

Briefing:

How many people need a social rented home?

September 2019

- 8.4m people in England are in some form of housing need
- 3.6m of these would have their needs best met by social rented homes.

1. Introduction

There is currently no recognised official measure of housing need in England. The closest thing we have are local housing registers – colloquially known as the ‘waiting list’. Local housing registers, maintained at local level by local authorities, are part of the mechanism by which social housing is allocated to people in need. Households wishing to obtain a social rented property must join their local register in order to be able to bid on properties. However, registers are generally felt to be inadequate as a measure of housing need, particularly since the introduction of the Localism Act in 2011. Simply put, there is now no consistent set of criteria for allowing households to join a register. Additionally, as these registers are not necessarily cleaned on a regular basis, it is very difficult to arrive at a robust national figure.

However, it is imperative to understand the scale of need in order to plan appropriate policy responses, and to humanise and better inform the debate around the scale and dynamics of the need for new housing.

2. Approach

This briefing outlines the headline findings of analysis carried out for the National Housing Federation by Professor Glen Bramley of the Institute for Social Policy, Housing, Equalities Research (I-SPHERE) at Heriot Watt Universityⁱ. This analysis builds on work commissioned by the Federation in partnership with Crisis, as part of a wider study evaluating housing requirementsⁱⁱ.

The previous study included an estimate of the backlog of need for new homes based on analysis of the Understanding Society survey carried out by the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) at the University of Essexⁱⁱⁱ. For this new exercise, we commissioned Professor Bramley to explore these backlog figures in more depth, looking at:

- an estimate of the number of households and people affected by different housing problems
- an estimate of how many of those affected would be best served by different types of sub-market housing provision, in particular social rented homes
- how these issues are distributed across broad regions of England.

The analysis identified how many households are affected by each of the housing issues identified in the list below, subsequently estimating how many people live in the households affected by:

- overcrowding (as measured by the bedroom standard)
- concealed households (including adult children who wish to move out of their parental home, lone parents living with other families, etc.)
- affordability issues
- accommodation unsuitable due to health, age or family type of household
- poor condition of property.

Affordability constraints were also applied to assess which sub-market tenure – if any – would be most appropriate for the affected households.

In addition, an assessment of other data sources was carried out to identify the scale of need related to homelessness which would not be picked up by the Understanding Society survey. This was based

on the definitions of core and wider homelessness developed by Crisis in conjunction with I-SPHERE^{IV}. It is reasonable to assume that all of the households identified in this way would be best served by social rented homes.

These figures were then added to those identified from Understanding Society to produce the following results.

Table 1 – Elements of need, England

Housing need issues	Households	People
Overcrowded (bedroom standard)	789,754	3,648,645
Concealed households	1,785,929	2,542,502
Affordability issues	924,283	2,514,219
Accommodation unsuitable due to age, health or family type	526,686	1,669,570
Poor conditions	515,689	1,381,988
Any need (i.e. any of the above)	3,709,685	7,988,356
Any need, where social rent would be the most appropriate tenure	1,855,241	3,201,071
Homeless or at risk of homelessness	251,814	406,009
Any need (incl. homeless)	3,961,499	8,394,365
Any need (incl. homeless) where social rent would be the most appropriate tenure	2,107,055	3,607,080

Note that as households can experience more than one type of need, the headline totals for the different types of need do not add up to the total identified as being in need.

The headline need figures break down regionally as follows:

Table 2 – Overall need by region

	Any need (incl. homelessness)	Any need (incl. homeless) where social rent would be the most appropriate tenure
North	2,225,751	1,017,375
Midlands	1,574,859	676,105
South	2,497,827	1,015,724
London	2,095,929	897,875
England	8,394,365	3,607,080

3. Caveat

It is important to note that the numbers in this study are estimates of the backlog of existing need. As such, they do not take newly arising need into account. It is thus not robust to use these figures as proxies for the numbers of new homes that need to be provided. We know from wider analysis that we need to be building 340,000 new homes a year, of which 145,000 should be affordable, including 90,000 for social rent. For a discussion of the much more complex modelling which sits behind these figures, see [Housing supply requirements across Great Britain](#).

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- ⁱ Technical note of this analysis will be available soon
- ⁱⁱ [*Housing supply requirements across Great Britain*](#)
- ⁱⁱⁱ www.understandingsociety.ac.uk
- ^{iv} These definitions are discussed in [*Everybody In – How to end homelessness in Great Britain*](#) (Crisis, 2018)