The use of temporary accommodation in Scotland

February 2017
CONTENTS

Summary 4

Chapter 1: Introduction 5

Chapter 2: Background 6

Chapter 3: Findings 8

Chapter 4: Conclusion 14

Chapter 5: Recommendations and Future Developments 15
SUMMARY

Key Points

- In 2015-16 local authorities provided an estimated 3.8 million days of temporary accommodation (TA) for homeless households of which around 1 million were for households with children. This is approximately the same as in 2014 and 2015.
- 60% of all homeless households spent time in temporary accommodation while the local authority resolves their homeless application. This is the same as in 2014 and 1% lower than in 2015.
- On average, households using temporary accommodation stayed there for 24 weeks (compared to 18 weeks in 2014 and 23 weeks in 2015*).
- 32% of households spent over 6 months in TA (compared to 25% in 2014 and 33% in 2015).
- 12% of households spend over a year in temporary accommodation (compared to 10% in 2014 and 2015).
- More households without children (25%) have stays under 2 weeks in TA, compared to the 10% of households with children who stay for less than two weeks. This pattern of households with children staying longer in temporary accommodation is the same as in 2014 and 2015.
- Households with children spent a median time of 20.1 weeks in TA (up from 17 weeks in 2014 and 17.8 weeks in 2015). This was higher than the median for households without children which was 13.5 weeks.
- The types of temporary accommodation used varies dramatically across local authorities: in two local authorities, hostels and bed and breakfast hotels made up over 50% of days spent in temporary accommodation provision, compared to a Scottish average of 29%.

Recommendations

- Shelter Scotland ask that the Scottish Government officially support guidance on standards in temporary accommodation to ensure that stays in temporary accommodation are a positive stepping stone away from homelessness.
- The Scottish Government has pledged to build 50,000 affordable homes over the lifetime of the Parliament. 35,000 of these homes will be for social rent. Shelter Scotland welcomes this development but asks that the focus on housebuilding happens alongside the need to ensure that temporary accommodation is of good standard and is used effectively. This is reflected in Shelter Scotland’s Far From Fixed campaign ask of a new national homelessness strategy.

* the difference between 2015 and 2016 is likely to be because of an improvement in data quality, rather than any significant change in the length of time people spend in TA
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This data report is intended to improve our understanding of the use of temporary accommodation in Scotland. In response to the limitations of existing datasets on TA, in August 2014 Shelter Scotland made a Freedom of Information (FOI) request to all 32 local authorities to address the gaps in identifying length of stay in TA, and the different experiences of households with and without children (see appendix 1 for pro-forma sent as part of request). We published our first findings in January 2015. In an attempt to capture some trend data as well as capitalize on recently improved data collection amongst local authorities, we repeated this exercise in August 2015 and September 2016. Given that this is the third year that Shelter Scotland has completed the exercise, this means that we can begin to analyse trends and patterns in the data.

We received data from 30 local authorities in 2016, (up from 27 last year) with varying levels of completeness, with a number of local authorities submitting relevant data in different formats. Of these, 27 local authorities completed the first section around the number of closed cases and uptake of temporary accommodation, however only 20 of these councils completed the second section around time in temporary accommodation. Though not all local authorities were able to provide full responses, the information submitted covered 79% (or 30,321 cases) of all cases closed in Scotland in 2015-16, which is a similar coverage as in 2015.

This report draws on this freedom of information request, existing statistics and performance information from the Scottish Housing Regulator [see appendix]. Taken together these provide a better, albeit limited, understanding of the experiences of homeless households using TA, covering the following questions:

1. How much is TA used?
2. How long do people stay in TA?
3. What type of TA do households stay in?
4. What types of TA were offered and refused, and what were the satisfaction levels with TA occupied?

Unless otherwise specified, all statistics used are from the data submitted in response to our FOI request.

---

1 Shelter Scotland, The use of temporary accommodation in Scotland, January 2015
http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_library/policy_library_folder/the_use_of_temporary_accommodation_in_scotland

2 In 2015 the decision was taken by the Scottish Government to make the return of a statistical dataset focusing on temporary accommodation provision by local authorities mandatory, resulting in more local authorities moving towards improved collection and reporting of temporary accommodation data.
CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND

Scotland has some of the most progressive homelessness legislation in the world, including the provision of temporary accommodation (TA) for homeless applicants at different stages of their homeless application:

- Local authorities must provide TA to all homeless applicants whilst their applications are being assessed.
- Since the end of 2012, all unintentionally homeless households are entitled to TA until permanent accommodation is found.
- Households assessed as intentionally homeless are entitled to TA for a reasonable period whilst the applicant is given information and assistance to secure alternative accommodation themselves.

There are also requirements set in legislation around standards of TA provision for some households. The Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2004 requires local authorities to ensure that homeless households with children, and pregnant women, are not placed in unsuitable TA (which includes bed and breakfast accommodation) unless under exceptional circumstances. In 2011, Shelter Scotland and the Chartered Institute of Housing Scotland jointly issued guidance on physical standards of TA as well as good practice in terms of location, service and management.\(^3\) Shelter Scotland have continued to campaign for the Scottish Government to build on and officially support and endorse guidance based on this.\(^4\) In 2014, an amendment was made to the 2004 Order,\(^5\) expanding the definition of ‘unsuitable accommodation’ to include that it must be wind and watertight.

The standard and use of TA is therefore a central element of Shelter Scotland’s Far From Fixed campaign which was launched in September 2016. As part of our campaign, Shelter Scotland made the following asks of the Scottish Government:

- That based on new information available through the collection of HL3 stats, the problem of length of stay in TA is analysed and a strategic approach is taken to reducing the length of time spent in temporary accommodation (where it is appropriate for households);
- That there must be a review of temporary accommodation funding in Scotland leading to a new model that is not solely reliant on the levels of housing benefit or Universal Credit housing element available;
- That a National Homelessness Strategy should set targets and approaches to the reduction of B&B use for all local authorities, particularly for vulnerable households;
- That a new National Homelessness Strategy should inform the development of new social housing to meet the needs of homeless households currently in temporary accommodation

---


The use of TA and the supply of affordable housing are inextricably linked, and the availability of social housing lets is one of the main reasons for the rise in the use of TA. Therefore, continued close strategic links between the Joint Housing Policy and Delivery Group (JHPDG) and a new National Homelessness Strategy will be important. The Scottish Government has committed to building 50,000 new affordable homes over the lifetime of this Parliament, with a target of 35,000 units for social let, a commitment which is particularly welcome in reducing the reliance on TA.

Being in TA can be disruptive especially for the 5,224 children who were recorded as living there on 31st March 2016. Long periods in TA can impact on a child’s physical and mental health and their educational attainment.6 Households in TA can feel disconnected from the wider community, unable to settle in and make the accommodation a home. It is important, therefore, to understand how long households are actually spending in TA, and to find ways to reduce this.

Accessing high quality TA is the crucial first step away from homelessness. Shelter Scotland is concerned about whether TA is delivering its full potential as a positive move away from crisis, and whether the best use is being made of this expensive resource. Audit Scotland estimated local authorities spend about £27 million more by housing people in temporary accommodation, rather than in a permanent home, which reinforces the need to move people onto sustainable permanent homes.7 This is especially paramount at a time when there is great pressure on local authority finances and the management subsidy for TA is being reduced with the introduction of Universal Credit.8

Funding of Temporary Accommodation

Several changes to the way that temporary accommodation is subsidised and paid for since 2010 pose a significant threat to local authorities’ ability to fund temporary accommodation without making large demands on other areas of council funding.

Shelter Scotland commissioned the Anna Evans Housing Consultancy9 in summer 2016 to conduct research into the funding of homelessness services. This research found that there has been a drive across local authorities to provide a leaner, more efficient service in response to thinning budgets. In practice, this has resulted in authorities taking steps such as redesigning their temporary accommodation portfolios and re-evaluating rent charges. It was also found that there was uncertainty around the future funding of services and it is likely that funding models will have to be revisited in most local authorities in order to plan how to continue to provide temporary accommodation and services.

Some local authorities predict that the quality of the temporary accommodation they provide will reduce and it is likely that the support available to people in temporary accommodation with also be cut back. This is of particular concern because Scotland does not currently have the safeguard of guidance on minimum standards in temporary accommodation for all. We must ensure that these changes do not negatively impact the temporary accommodation that households rely on.

---

6 Shelter Scotland, Temporary accommodation standards: campaign briefing, November 2013
http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_library/policy_library_folder/temporary_accommodation_standards_campaign_briefing


9 Anna Evans Housing Consultancy (2016) Funding Homelessness Services in Scotland
CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS

1. How much is temporary accommodation used?
   - According to Scottish Government statistics, as at 31 March 2016, there were 10,555 households in Scotland in TA, of whom 2,884 (27%) were households with children.\(^\text{10}\)
   - At 31 March 2016, there were 5,224 children in TA.
   - According to Scottish Government HL2 statistics, in 2015-16, local authorities provided an estimated 3.8 million days of TA of which just under 1 million were for households with children.\(^\text{11}\) However, the Scottish Housing Regulator estimates that 3.37 million days were provided, but does not distinguish between households with and without children.\(^\text{12}\)
   - The Scottish Housing Regulator approximates that 60% (16,233) of 26,854 estimated households whose cases closed in 2015-16 occupied TA arranged by the local authority at some point during their homelessness assessment according to those who provided this data as part of the FOI response. This is down from 61% in 2014-15. This compared to HL1 data submitted to the Scottish Government by all local authorities that shows that 55% of cases spent time in local authority arranged temporary accommodation. This pattern was the same for households with children, and for those without, although households with children were less likely to take up temporary accommodation.

2. How long do people spend in temporary accommodation?

   Shelter Scotland estimates from both the FOI request and the existing published data that the average (mean) time spent in TA for all households who spent time there and whose case closed in 2015-16 was 24 weeks.\(^\text{13}\) This is marginally longer than in 2014-15 where the figure was 23 weeks, and the difference is likely to be because of an improvement in data quality, rather than any significant change in the length of time people spend in TA. Evidence from our FOI request helps break this down further.\(^\text{14}\)

   - 14% of households spent less than 2 weeks in TA.
   - 27% spent less than 7 weeks in TA.
   - 54% of households spent 13 weeks or more in TA.
   - A third (32%) spent more than 6 months in TA.
   - 12% of households spent over a year in TA.

---

\(^\text{10}\) Scottish Government, Homelessness in Scotland 2015-16
http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/RefTables/Homelessness201516

\(^\text{11}\) Calculated using Scottish Government HL2 return

\(^\text{12}\) Based on responses to 2016 FOI request from 27 local authorities

\(^\text{13}\) We used the ‘total households using TA’ figure from the FOI as a base for this calculation. As such, to calculate the mean we used the ARC data for only the local authorities who could respond to this initial figure (27 local authorities). This provides a mean for these local authorities which, given the coverage, can be assumed to be correct for across Scotland.

\(^\text{14}\) NB: These statistics only correspond to households whose cases were closed in 2015-16, therefore it does not cover applicants who have been in temporary accommodation for a long period and whose case is still open.
- Chart 1 shows that households without children were more likely to have spent small amounts of time (i.e. less than one week) in temporary accommodation. In the same vein, more households with children spent longer periods in temporary accommodation, until the 78 week point, when households with and households without children come close to converging. From the graph above, it is clear that that more households without children spent shorter periods in TA, up to 7 weeks.
- The majority of households both with and without children spent between 2 and 52 weeks in temporary accommodation (87% of households with children and 85% of households without children).
- 15% of households without children spent less than 2 weeks in TA, compared with 10% of households with children.
- There is a small group of households who spend a very long time in TA: 13% of households with and 11% of households without children spent over a year in TA.
- The median time spent in TA is higher for households with children, at 20.1 weeks, than households without children, at 13.5 weeks.

Chart 1: Percentage of cases closed by time spent in temporary accommodation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Households with children</th>
<th>Households without children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(under 1 week)</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1 week to under 2 weeks)</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2 weeks to under 7 weeks)</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7 weeks to under 13 weeks)</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(13 weeks to under 26 weeks)</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(26 weeks to under 52 weeks)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(52 weeks to under 78 weeks)</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(78 weeks to under 104 weeks)</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(over 104 weeks)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our data request did not include a question on outcomes of households once leaving TA, and as such we cannot be sure whether the higher proportion of households spending short periods of time in TA was because they are being placed in permanent accommodation quicker, or because they are leaving TA before they receive an offer of settled accommodation or achieve another positive outcome. Greater periods of time in TA can be due to a support need being met and some local authorities indicated that households with children who spent a longer than average time in temporary accommodation was due to some receiving intensive parenting support before moving on.

3. What type of temporary accommodation do households stay in?

- 41% of all temporary accommodation days provided by local authorities were in ‘ordinary local authority dwellings’ and 16% in RSL dwellings. However, the picture changes dramatically across local authorities.

- Most days in temporary accommodation in Edinburgh (33%) and the Highlands (46%), were spent in bed and breakfast accommodation. The high use of bed and breakfast and hostel accommodation in these areas is likely to reflect their use by the councils to provide temporary accommodation for single homeless applicants.

- Evidence from councils’ HL2 returns to the Scottish Government shows very few households with children in these types of accommodation on 31 March each year.

- Angus, Renfrewshire and Clackmannanshire used ordinary LA dwellings (i.e. non-hostel, non-B&B) as temporary accommodation the most, with over 85% of all days spent in temporary accommodation spent in this type of dwelling.

Bed and breakfast hotels and hostel accommodation are generally not considered good practice in the provision of TA, particularly for vulnerable households. The Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2004 requires local authorities to ensure that homeless households with children, and pregnant women, are not placed in unsuitable TA, including B&B accommodation unless under exceptional circumstances. Scottish Government statistics show that there have been very few breaches of the order; Highland Council committed the only breach in 2015-16. As such, it is important to understand how much this accommodation is being used by local authorities, and the evidence around how long homeless households are spending in this type of TA. Chart 2 looks at the use of B&Bs and hostels in the local authority areas where more than a third of days are spent in these types of accommodation.

---

16 Scottish Government, Homelessness in Scotland 2015-16
The use of temporary accommodation in Scotland

Chart 3 (below) shows that over 10,300 households whose cases closed in 2015-16 spent time in local authority accommodation, over 10,500 spent time in bed and breakfast accommodation, and 10,623 in hostels (any type).

More households spent time in bed and breakfast accommodation than any other type of accommodation. However, while a high number of households spent time in bed and breakfast accommodation the average time they spent in this type of accommodation (32 days) was markedly lower than the average time spent by households in local authority dwellings (135 days), registered social landlord dwellings (212 days) or private leases (222 days).  

It seems likely that the fact that there is a relatively high number of households housed in bed and breakfast TA together with the relatively low time spent in this type of accommodation is due in part to a pattern of initial placement in bed and breakfast followed, for longer duration cases, by households moving on to TA with a local authority, registered social landlord or private sector leased dwelling.

Future data analysis from the HL3 will give a clearer picture of to what extent these patterns occur, and the effect on households of this practice.

---

4. What types of temporary accommodation were offered and refused, and what were the satisfaction levels with temporary accommodation occupied?

- In 2015-16, Scottish local authorities made 42,030 (44,138 in 2014-15) offers of TA to homeless households.\(^\text{18}\)

- 27.8% of offers made were for ordinary local authority dwellings, and 29.2% for bed and breakfast accommodation.

- Of the 42,030 offers made in 2015-16, 2,943 were refused (7% of all offers made).\(^\text{19}\)

- The proportions of offers refused varied between 7.4% for the relatively small numbers of offers of TA in women’s refuges (26 of 350 offers), up to 11% of offers


made for TA in ‘other hostels’ (482 of 4,373), and similarly 8.1% of ‘ordinary local authority dwellings’ (942 of 11591).20

- Of 12,255 offers of TA in bed and breakfast accommodation, 565 were refused. At 4.6%, this was the lowest refusal rate after that of private sector leases. This might suggest that in some circumstances bed and breakfast is an acceptable option for homeless households. As noted above, while a high number of households spent time in bed and breakfast accommodation the average time they spent in this type of accommodation was markedly lower and suggests it is likely that bed and breakfast is often used as short-term emergency accommodation until more suitable TA can be arranged.

- The level of satisfaction with TA varies across local authorities, from 100% satisfaction in Falkirk to 72% in Shetland. This is a marked change from the previous year, as the bottom ranking local authority in terms of satisfaction is 20 percentage points higher than the bottom ranking in 2015. However, data is not available by type of TA occupied, and local authorities asked the question of only a very small proportion of those leaving a TA placement (5,250 households). Therefore, care must be taken when drawing conclusions from this data.

---

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

The provision of temporary accommodation is a central element of our progressive homelessness legislation, however it is essential for households that this is a positive move away from crisis. The average time spent in temporary accommodation is 24 weeks, with more than 1 in 9 spending over a year there. It appears there is a bottleneck in temporary accommodation as local authorities struggle to move on households with a right to settled, permanent accommodation.

We must ensure that minimum standards are met around the quality of temporary accommodation as well as the support and services provided. This will ensure that the time spent in temporary accommodation is worthwhile and that moves to permanent accommodation when the time comes are sustainable, building on the standards we jointly produced with the Chartered Institute of Housing in 2011.21 Looking to the future, there will be challenges facing the funding of temporary accommodation, especially around the capping of rents at LHA levels, which may force many temporary accommodation providers to reassess how they provide temporary accommodation. In light of this, the Scottish Government has an opportunity to ensure standards of temporary accommodation when deciding how management fee grant funding is distributed.

A renewed emphasis on the delivery of affordable housing in Scotland is necessary to counteract both the affordability concerns around the current level of temporary accommodation provision for local authorities, as well as to ensure that long stays in temporary accommodation are reduced. This includes a commitment to the need for 12,000 affordable homes each year for the next five years, as identified in research commissioned by Shelter Scotland, SFHA and CIH Scotland22. As above, affordable housing supply and good quality temporary accommodation must go hand in hand and should be the cornerstones of a new national strategy which is called for within Shelter Scotland’s Far From Fixed campaign.

---

21 Shelter Scotland and CIH Scotland, Temporary accommodation guidance, January 2011
   http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_library/policy_library_folder/temporary_accommodation_guidance

CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Taking into account evidence from responses to the FOI request in conjunction with existing published evidence from the ARC, Shelter Scotland recommends:

1. That the Scottish Government takes account of the length of time spent by households in temporary accommodation and carries out a review to ensure that local authorities have as much guidance as they need to make best use of temporary accommodation.

2. That the Scottish Government takes learning from this report and seeks to understand more deeply the reasons for which households are staying longer in temporary accommodation and take reasonable steps to assist local authorities with finding sustainable housing solutions for these households.

3. That the Scottish Government develops guidance for minimum standards for all households in TA in line with recommendations jointly set out by Shelter Scotland and CIH in 2011.

4. That a review of the funding model for temporary accommodation is undertaken urgently in line with expected changes to welfare which will limit the amount that can be claimed for housing costs. Discussions are already underway across the housing sector and local authorities around these funding concerns and the Scottish Government must take a lead in developing a collaborative approach to ensure that temporary accommodation can continue to be provided in a sustainable and high quality way.

As part of the development of homelessness statistics the Scottish Government is developing a new data collection – the HL3 return. This will provide information linking the use of temporary accommodation with the circumstances of households who become homeless and the outcomes of their homeless application. We expect the first published statistics based on this new return to be available in Summer 2017. Shelter Scotland welcomes this development, which would allow us to address some of the outstanding questions raised in this paper.
Background to Data Sources Used

This report is based on statistical information about temporary accommodation from three sources:

1. The quarterly and annual temporary accommodation statistics collected by Scottish Government statisticians from Scottish local authorities. This provides information on:
   - Number of households in temporary accommodation by type of accommodation at the end of each quarter.
   - Number of such households which have children or a household member pregnant; and number of children in such households.

2. Performance information gathered by the Scottish Housing Regulator in 2016 on local authority performance in providing temporary accommodation to homeless households. These provide information, for homeless households whose case was closed in 2015-16, on:
   - Number who spent time in each type of temporary accommodation during their homelessness application.
   - The total amount of time spent in each type of accommodation.
   - Offers and refusals of offers for each type of temporary accommodation.
   - Whether households were satisfied with the temporary accommodation they had used.

3. Information supplied by the 27 local authorities who responded to Shelter Scotland’s freedom of information request for supplementary information not covered in the Scottish Government statistics or the ARC indicator data. This provided information for homeless households whose case was closed in 2015-16 on:
   - The number and proportion who did/ did not spend time in temporary accommodation arranged by the local authority separately for households with/ without children.
   - For those who spent time in temporary accommodation the total amount of time in temporary accommodation, separately for households with and without children.
   - While 27 local authorities responded to the freedom of information request, not all local authorities were able to provide information at the full level of detail requested.
### Part 1: Summary Information on Homeless Households Spent in Any Form of Temporary Accommodation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child/Adult</th>
<th>Total Number of Cases Closed in 2015-16 [AS]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All cases closed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households without</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Local Authority Name: -

Notes:
- Count part of 1 day as a full day.
- Ensure all columns are completed.
- For you to present this data in this format, feel free to send this through.
The use of temporary accommodation in Scotland

Shelter Scotland helps over half a million 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 shelterscotland.org

RH7439. Registered charity in England and Wales (363710) and in Scotland (SC002327)

Shelter Scotland
Scotiabank House
6 South Charlotte Street
Edinburgh EH2 4AW

shelterscotland.org