



# A Life in Limbo

The cost of unsuitable accommodation for  
homeless people in Scotland

May 2018



**Together**  
we will end  
homelessness



## Summary

Scotland has progressive housing and homeless legislation, which has been evidenced in the significant drop in homelessness since the introduction of the Homelessness Scotland Act 2003. However, one of the unintended consequences has been the rise in people now accommodated in temporary accommodation.

This has been recognised with time limits introduced for families living in unsuitable temporary accommodation, but there are no time limits for other homeless people in unsuitable temporary accommodation. The result is a cohort of homeless people living in unsuitable temporary accommodation for lengthy periods, where they effectively experience 'A Life in Limbo'. The number of households currently housed in unsuitable temporary accommodation in Scotland is calculated at 2,070.<sup>1</sup>

Research commissioned by Crisis has estimated that each time a single person is moved out of unsuitable temporary accommodation to other forms of temporary accommodation within seven days would save £812. PricewaterhouseCoopers has also estimated that in 2018 the expected benefits of moving all single people out of unsuitable temporary accommodation to other forms of temporary accommodation within seven days would be a saving of £29m.<sup>2</sup>

**Scottish councils could save £29m in 2018 by moving people out of unsuitable temporary accommodation at seven days.**

Crisis believes all homeless people should be treated equally and no one should be housed in unsuitable temporary accommodation without basic facilities, except in emergency circumstances and for as short a time as possible. Crisis is calling for the Government to reform the Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2014 to give parity to all people experiencing homelessness and to ensure nobody is forced to live in unsuitable temporary accommodation for more than seven days.

**"You have to give your keys over every time you leave and sometimes when you come back it takes them up to forty-five minutes to let you back in. So you just have to wait there in the cold. I understand they have to make rules but when you're living that way as a grown adult it's so dehumanising. There's always this implication that we can't be trusted. All I want now is a nice place to live. But really all I mean is a safe place to live." Annabelle's story**

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<sup>1</sup> Bramley, G. (2016) *Homelessness projections in Great Britain: Core homelessness in Great Britain*. Crisis: London

<sup>2</sup> This is based on an average duration in UTA of 38 days for single people in Scotland in 2018.



## The legal context

The Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2014 currently sets a time limit for how long pregnant women and families can be housed in unsuitable temporary accommodation, and as part of their 2016 election manifesto the Scottish Government committed to reducing this time limit from 14 to seven days – this was implemented in October 2017. This is a positive step forward, which Crisis welcomes.

However, there is no such legal time limit for the vast majority of homeless people who are placed in unsuitable temporary accommodation. In 2003, Scotland ambitiously decided to end prioritising need in the homeless system. But this anomaly on unsuitable temporary accommodation means that single people and couples without children remain in unsuitable accommodation for prolonged periods of time, making it harder to move on from homelessness. The number of households currently in unsuitable temporary accommodation in Scotland is calculated at 2,070.<sup>3</sup>

## Impact

Anecdotal evidence from Crisis members in Edinburgh and the wider homeless community, along with discussions with homelessness organisations and local authorities, shows that there are a number of common problems with stays in unsuitable B&Bs that make it an unacceptable solution for responding to homelessness. These include:

- No access to basic amenities such as refrigeration, cooking and laundry facilities
- Poor access to rights, meaning people may be asked to leave with just a few hours' notice, and strict curfews mean they may not be able to come and go freely, or to stay away from their home overnight
- Isolation, especially where B&B provision is far from family and friends
- Lack of support from homelessness services
- Uncertainty about the future
- Non-resident parents not being allowed to invite their children to visit
- Feeling threatened or risking a return to destructive lifestyles especially if several people are housed in one place by the council.

In addition to making it harder to move on from homelessness, the total cost of using unsuitable temporary accommodation for single people in Scotland in 2018 is estimated

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<sup>3</sup> Bramley, G. (2016) *Homelessness projections in Great Britain: Core homelessness in Great Britain*. Crisis: London



to be £78m. Research commissioned by Crisis has found that £812 could be saved each time an individual living in unsuitable temporary accommodation is moved out of more expensive unsuitable temporary accommodation to cheaper suitable temporary accommodation within seven days. This would mean that they would avoid the higher costs for the remaining 31 days (i.e. the average time they would otherwise be housed in unsuitable temporary accommodation).

PricewaterhouseCoopers also estimated the overall benefit of moving people out of unsuitable temporary accommodation in 2018 could be a saving of £29m. This estimate is based on the total number of individual instances of single adults living in unsuitable temporary accommodation in 2018: using the ratio of homeless households in unsuitable temporary accommodation to adults from Heriot-Watt's research project, 2,070 households corresponds to 3,726 single adults currently living in unsuitable temporary accommodation.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, to translate this into the total number of instances of people living in unsuitable temporary accommodation the number of adults is multiplied by the number of days in a year divided by the average length in unsuitable temporary accommodation (365 divided by 38 days) – for 2018, the total number of individual instances of people living in unsuitable temporary accommodation is 35,788.

## What Crisis is calling for

Work is ongoing to identify ways in which to transform the use of temporary accommodation in Scotland as whole, for example by reducing the need for temporary accommodation through effective prevention and housing-led approaches; and strengthening standards, improving quality and regulation. A whole system approach involving commissioning, funding, allocations and planning of supply is required.

However, Crisis believes that legal reform is a crucial and urgent step required to ensure that unsuitable temporary accommodation is only used in emergency circumstances and for as short a time as possible. Crisis is calling reform to the Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2014, to extend the 7-day time limit to all homeless people to ensure that nobody is forced to live in unsuitable temporary accommodation for more than seven days.

**Crisis published a report into the prolonged use of unsuitable temporary accommodation in September 2017. A Life in Limbo shows the picture across Scotland and can be read at [www.crisis.org.uk/limbo](http://www.crisis.org.uk/limbo).**

Crisis Scotland, Crichton House 4 Crichton's Close Edinburgh EH8 8DT. Email [enquiries@crisis.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@crisis.org.uk)

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<sup>4</sup> Bramley, G. (2016) Homelessness projections in Great Britain: Core homelessness in Great Britain. Crisis: London