flow of households through temporary accommodation

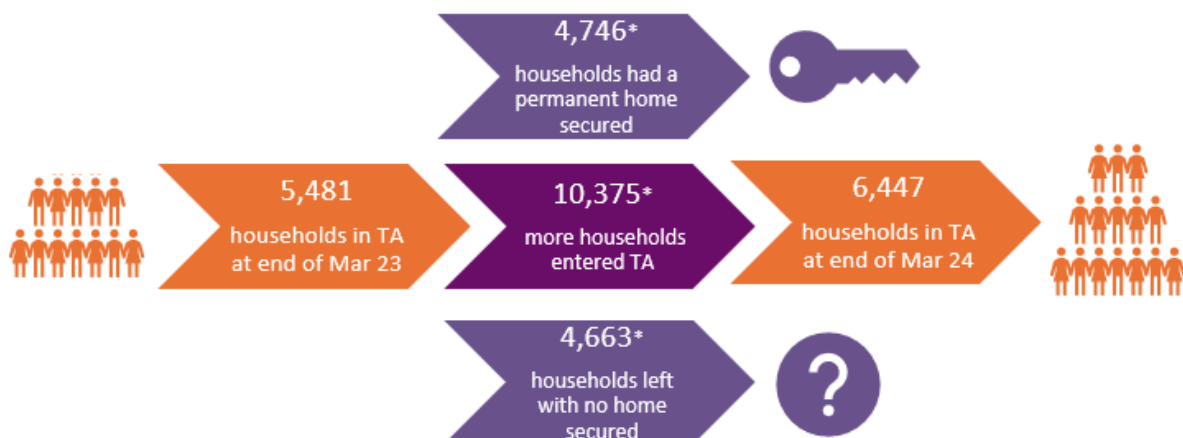
Analysis of the flow of households through temporary accommodation during 2023-24 reveals a mixed picture of success in moving on.

As already noted, the number of households in temporary accommodation increased from 5,481 at the end of March 2023 to 6,447 at the end of March 2024, an additional 966 households. We estimate that during the course of the year, 10,375 additional households were placed in temporary accommodation. (This data is only available for persons living in temporary accommodation so we assumed a ratio of people to households based on other available data).

During the year, around 4,746 households were successfully moved into suitable permanent housing by their local authority. This represents only 30 per cent of all households who had been in temporary accommodation at some point during the year (in at the start of the year or been placed during).

A further 29 per cent (4,663) left without accommodation being secured. While it will be the case that some will have found permanent housing themselves, others are likely to have remained homeless but found alternative temporary arrangements.

Fig 7: The flow of households through temporary accommodation during 2023-24



Source: *StatsWales*,

*household numbers are estimated based on available data for the number of persons and an assumed ratio of people to households

4.2 Finding a long-term home

The local authority's duty to accommodate comes to an end if the homeless household receives an offer of accommodation which is considered to be reasonable, regardless of whether this is accepted or refused. Traditionally, this would have only been an offer of social housing. However, the Housing (Wales) Act 2015 enabled the duty to also end by the homeless household securing a tenancy in the private sector.

Many local authorities who responded to the Ending Homelessness in Wales White Paper¹³ cited the difficulty in finding suitable, permanent homes.

The demand for affordable housing in the city is very high. Even though a significant percentage of social housing lets are targeted at homeless households, move on is slow as relatively few properties are becoming available. Move on into the private rented sector is difficult due lack of availability and high rent levels.

Cardiff

Turnover and vacancies in social housing is low, which impacts on move-on to those in temporary accommodation.

Monmouthshire

In the longer term, we need to see a more strategic approach to the sector to create more housing choices for people including a route out of temporary accommodation.

Rhondda Cynon Taf

4.2.1 Moving into a social home

The peer researchers' analysis of Shelter Cymru casework confirmed that a lack of social homes is reported to be the most significant barrier by those living in temporary accommodation, with 40 per cent of the cases confirming this to be the case.

It was evident that most regarded a social home as being the best way to gain a permanent home. Many had experience of renting in the private sector and were worried that the offer of a tenancy there would not provide the stable, affordable housing that they needed to be able to get on with their lives. Some spoke from experience of having had their tenancy ended by the landlord through a no-fault eviction, or having the rent increased to an unaffordable level.

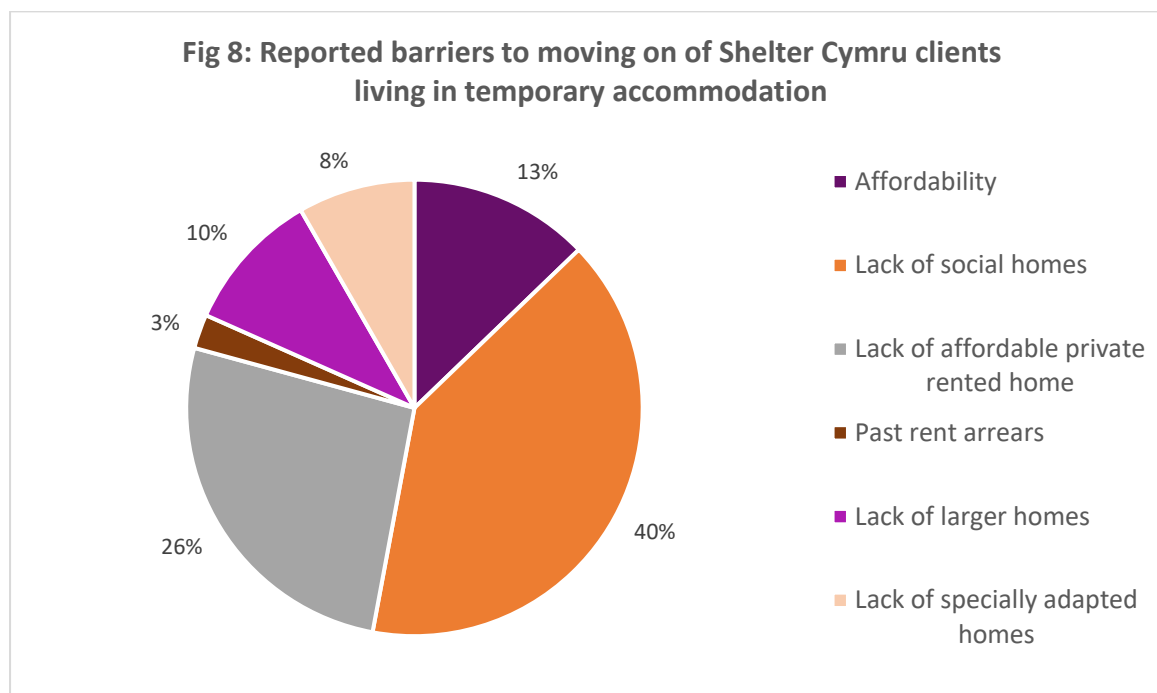
Welsh Government have set a target to deliver 20,000 homes for social rent during this term of the Senedd, but progress is slow. It is now accepted that this number is highly unlikely to be achieved. Only 5,775 homes had been delivered in the first two years, 4,780 of which were actually homes for social rent. We will explore the shortage of rehousing options in social housing further in our next report.

4.2.2 Finding affordable accommodation in the private rented sector

26 per cent of the Shelter Cymru cases identified a lack of affordable private rented homes as a barrier to moving on and a further 13 per cent cited issues of affordability more generally.

Previous research by the Bevan Foundation¹⁴ explored the barrier of affordability in the private rented sector for low-income households. In February 2023, only 32 properties advertised across

Wales were available at local housing allowance rates (the rate at which the housing element of Universal Credit is paid), equating to just 1.2 per cent of the market. 16 local authorities did not have a single property available at local housing allowance rates.



Source: *Shelter Cymru casework database*

4.2.3 Other barriers to moving on

Other barriers to moving on to permanent housing from temporary accommodation were reported by Shelter Cymru clients included a shortage of accommodation which would meet their households' specific needs in terms of being large enough (10 per cent) or specially adapted for disabled family members (8 per cent). A further barrier reported was the presence of arrears from a previous tenancy (3 per cent).

Discussions with both Shelter Cymru caseworkers and local authorities confirmed that there are particular challenges in finding permanent homes for single people, larger families and households in need of accessible properties.

4.3 The revolving door into temporary accommodation

Welsh Government data suggests that many of those being placed into temporary accommodation will have lived there in the immediate past. 294 of the 1,371 (21 per cent) who had entered temporary accommodation during June 2024 had previously been placed into temporary accommodation within the last 12 months.

More than a third (36) of the 84 people who entered temporary accommodation from street homelessness had previously been in temporary accommodation during the year. Four out of ten prison leavers (48 of 123) were also in this position. Those moving into temporary accommodation from other unsuitable accommodation are the most likely to be doing so for the first time, accounting for 85 per cent of placements (459 out of 537 people).

The number of people returning to temporary accommodation should be considered against the fact that nearly three in ten households (29 per cent) leave temporary accommodation without a long-term home being secured. In addition, the available data¹⁵ show that during 2023-24:

- 462 households who were owed a full duty to be accommodated had that duty brought to an end because they voluntarily ceased to occupy their temporary accommodation.
- 375 households were deemed to have become homeless intentionally, having been asked to leave their temporary accommodation.

The peer researcher's analysis of Shelter Cymru casework found evidence of households questioning whether they could continue to remain living in temporary accommodation due to the conditions that they were living in.

I can't keep going the way I'm going. My state of mind is deteriorating living here.

Shelter Cymru client living in a hotel

The amount of times I've wanted to give up and just make myself homeless again.

Shelter Cymru client living in a bed and breakfast

There does appear to be significant evidence of a revolving door into and out of temporary accommodation which requires further investigation. Caseworkers raised concerns that failure to find the right solution the first time can often perpetuate problems, and risks leaving people disillusioned with the system and less likely to engage again or until they reach a crisis point.

4.4 Conclusion

Our analysis has considered the flow of households through temporary accommodation with more people coming into the system year after year. There is a mixed picture of success in moving people on. As many households that are leaving with the keys to a permanent home are, it appears, leaving but continuing to be homeless.

The evidence suggests that there are a considerable number of repeat placements, as people yo-yo back and fore between temporary accommodation stays and their own arrangements. This is likely to be perpetuated by the conditions they experience in temporary accommodation and the uncertainty of how long they have to remain living there.

5. Conclusions and next steps

Our findings show that too many people are being placed in temporary accommodation. Often it is not suitable for their needs and their stay is for far too long. Temporary accommodation is an important lifeline at a time of crisis for anyone experiencing homelessness. It does not, however, provide a secure, long-term home.

While the Welsh Government wants homelessness to be rare, brief and unrepeatable, that aspiration seems a long way from being realised. Unprecedented pressure on local authority homelessness services has affected their ability to provide temporary solutions which are suitable for a household's needs. The shortage of affordable, permanent housing to move to is causing severe blockages in the homelessness system and contributing to lengthy stays in challenging conditions. Many are falling out of the temporary accommodation system, only to return again.

The time has come for deeper and more radical interventions to reduce need for temporary accommodation in the first place, to improve the quality and suitability of the temporary accommodation that is required, and to accelerate moving on into suitable, affordable long-term homes. Moving people into suitable homes is key to reducing the pressure on services, as well as enabling lives to be rebuilt after the trauma of homelessness.

Social homes provide long-term security, affordable, regulated rents and peace of mind for the future. Making sure that everyone trapped in temporary accommodation can access them is crucial.

To this end, this report is part of a wider project developed between the Bevan Foundation and Shelter Cymru. Over the course of three years we will be looking at how to increase the availability of move on accommodation for the record number of households in temporary accommodation, covering issues such as the supply of homes and making best use of available housing stock, allocations policies, the planning system and access to land. Through this work we will develop a route map for Welsh Government, outlining the actions that must be taken to solve Wales' homelessness crisis.

Annex 1 – what we did?

We have used a number of different methods to inform our research.

1.1.1 Data analysis

Our analysis uses statutory data set provided to the Welsh Government by local authority homelessness services. These are collated and presented on the Stats Wales website¹⁶. Wherever possible we have used data relating to households in Wales as this relates more easily to our wider work on housing supply. However, there are some areas of our analysis where only people-focused data is available.

1.1.2 Shelter Cymru casework

A team of Shelter Cymru Peer Researchers, themselves having lived experience of homelessness and housing insecurity, interrogated the Shelter Cymru casework database to provide insight into areas where there are gaps in the statutory data sets.

They also worked with Shelter Cymru caseworkers to identify cases that highlight the human impact of living in temporary accommodation. The Peer Researchers then created anonymised short-form case studies from file notes and reached out to consenting Shelter Cymru clients to conduct interviews to produce more detailed accounts of experiences of temporary accommodation.

The Peer Researchers attended group discussions with Shelter Cymru caseworkers and reviewed recent meeting minutes to further inform the picture of temporary accommodation as experienced by Shelter Cymru clients.

1.1.3 Insight from the work of others

The report also draws upon the work recently undertaken by others in Wales, informed by our review of relevant research, Welsh Gov documents and consultations, Senedd Committee evidence and local authority plans and strategies.

1.1.4 Conversations with local authorities and wider stakeholders

We also reflect on conversation which we have had with local authorities and a wide range of stakeholders including the organisations which support the wider research through an advisory group.

References

¹ Figures are from YouGov Plc. The total sample size was 1,207 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between the 2nd and 3rd of September 2024. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted (unless specified otherwise) and are representative of all Welsh adults (aged 16+).

² [Ending homelessness in Wales: a high level action plan 2021 to 2026 \(gov.wales\)](#)

³ [White Paper on ending homelessness in Wales | GOV.WALES](#)

⁴ [allocation-of-accommodation-and-homelessness-guidance-for-local-authorities.pdf \(gov.wales\)](#)

⁵ [The Homelessness \(Suitability of Accommodation\) \(Wales\) Order 2015 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

⁶ [White Paper on ending homelessness in Wales | GOV.WALES](#)

⁷ [Occurrences of people placed into temporary accommodation during the period by reason for homelessness \(gov.wales\)](#)

⁸ [Third Paper to Expert Review Panel – Experts by Experience \(cymorthexperts.wales\)](#)

⁹ [Total placements in bed and breakfasts during the quarter, by length of stay and provision \(gov.wales\)](#)

¹⁰ [The Homelessness \(Suitability of Accommodation\) \(Wales\) Order 2015 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

¹¹ [White Paper on ending homelessness in Wales | GOV.WALES](#)

¹² [No space to crawl, play or use a potty: why are thousands of young children living in B&Bs? | Katharine Swindells | The Guardian](#)

¹³ [White Paper on ending homelessness in Wales | GOV.WALES](#)

¹⁴ [Wales' Housing Crisis: Local Housing Allowance and the private rental market in Wales, Winter 2023 - Bevan Foundation](#)

¹⁵ [Reasons for discharge of duty under section 75 during the year \(gov.wales\)](#)

¹⁶ [Homelessness \(gov.wales\)](#)