

One in every 200 people in UK are homeless, according to Shelter

Charity used official government data to estimate 307,000 people sleeping rough or living in inadequate housing

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More than 300,000 people in Britain – equivalent to one in every 200 – are officially recorded as homeless or living in inadequate homes, according to figures released by the charity Shelter.

Using official government data, it estimates that 307,000 people are sleeping rough, or accommodated in temporary housing, bed and breakfast rooms, or hostels – an increase of 13,000 over the past year.

Shelter said the figures were an underestimate as they did not include people trapped in so-called “hidden homelessness”, who have nowhere to live but are not recorded as needing housing assistance, and end up “sofa surfing”.

London, where one in every 59 people are homeless, remains Britain’s homelessness centre. Of the top 50 local authority homelessness “hotspots”, 18 were in Greater London, with Newham, where one in 27 residents are homeless, worst hit.

However, while London’s homeless rates have remained largely stable over the past year, the figures show the problem is becoming worse in leafier commuter areas bordering the capital, such as Brounne, Luton, and Chelmsford.

Big regional cities have also seen substantial year-on-year increases in the rate of homelessness. In Manchester, one in 154 people are homeless; in Birmingham one in 88 are homeless (119); in Bristol one in 170 are affected (199).

Polly Neate, chief executive of Shelter, said: “It’s shocking to think that today, more than 300,000 people in Britain are waking up homeless. Some will have spent the night shivering on a cold pavement, others crammed into a dingy hostel room with their children. And what is worse, many are simply unaccounted for.

“On a daily basis, we speak to hundreds of people and families who are desperately trying to escape the devastating trap of homelessness. A trap that is tightening thanks to decades of failure to build enough affordable homes and the impact of benefit cuts.”

Although public perceptions of homelessness are dominated by rough sleeping, Shelter points out that the leading cause of homelessness is the ending of a private renting, which is responsible for three in every 10 cases of homelessness, and often triggered by a combination of high rent prices and housing benefit cuts.

Shelter's figures show that as of April this year 281,000 people were living in temporary accommodation in Britain. A further 21,300 were in single homeless hostels or social services housing, while 4,500 were rough sleeping.

The Homelessness Reduction Act comes into force next year. This requires local authorities to actively take steps to prevent households at risk of homelessness tipping into crisis and leading to homelessness.

However, people working for the government are concerned that funding for their new duties is insufficient, at a time when pressures caused by housing shortages, rising rents and benefit cuts are increasing pressure on their housing departments.

Shelter warned earlier this year that more than a million households are at risk of becoming homeless by 2020. Rising numbers of families on low incomes are struggling to pay even the lowest available private sector rents in many areas, leading to ever higher levels of eviction and homelessness.

It calls for more genuinely affordable homes to be built, an end to the local housing allowance freeze, and measures to increase security for tenants in the private sector.

A National Audit Office inquiry in September criticised the government for failing to get a grip on homelessness, despite recorded numbers rising every year since 2010. It said local housing allowance cuts helped fuel the crisis, which costs the taxpayer about £1bn a year. A DCLG spokesperson said: "We

are determined to tackle all forms of homelessness, which includes making sure people in temporary accommodation are getting support to keep a roof over their heads.

"We're investing £950m by 2020 to support these efforts, and bringing in the Homelessness Reduction Act. This requires councils to provide early support to people at risk of being left without anywhere to go."

