

Number of families homeless or at risk of homelessness up 23% in past year

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The number of families who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness has gone up by more than 23% in 12 months, new analysis by Channel 4's *Dispatches* has revealed.



The number of families who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness has gone up by more than 23% (picture: Getty)

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Research by the current affairs programme also found that in the first three months of this year, around 26,000 households were put in accommodation outside of their borough after being made homeless – three times the number in the same period 10 years ago.

It found that the number of homeless households living in temporary accommodation is rising: up by 23% in the past five years.

The figures come ahead of an episode called 'Britain's Evicted Kids', which will look at the impact of eviction on children.

A survey by homelessness charity Shelter, shared with *Dispatches*, found that 26% are falling behind on temporary accommodation payments, including rent, bills and service charges, amid the cost of living crisis.

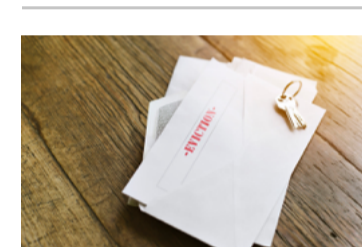
In order to keep up with these costs, a third of people have had to cut back on heating and/or electricity, a third have had to turn to food banks, and just under half have had to borrow money.

Other research by Shelter found that 25% of private renters have cut back on food or skipped meals to cover the rent – a 66% increase in the past two years.

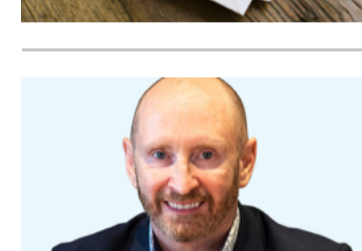
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Research by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism (BIJ) on behalf of *Dispatches* looked at what the freeze on Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates means in the current housing market.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) uses LHA rates to calculate how much Universal Credit or housing benefit a tenant can get to pay their rent.

Before being frozen in 2016, LHA rates covered the cheapest 30% of rents in the local area. In April 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government restored LHA rates to the cheapest 30th percentile, but they have been frozen since then and have not kept pace with inflation.

Looking at 40,534 two-bed properties on Rightmove in July across England, Scotland and Wales, the BIJ found that one in 50 rental properties in Britain are affordable for people relying on housing benefits.

In 19 areas across Britain, including London, the BIJ could not find any affordable properties throughout July. In a further 22 areas, there was only one affordable property advertised during the month.

In Birmingham, only 0.6% of properties found were affordable.

The BIJ calculated that in England, the average increase in LHA needed to make 30% of the properties advertised affordable was £206. In central London it was as much as £1,444.

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Shelter has called on the government to unfreeze housing benefit immediately “or face an onslaught of evictions and surging homelessness”.

Polly Neate, chief executive of Shelter, said: “The cost of living crisis is worsening every day, and the government is catastrophically failing to do anything that will help families keep a roof over their heads.

“Despite countless promises, the government has yet to ban no-fault evictions, which leave people in constant fear of losing their home.

“And it's done nothing to help people cope with rapidly rising rents, with housing benefit still frozen at 2020 levels.”

She added that “something radical needs to be done to fix our broken housing system”.

A DWP spokesperson said: “During the pandemic we increased the LHA for housing benefits, with 1.5 million households receiving on average an additional £600 a year.

“We are maintaining this boost, ensuring those who benefitted will continue to do so, while also investing £11.5bn in our Affordable Homes Programme.

“We have also taken action to support the most vulnerable with direct payments worth at least £1,200, while our new energy price guarantee – saving households on average a further £1,000 – will help people to pay their bills.”

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