

Short Debate: Supporting people previously homeless into permanent housing after the Covid-19 pandemic, 14th May 2020

Temporary accommodation, homeless families and protections against eviction

Key messages

- During and after the COVID-19 emergency, all families, including homeless families living in temporary accommodation, must be protected against eviction and have access to suitable self-contained accommodation, including households with no recourse to public funds. Local authorities must be given the resources necessary to identify and support households living in unsafe temporary accommodation and provide them with alternative suitable self-contained accommodation where necessary.
- Thousands of households could be evicted from their home once the COVID-19 eviction ban is lifted on 25 June as people face job losses and rent arrears. Further protection against eviction and homelessness beyond the current eviction ban is urgently required.
- The COVID-19 emergency has a disproportionate and profound impact on low-income families and those in precarious employment and insecure housing. This requires urgent changes to the welfare system so that struggling households and homeless families with children can meet their basic needs.

Questions to the Government

- COVID-19 means that many homeless households will face even greater financial hardship and greater risk of eviction, debt and homelessness once the lockdown and the eviction ban are lifted. Will the Government make urgent improvements to the social welfare system so it can support those who face the risk of homelessness and destitution, including by lifting the benefit cap and the two-child limit, increase Local Housing Allowance so that it reflects the true costs of rent and put an end to the 5-week waiting period for Universal Credit?
- Given the risk of a wave of evictions due to job losses and rent arrears as a result of COVID-19 after the current ban on evictions comes to an end, will the Government extend the current ban on evictions in order to protect households from homelessness?

Homeless families living in unsuitable Temporary Accommodation

Even before the COVID-19 emergency, CRAE has continually raised concerns regarding the thousands of homeless families living in unsuitable and overcrowded temporary accommodation, in conditions which put children's health and wellbeing at risk. COVID-19 presents heightened risks and concerns for the many homeless families living in dangerously overcrowded conditions, forced to share facilities with strangers, and struggling to self-isolate and to protect their health. The COVID-19 emergency raises additional child protection and safeguarding concerns, given the increased pressures on social care and housing support, the effects of school closures and the additional stress on those in insecure and unsafe housing.

The Children's Commissioner for England has drawn attention to the 128,000 childrenⁱ living in temporary accommodation, in cramped and poor-quality housing, including in office-to-residential conversions on old industrial estates, in overcrowded units with no access to green space, to any play areas or to amenities. While many local authorities have been working to secure suitable self-contained accommodation for homeless families, many families are still stuck in unsafe and unhealthy accommodation, often sharing facilities with strangers. Shelter has been warning that the COVID-19 public health crisis is colliding with the existing housing emergency. We agree. ⁱⁱ

We know from our work with children who have experienced living in crowded and unsafe temporary accommodation, including B&Bs, for extended periods of time, how damaging this can be. Children have

the told us of the difficulties of sharing facilities with strangers and having no place to study or play or prepare proper meals. The COVID-19 emergency heightens the risks to the health, wellbeing and safety of families forced to live in these conditions, and the need to ensure suitable self-contained accommodation.

Protecting households from evictions

The post-lockdown impacts on homeless families and homeless young people will be significant, due to their already precarious living conditions and ongoing financial difficulties. These will be made worse by the COVID-19 emergency, as households struggle to deal with illness, poor mental health, poverty, loss of earnings and the threat of eviction and homelessness.

There are growing concerns that thousands of households could be evicted from their home once the COVID-19 eviction ban is lifted on 25 June, as people face job losses and rent arrears. Despite the Government announcement that people will be further protected from eviction by the introduction of a 'pre-action protocol' on all possession proceedings, there are ongoing concerns that this will not be enough to protect them from eviction and homelessness. Shelter has estimated that 1.7 million private renters face losing their jobⁱⁱⁱ due to the coronavirus emergency and have called for stronger legal protections against Section 8 and Section 21 evictions.^{iv}

Recommendations

- During and after the Covid-19 emergency, all families, including homeless families living in temporary accommodation, must be protected against eviction and have access to suitable self-contained accommodation, including households with no recourse to public funds.
- Legal protections against eviction and homelessness due to COVID-19 should be strengthened by scrapping Section 21 'no fault' evictions and temporarily suspending the use of Section 8 (Housing Act 1998) evictions.
- There should be an extension of the current ban on evictions.
- Local authorities should be provided with the necessary resources to identify and support households living in unsafe temporary accommodation and provide them with alternative suitable self-contained accommodation where necessary.
- A temporary increase in child benefit of £10 per week should be introduced, as recommended by a number of children's charities.
- The benefit cap should be lifted and the two-child limit scrapped.
- The 5-week wait for Universal Credit should be ended.
- Local Housing Allowance should be increased so that rent support covers the actual costs of renting.

About Just for Kids Law and CRAE

Just for Kids Law (JfKL) is an award-winning UK charity working with and for children and young people to hold those with power to account, and fighting for wider reform by providing legal representation and advice, direct advocacy and support, and campaigning. The Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE) merged into Just for Kids law in 2015 and works with over 100 members to promote children's rights and monitor government implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Contact details

If you would like more information, please contact: Giana Rosa, Change It! Campaign Consultant, CRAE, part of Just for Kids Law, Tel: 07951 142105, Email: GRosa@crae.org.uk

ⁱ Children's Commissioner for England creates local area profiles of child vulnerability during Covid-19

<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/2020/04/25/childrens-commissioner-for-england-creates-local-area-profiles-of-child-vulnerability-during-covid-19/>

ⁱⁱ *On the frontline with Shelter services during coronavirus*, Chloe Grass-Orkin, Shelter, 1 May 2020, <https://blog.shelter.org.uk/2020/05/on-the-frontline-with-shelter-services-during-coronavirus/>

ⁱⁱⁱ *One in five private renters expect to lose their job in next three months, says Shelter*, Nathaniel Barker, Inside Housing, 16 April 2020,

<https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/news/one-in-five-private-renters-expect-to-lose-their-job-in-next-three-months-says-shelter-66079>

^{iv} *Renters are facing a cliff edge: government must act now*, Ruth Ehrlich, Shelter, 6 May 2020, <https://blog.shelter.org.uk/2020/05/renters-are-facing-a-cliff-edge-government-must-act-now/>