



PAPER 8

Homelessness: Trends and Impacts 2018-2025

**NORTHERN IRELAND HOUSING
MARKET REVIEW** 2024/25



**Housing
Executive**

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Foreword

I am delighted to introduce this first edition of our quarterly in-year papers which form part of our refreshed Northern Ireland Housing Market Review. We are pleased to re-establish the Housing Market Review as an annual publication and a resource for the collation and dissemination of housing-related data.

In developing the new format, the Housing Executive's Research Team consulted with colleagues and stakeholders in the housing sector; we are grateful for their input, and that of the editorial team, which provided both feedback and content.

Alongside this report, a series of data tables will be made available, which will allow for all data contained in the publication to be downloaded and used by the reader. These data tables will be updated throughout the year, as and when new figures are released.

This report is published against a backdrop of acute housing supply challenges; however we welcome the specific priority attached to housing supply in the new Programme for Government, coupled with the Housing Supply Strategy. It places important emphasis on the development of the right kind of housing in the right places. As well as providing much-needed homes for those in housing need, this focus on delivery will also make a significant contribution to the local economy and the stability of the construction sector for years to come. Reducing homelessness and housing stress are a key Northern Ireland Executive priority with a welcome focus on prevention and collaboration across departments.

Our mission – as set out in our Corporate Strategy for 2025/26 – 2027/28 is to ensure that housing helps resolve some of our greatest challenges. Through good housing, we aim to help end health inequalities, prioritise early intervention and prevention, protect our communities from climate change, and drive sustainable economic growth.

We are ambitious about what can be achieved over the next ten years. As we plan future activities, the data, research and information brought together in this comprehensive document provides a critical evidence base for us as an organisation. We trust that it will also be a useful reference point for our partners and stakeholders across and beyond the housing sector.

Grainia Long
Chief Executive

Introduction

The Northern Ireland Housing Market Review consists of a series of papers covering a range of housing topics, market data, analysis and commentary which is designed to provide important background and contextual information for the development of housing strategies and housing policy as well as direct intervention in the housing market. It draws together key statistics compiled by the Housing Executive, Government departments, universities, and the private sector.

This paper is the first of our quarterly in-year papers and provides an overview of homelessness and an examination of homelessness trends including homelessness presentations and acceptances as well as the scale and nature of temporary accommodation demand.

Homelessness is a complex and multi-faceted issue. Trends changed significantly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and many have been long-lasting and potentially permanent. In November 2020 the Housing Executive produced its COVID-19 Reset plan for homelessness which considered the long-lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on homelessness. These assumptions informed the Housing Executive's long-term plans and priorities, in particular the development of the NIHE's Homelessness Strategy.

The paper provides an overview of annual data on homeless presenters, acceptances under the Housing (NI) Order 1988's statutory tests and temporary accommodation use by households and children. These data tables on homelessness can be found on our Data Hub within the Northern Ireland Social Housing Supply section.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my thanks to colleagues within the Homelessness team and our team of Housing Executive researchers who have dedicated considerable time to the production of this report and associated data tables. I hope you find this paper useful and informative.

Ursula McAnulty

Head of Research

Acknowledgements

Production Team:

Authors:

Patrice Reilly (Lead Researcher)

James McFall (Policy & Business Excellence)

Richard Tanswell (Head of Homelessness Policy & Strategy)

For further information on the Northern Ireland Housing Market Review please contact:

The Research Unit, Housing Executive, 2 Adelaide Street, Belfast, BT2 8PB

Patrice Reilly (Lead Researcher) Email: patrice.reilly@nihe.gov.uk

Ursula McAnulty (Head of Research) Email: ursula1.mcanulty@nihe.gov.uk

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5. Homelessness

Authors:

Patrice Reilly, Senior Research Officer, Housing Executive Research Unit

James McFall, Policy & Business Excellence, Housing Executive

Richard Tanswell, Head of Homelessness Policy & Strategy, Housing Executive

Context and trends

Homelessness is a complex and multi-dimensional issue that extends far beyond the absence of shelter. Its impacts are felt across multiple areas of public policy, including health, justice, education, welfare, employment, and housing. Addressing homelessness effectively requires a holistic response that goes beyond housing provision to consider the contributing wider social and systemic factors.

While rough sleeping is often the most visible form of homelessness, the issue is far broader and includes individuals living in temporary accommodation, unsuitable or overcrowded housing, or staying with others in unstable arrangements such as 'sofa surfing'. It also encompasses those at risk of violence in their current accommodation or living in conditions that negatively impact their health or fail to meet their physical needs. Addressing homelessness requires recognition of, and responses to, this wider spectrum of housing insecurity.

While anyone can experience homelessness, certain factors significantly increase the risk. These include unemployment, poor physical or mental health, substance misuse, relationship breakdown, or a combination of these challenges. Such circumstances can make it difficult for individuals to maintain their housing or secure alternative accommodation quickly, increasing their vulnerability to homelessness. Crisis has noted that 'People become and stay homeless for a whole range of complex and overlapping reasons which are a combination of structural factors in society and individual support needs, decisions and actions. Solving homelessness therefore is about much more than putting a roof over people's heads¹.' In addition to the personal and social impacts of homelessness, there are also significant economic costs. These include increased demand on public services such as healthcare, justice, and social support systems, as well as lost productivity and long-term financial implications for government and society.

1. Crisis Policy Briefing: Introduction to Homelessness & Housing. Crisis (2010) <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/introduction-to-homelessness-and-housing>

In Northern Ireland, the Housing (NI) Order 1988 (as amended) identifies the Northern Ireland Housing Executive as the agency tasked with responding to homelessness. The Order places a statutory duty on the Housing Executive to provide interim and/or permanent accommodation for certain homeless households, dependent upon investigations and assessment of their circumstances. In order to be “accepted” as statutorily homeless, a household must meet the four tests of:

- Eligibility
- Homelessness
- Priority Need
- Intentionality

Any household that meets the four statutory tests will be classified as a Full Duty Applicant (FDA) and entitled to a full housing duty. This duty includes the provision of suitable accommodation, temporary housing where necessary, and support to protect the household’s belongings.

In accordance with the Housing (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010, the Housing Executive also has a statutory duty to publish a new homelessness strategy at least every five years. The current strategy ‘Ending Homelessness Together’ covers the period 2022-27 with an overarching aim that ‘wherever possible homelessness should be prevented; but if homelessness cannot be prevented it should be rare, brief and non-recurring’.²

Over the past five years, homelessness trends in Northern Ireland have shifted significantly, influenced initially by the COVID-19 pandemic and later by economic shocks and cost-of-living pressures.

While the annual number of households presenting as homeless has reduced in recent years, there has been soaring demand for temporary accommodation from households unable to make their own arrangements, while awaiting re-housing. Furthermore, a reduction in allocations of social housing generally has resulted in 32,159 households registered as Full Duty Applicants (FDA) on the waiting list as of June 2025; a ‘bottleneck’ of unprecedented demand for housing. Newly arrived households to Northern Ireland have had a small (5%) but growing impact on demand for homelessness services.

This paper provides an overview of current homelessness trends, examining both the scale and nature of demand, as well as the pressures on temporary accommodation supply and throughput.

2. <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/housing-help/homelessness/homelessness-strategy>

Homeless Presenters

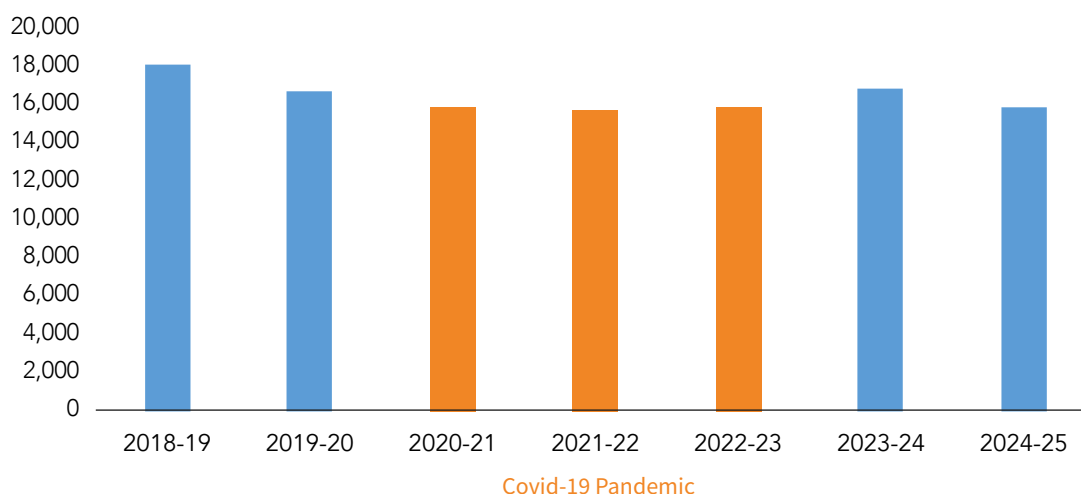
The number of people presenting as homeless in Northern Ireland has broadly decreased from highs of 21,013 in 2006/07³ to 15,905 in 2024/25. Figure 8.1 shows that over the last nine years, levels of homelessness have generally ranged between c16,000 - c18,000 presenters each year.

Homeless presentations in Northern Ireland declined during the COVID-19 pandemic, reaching a low of 15,758 in 2021-22. This was followed by an increase over the next two years, peaking at 16,943 in 2023-24.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a lasting impact on homelessness services in Northern Ireland and across the UK. In its Homelessness Reset Plan: The Way Ahead (November 2020), the Housing Executive reviewed its COVID-19 pandemic response and anticipated key challenges, including increased demand, changes in the profile of those presenting as homeless, and shifts in the reasons for homelessness. It is now clear that these assumptions were accurate, with trends reflecting the predicted pressures.

The most recent data for 2024/25 shows a slight decrease to 15,905 presenters, indicating some stabilisation after the post-pandemic rise in 2023/24. Overall, the number of presenters during 2024/25 has returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 8.1: Total Number of Homeless Presenters 2018/19-2024/25



Source: NIHE

3. <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-homelessness-bulletin-october-2024-march-2025>

Homeless Households Accepted as Full Duty Applicants (FDA)

The number of homeless households accepted as Full Duty Applicants (FDA⁴) decreased during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (9,889: 2020/21) before gradually increasing and peaking during 2023/24 (11,537). The number of FDA decreased again during 2024/25 to 10,855. The proportion of households accepted as FDA has increased significantly over the last 20 or more years, from 46% of all presenters in 2011/12 to 68% of all presenters in 2024/25.

Figure 8.2: Homeless Households Accepted as Full Duty Applicants (FDA) 2018/19-2024/25

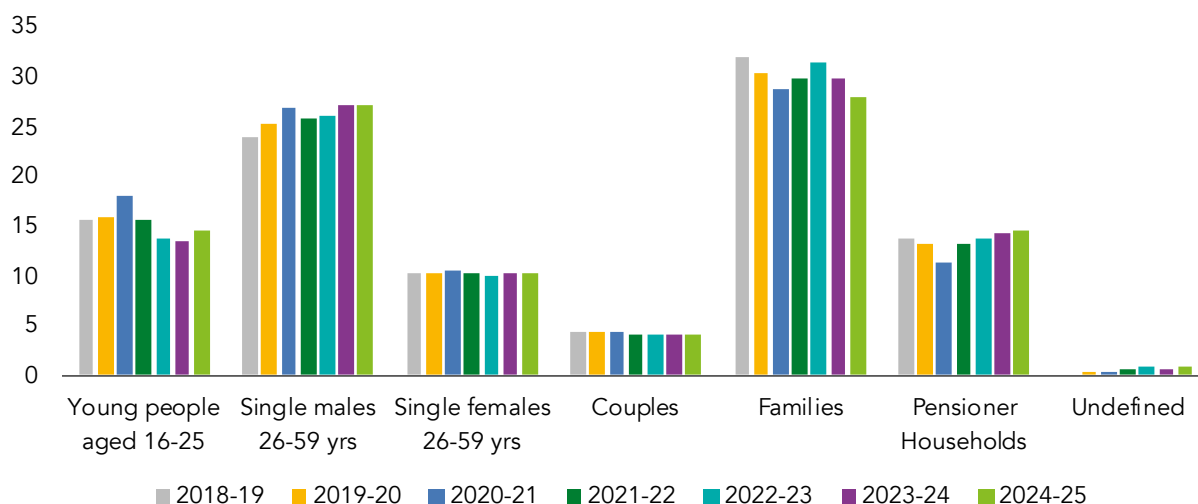


Homeless Presentations - Household Groups

Since 2018/19, the number of households presenting as homeless has declined across all household types, with the most significant reduction among families - from 5,843 in 2018/19 to 4,476 in 2024/25. Despite this decrease, families remain the largest presenting group, followed by single males, highlighting the continued need for targeted support for these cohorts. If we look at the breakdown of all households presenting as homeless, we see differing experiences over time as shown in Figure 8.3.

The composition of homeless presenters has shifted since 2018/19. Families and young people now account for a smaller share of presentations: families decreased from 32% to 28%, and young people (16-25) fell from 16% to 15% after a temporary rise during the COVID-19 pandemic. In contrast, older households (60+) increased slightly from 14% to 15%, while single males aged 26-59 saw the largest growth, rising from 24% to 27%. These trends highlight the need for targeted responses to changing demographic pressures.

4. <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-homelessness-bulletin-october-2024-march-2025>

Figure 8.3: Homeless Presentations - Household Groups 2018/19-2024/25 (%)

Source: NIHE

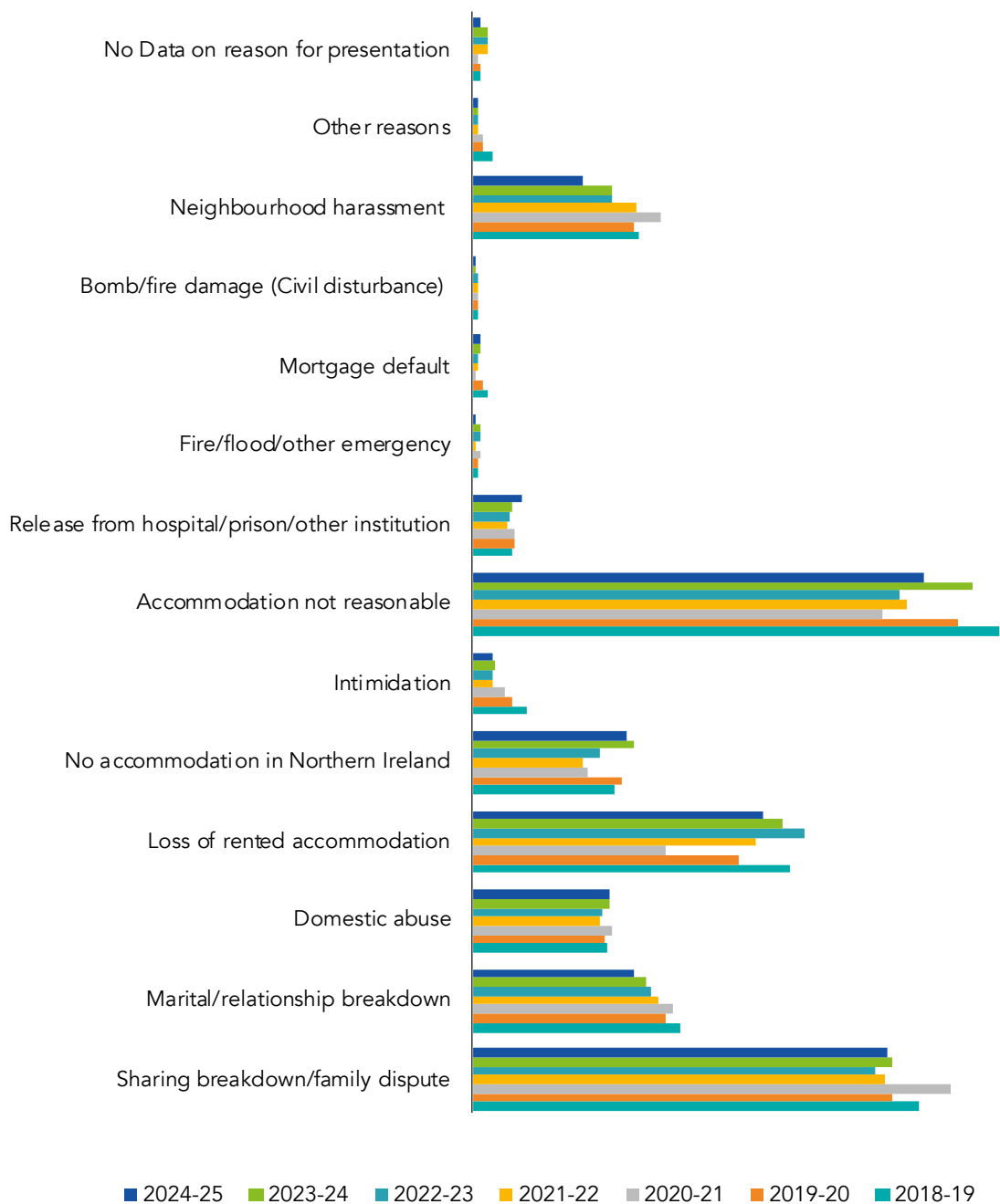
Homeless Presentations - Reasons for Homelessness

Figure 8.4 shows that ‘accommodation not reasonable’ is the main reason given by households presenting as homelessness. This is followed by “sharing breakdown/family dispute” and then “loss of rented accommodation”.

The category of ‘accommodation not reasonable’ continues to encompass a wide range of issues, but analysis shows that physical health and disability are the predominant factors, highlighting the need for appropriate housing and support for individuals with complex health needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on homelessness trends, particularly in 2020/21, when presentations rose due to family disputes and domestic violence - trends that align with PSNI data. During this period, presentations due to loss of private rented accommodation temporarily declined due to eviction restrictions. Since then, there has been a steady decrease in cases linked to relationship breakdown and neighbourhood harassment, while domestic abuse remains a persistent issue, disproportionately affecting women and families with children.

Overall, the number of households presenting due to reasons such as loss of rented accommodation, unsuitable housing, lack of local accommodation, and release from institutions has now returned to pre- 2018/19 levels, underscoring the need for sustained policy attention to housing accessibility, health-related accommodation needs, and support for vulnerable groups.

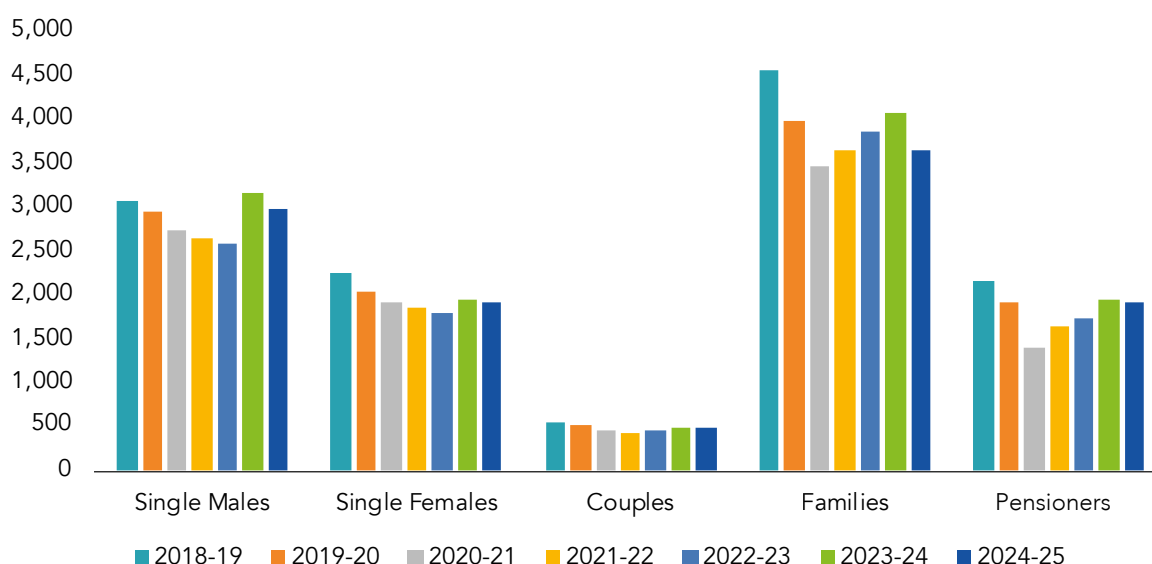
Figure 8.4: Households Presenting as Homeless by Reason (2018/19-2024/25)

Source: NIHE

Acceptances - Household Type

Figure 8.5 shows that families remain the most common household type being accepted as homeless, followed by single males. The most marked change over time was the increase in single males accepted as homeless during the last two years. In contrast the number of families accepted as homeless has decreased during 2024/25 (3,630) compared to the previous year (4,071).

Figure 8.5: Acceptances by Household Type 2018/19-2024/25



Source: NIHE

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the overall number of homelessness acceptances in Northern Ireland decreased, but has since returned to levels similar to those seen prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. While a post-pandemic spike in homelessness was anticipated - particularly among certain household types - the data reveals a more nuanced picture. Acceptances have declined among families and young people, yet increased among single males.

Notably, young people appear to have been disproportionately affected by homelessness during this period. Their experiences often differ from adults, with many facing “hidden” homelessness - relying on informal arrangements such as staying with friends or extended family.

This is particularly concerning given the long-term impact homelessness can have on young people’s development and wellbeing. In response, the Housing Executive has prioritised youth-specific interventions to better support young people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Rough Sleeping

As part of our commitment to regularly monitor and measure the extent of rough sleeping throughout Northern Ireland, the Housing Executive has continued to conduct annual rough sleeping counts since 2018.

Prior to 2018 the Housing Executive carried out snapshot counts only in areas where there was an identified need, which were primarily urban areas such as Belfast, Derry/Londonderry and Newry. The approach since 2018 has enabled the Housing Executive to publish information on rough sleeping across Northern Ireland as outlined in this update.

This update also allows the Housing Executive to track progress, consider whether current measures are effective in tackling rough sleeping and consider if new approaches are required. To ensure consistency is maintained each year, and to collect data which is comparable with other jurisdictions, the Housing Executive conducts the rough sleeping count using Homeless Link's Rough Sleeping Estimate guidance. Table 8.1 details rough sleeping numbers for 2018 through to 2024 with figures for 2025 due to be published in February 2026.

Table 8.1: Rough Sleeping Numbers 2018-2024

Council Area	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Antrim & Newtownabbey	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ards & North Down	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	0	4	0	1	1	1	4
Belfast	16	28	10	18	26	32	51
Causeway Coast & Glens	4	0	0	0	0	0	2
Derry City & Strabane	13	1	2	0	2	3	2
Fermanagh & Omagh	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Lisburn & Castlereagh	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Mid & East Antrim	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Mid Ulster	0	0	0	0	1	0	4
Newry, Mourne & Down	5	1	6	4	3	7	6
Total	38	36	18	23	33	45	72

Source: NIHE

Additionally, to further understand the needs of rough sleepers the Housing Executive carried out a Street Needs Audit with Welcome Organisation, Depaul and First Housing. The purpose of the street needs audit was to provide the Housing Executive with a comprehensive understanding of the scale of street activity, including rough sleeping, in Belfast, Derry/Londonderry and Newry. The organisations involved have an established working relationship in assisting rough sleepers and those engaged in street activity and were tasked with capturing data on the number of encounters with individuals engaged in street activity. The full report was published in 2023 and can be found on this [link](#).

Changing Profile & Complexity: Temporary Accommodation (TA)

Demand context

The Housing Executive has a statutory duty under the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1988 to secure accommodation for individuals assessed as homeless and in priority need. This duty applies both during the interim inquiry period and, where the full duty is owed, until suitable permanent housing is secured. Temporary accommodation is a demand-led service, and the Housing Executive has a duty to provide it to every full duty applicant who requires it. NIHE's ability to respond is shaped by available funding models and accommodation supply.

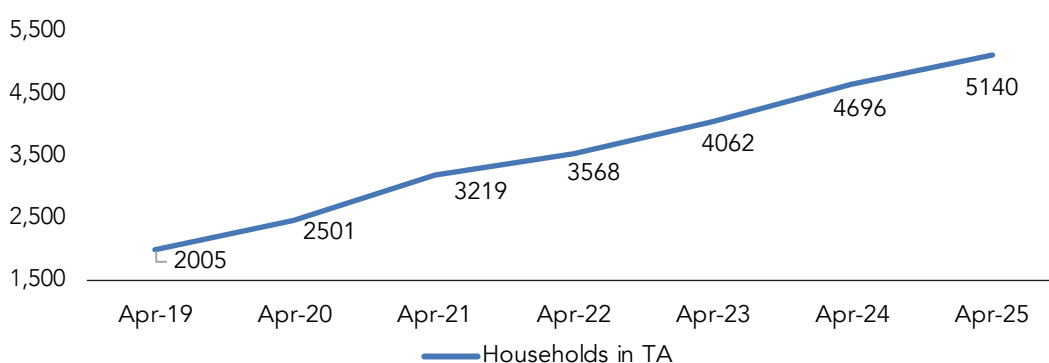
The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 triggered a sharp increase in demand, particularly from households unable to remain in shared or family settings. Between 2019/20 and 2020/21, placements into temporary accommodation rose by 115%, and the number of households currently in temporary accommodation increased by 29%. Since then, sustained pressures across the wider housing system - including a shortfall in allocations to social housing, affordability and availability issues in the private rented sector, and the cost-of-living crisis - have driven continued growth in temporary accommodation use, with an average annual increase of 13% from 2020/21 onwards. More recently, rising numbers of households recently granted 'leave to remain' have created some additional demand for temporary accommodation.

Demand has not only grown in scale but also in complexity, with rising numbers of single-person households, families, and individuals with higher support needs. This has necessitated a more flexible and diverse range of accommodation options to meet the evolving needs of those experiencing homelessness.

Table 8.2: Percentage Increase in TA Placements (2019/20-2024/25)

Year	Total Number of Placements in TA	Percentage Increase from 2019/20
2019/20	4,527	Baseline
2020/21	9,752	+115.4%
2021/22	9,265	+104.7%
2022/23	10,253	+126.5%
2023/24	11,368	+151.1%
2024/25	11,887	+162.6%

Source: NIHE

Figure 8.6: Current Households in Temporary Accommodation in NI (April 2019 - April 2025)⁵

Source: NIHE

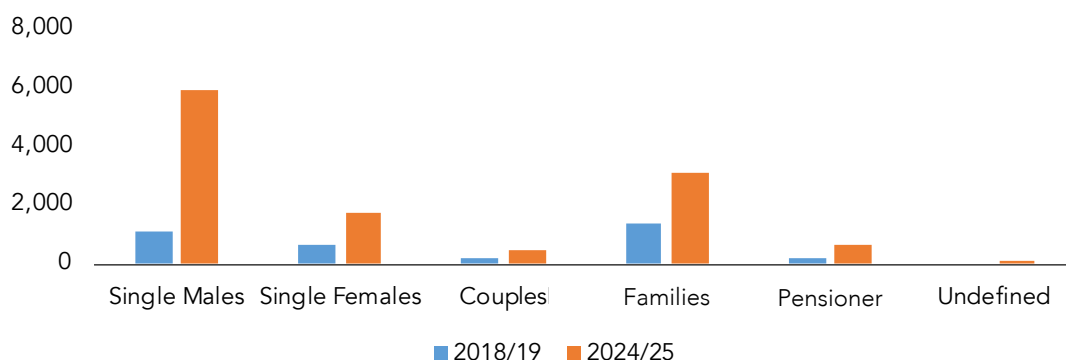
Between April 2019 and April 2025, the number of households in temporary accommodation in Northern Ireland increased from 2,005 to 5,140 - an overall rise of 156%. The most significant growth occurred between 2020 and 2021, during the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, with an increase of over 700 households. Since then, demand has remained persistently high, with household numbers growing by an average of 13% annually.

This steady increase reflects both a continuous inflow of new households entering temporary accommodation and a reduced rate of transition into permanent housing. The data highlights the cumulative impact of structural pressures within the housing system, including a shortfall in social housing supply, affordability constraints in the private rented sector, and broader economic challenges.

5. It should be noted that the figures in above chart reflect differing timepoints from published data and will therefore differ from figures within the DfC Homelessness Bulletin.

These trends confirm the demand for temporary accommodation both in terms of those who require it and how long it is needed. Addressing this requires coordinated, strategic responses across housing, health, and support services to ensure system capacity, improve throughput into permanent housing, and meet the needs of increasingly diverse and complex household profiles.

Figure 8.7: Placements in Temporary Accommodation by Household Type (2018/19 vs 2024/25)



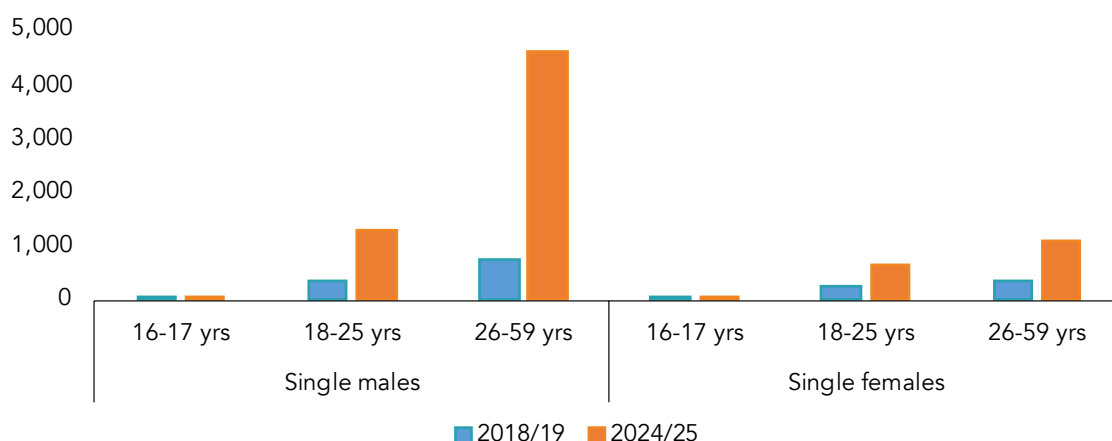
Source: NIHE

The profile of households placed in temporary accommodation by the Housing Executive has shifted significantly since before the COVID-19 pandemic, reflecting both the scale and diversification of homelessness demand. Compared to 2018/19, there has been a marked increase across all household types.

The most substantial growth has occurred among single males, whose placements rose from 1,123 in 2018/19 to 5,887 in 2024/25 - now representing 50% of all placements. Family placements have also more than doubled, increasing from 1,348 to 3,118 over the same period. This rise highlights the growing number of households with children entering temporary accommodation, often linked to factors such as loss of private rented housing and domestic abuse. The data points to a more complex and varied pattern of homelessness, with both individual and family needs increasing sharply.

This underscores the importance of developing a responsive and flexible temporary accommodation system, supported by integrated services that can address the distinct needs of different household types and ensure pathways into sustainable housing. The Housing Executive has been proactive in developing its temporary accommodation portfolio to reflect the change in needs and increased demand.

Figure 8.8: Placements in Temporary Accommodation, Single Males & Females by Age



Source: NIHE

The age profile of single persons placed in temporary accommodation has shifted significantly since 2018/19, with the most pronounced increase observed among males aged 26–59. Placements within this group have risen six-fold, underscoring persistent barriers to accessing and sustaining housing, particularly due to the limited availability of one-bedroom social housing stock. While smaller increases have been recorded among younger single males (aged 18-25) and across all single female age groups, overall placements among women remain comparatively lower.

This evolving demographic profile highlights the need for targeted housing interventions and support services that reflect the distinct needs of different age and gender groups. The data reinforces the importance of addressing gaps in housing supply - especially for single-person households - and ensuring that temporary accommodation provision is responsive to the changing nature of homelessness demand.

Table 8.3: Average Length of Stay in TA Placements (2020/21 – 2024/25)

Year	Average (days)
2020/21	175
2021/22	217
2022/23	228
2023/24	241
2024/25	265

Source: NIHE

The average length of stay in temporary accommodation has increased steadily over the past five years, rising from 175 days in 2020/21 to 265 days in 2024/25—an overall increase of 51%. This progressive rise indicates that temporary accommodation is increasingly functioning as a medium- to longer-term housing solution, rather than a short-term intervention, due to lack of social housing allocations, through which NIHE can discharge its housing duty.

The shift has significant implications for system capacity and resource allocation, as longer stays reduce turnover and contribute to sustained occupancy levels across the temporary accommodation portfolio. While temporary accommodation continues to play a vital role in meeting urgent housing need, extended durations can present challenges for households in maintaining stability, continuity of care, and access to education, employment, and support services - particularly for families and individuals with complex needs.

NIHE has responded to this changing pattern of demand by ensuring that the majority (80%) of its temporary accommodation is provided through 'own front door' accommodation, e.g. through 'single lets' which are higher quality accommodation and more suitable provision for households over the medium term. This is dealt with in more detail below. The Housing Executive is particularly mindful of ensuring that households with children are not placed in non-standard accommodation (Hotels and B&B's) and if children are placed in non-standard, alternative accommodation in 'own front door' accommodation is prioritised. On 1st April 2025 there were 5,124 households in temporary accommodation, and households with children in non-standard accommodation accounted for 1.6% of all placements. By means of comparison, data for England noted that as of 31st March 2025 3,870 households with children were in B&B style temporary accommodation and 2,300 of these had been resident for more than the statutory 6-week limit.

Temporary Accommodation: Supply Response

To effectively discharge its statutory duty under the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1988, the Housing Executive utilises a broad and flexible range of temporary accommodation types.

These include dispersed social sector stock (NIHE and Housing Associations), voluntary sector hostels, private sector options such as self-contained properties and Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), NIHE-managed hostels, bespoke facilities, Dispersed Intensively Managed Emergency (DIME) accommodation, and, where no other options are available, short-term use of hotels and B&Bs (non-standard accommodation).

In response to sustained and evolving demand, and to control costs and ensure value for public money, the Housing Executive has undertaken a programme of work to scale up and diversify temporary accommodation supply. To coordinate and accelerate this effort, the NIHE's Accommodation Solutions Group was established in November 2023.

This group leads on identifying and implementing work strands aimed at expanding capacity, improving throughput into permanent housing, and strengthening the overall balance and resilience of the temporary accommodation portfolio. These actions are critical to ensuring the system remains responsive to the increasingly complex and diverse needs of households experiencing homelessness.

Some key achievements delivered in 2024/25 include:

- The supply of social sector temporary accommodation increased through the repurposing both void Housing Executive units and working in partnership with Housing Associations
- The use of self-contained accommodation expanded, supported by the development of a new model to respond to growing demand from single households
- Bedspaces for individuals with support needs were increased through partnership with an existing Supporting People provider
- Across all forms of settled accommodation, there was an overall net increase of more than 360 units

Progress in 2025/26 to date:

- Ongoing collaboration in the use of both social and private sector accommodation to expand self-contained and single household models across Northern Ireland
- A new Supporting People service was commissioned in Derry City & Strabane to enhance provision for individuals with high support needs
- Overall, a further net increase of over 300 units was added to the accommodation portfolio

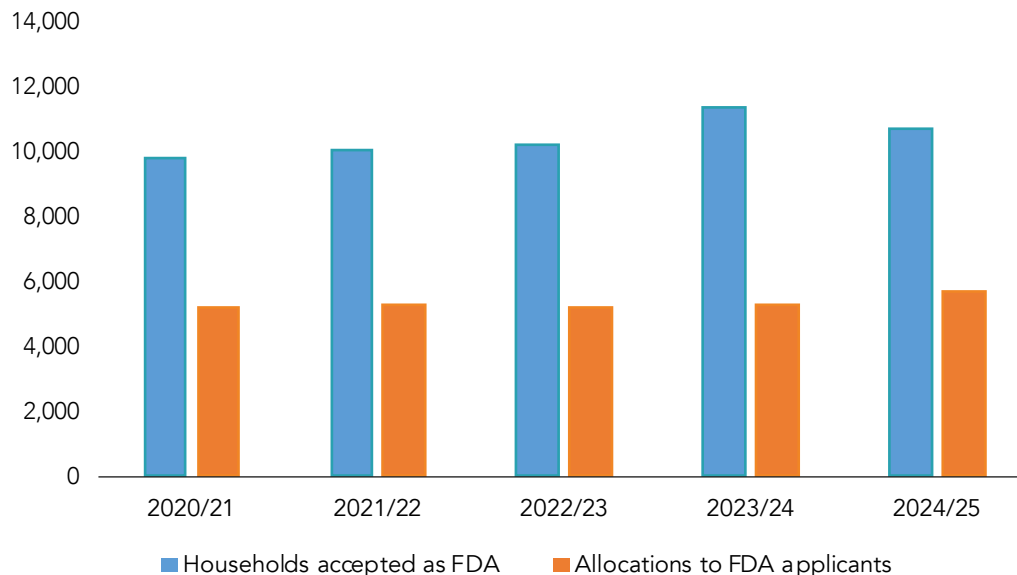
Throughput in Temporary Accommodation

Ensuring that households can progress from temporary accommodation to a permanent housing solution remains critical to managing overall demand and maintaining capacity within the system.

The number of households accepted each year as homeless and added to the waiting list as Full Duty Applicants remain greater than the number of allocations; with a gap of approximately 50%. This imbalance limits throughput, resulting in longer stays in temporary accommodation as households await access to suitable permanent housing.

The trend underscores the need for strategic investment in social housing supply and improved mechanisms to support timely rehousing. Addressing this gap is essential to reduce pressure on temporary accommodation, improve outcomes for households, and ensure the system remains responsive and sustainable.

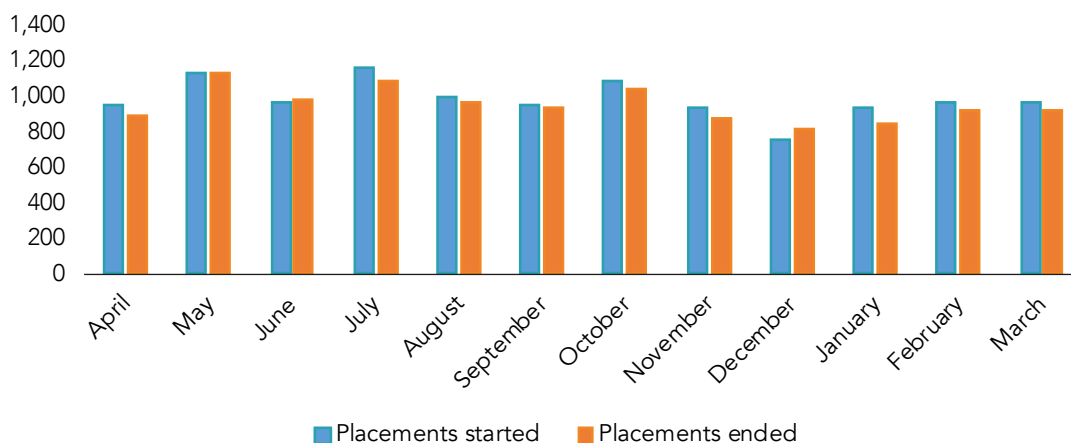
Figure 8.9: Households Accepted as FDA and Allocations to FDA (2020/21-2024/25)



Source: NIHE

The number of placements starting in each month consistently exceeds the number of placements ending, resulting in sustained occupancy levels and limited turnover. This pattern reflects ongoing structural pressures within the housing system and highlights the challenge of maintaining capacity while meeting statutory obligations.

These trends underscore the need for measures that improve throughput into permanent housing, expand TA supply, and ensure the system remains resilient in the face of persistent demand growth.

Figure 8.10: TA Throughput: TA Placements (April 2024-March 2025)

Source: NIHE

Value for Money Action Plan 2025

The Housing Executive has worked in partnership with the Centre for Homelessness Impact (CHI) for several years to drive evidence-led change and deliver breakthrough results in tackling homelessness. In 2024 the NIHE Commissioned CHI to undertake work on Value for Money, and in May 2025, CHI published a review of Temporary Accommodation (TA) in Northern Ireland, with a particular focus on the use of non-standard accommodation. The report set out four key recommendations for the Housing Executive:

1. **Maximise Data Utilisation** - Ensure comprehensive data collection and analysis, including cost and effectiveness metrics, with a particular emphasis on rent collection.
2. **Early Needs Assessment** - Assess the needs of all individuals entering TA promptly and use this insight to inform strategic learning on the causes of homelessness.
3. **Improve Suitability of TA** - Review how TA provision can better meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness.
4. **Strengthen Prevention Work** - Establish what prevention activity has been delivered, identify logical areas for focus, and explore how frontline budgets can enhance this work.

NIHE has produced an Action Plan to implement these recommendations, which includes review and consolidation of temporary accommodation and homelessness data, alongside advanced data analysis to deepen understanding of TA usage and emerging needs. This evidence-driven approach will inform future policy decisions, improve service design, and ensure resources are targeted effectively.

Strategic Responses and Partnerships

Research and evidence on homelessness have consistently demonstrated that prioritising prevention is crucial to lasting solutions to end homelessness. NIHE's ambition is to prioritise homelessness prevention as set out in its Homelessness Strategy.

In addition to expanding temporary accommodation options and delivering ongoing support services, the Housing Executive has developed a suite of initiatives aimed at preventing homelessness, supporting individuals to exit homelessness, and enabling households to sustain stable housing. These initiatives reflect a whole-system approach, combining housing, health, and social support to address both immediate needs and long-term outcomes.

Despite funding shortfalls and rising costs, which have constrained progress on prevention, the Housing Executive continues to respond through a range of accommodation and support solutions and examples of this are given below.

Lived Experience Programme

The Homelessness Strategy 2022-2027 places lived experience at its core, recognising the critical value of engaging individuals who have experienced homelessness in shaping policy and service delivery. This commitment is operationalised through a co-production and co-design approach, ensuring that services are informed by those with direct experience.

To advance this commitment, the Housing Executive, in partnership with Homeless Connect and Housing Rights, has been developing a comprehensive Lived Experience Programme. This work has included the facilitation of Lived Experience Groups and participatory engagement activities to inform programme design.

During 2024/25 and 2025/26, the partnership has progressed the development of an outline programme plan. A funding proposal was submitted to Homeless Link under the Royal Foundation's Homewards Programme, with confirmation of a successful bid received in June 2025. The award was publicly announced via Homewards' newsletter on 27 August 2025.

This funding secures delivery of the Lived Experience Programme through to March 2027, enabling it to:

- Play a pivotal role in shaping the final 18 months of the current Homelessness Strategy.
- Serve as a key consultation mechanism for the development of the next strategy cycle.

To support governance and ensure independence, the Housing Executive, Homeless Connect, and Housing Rights have engaged with the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) to establish a formal collaboration agreement. NICVA is acting as an independent facilitator in this process. A draft agreement has been produced following a series of structured meetings, with final sign-off anticipated after the third and concluding session.

In parallel, work is underway to finalise the recruitment and delivery plan for the programme. Subject to agreement, the recruitment process - inviting expressions of interest from individuals with lived experience - will commence shortly.

In addition to the wider Lived Experience Programme, the Housing Executive has also been working with the Simon Community and the Northern Ireland Youth Forum where a number of consultation workshops with young people who have lived experience of homelessness will contribute to a report which will be published in early 2026. The consultation identified a number of themes which will be considered in the ongoing implementation of the Youth Homelessness Action Plan (more detail below) and the imminent development of the Homelessness Strategy 2027-32, with the intention to support and inform actions to be developed in the final year of the current Youth Homelessness Action Plan which concludes in March 2027.

Complex Lives Partnership

This multi-agency partnership brings together NIHE, Belfast City Council, the Public Health Agency, criminal justice partners, and voluntary and community sector expertise to support individuals experiencing chronic homelessness and those exiting the cycle. Adopting a Housing First model, the initiative provides wraparound, flexible support for as long as needed to sustain tenancies. To date, over 200 people have been supported, with 52 now in permanent tenancies—33 of whom continue to receive multi-disciplinary team (MDT) support.

Housing First for Youth

Working collaboratively with the Northern, South Eastern, and Belfast Trusts and the Simon Community, this service provides accommodation and intensive support for young people leaving care. By offering 24/7, year-round assistance in community-based settings, the programme helps young people transition successfully into settled housing and reduces the risk of future homelessness.

Housing First (Adults)

The Housing Executive is preparing to deliver a Housing First service for individuals experiencing chronic or repeat homelessness. Research has been completed to inform the model, estimate costs, and identify the target client base. Housing First principles prioritise immediate access to housing without preconditions, alongside flexible, person-centred support for those with complex needs.

Housing Executive Stock Acquisition (HESA)

This programme will enable the purchase of 600 homes over three years for use as temporary accommodation. Properties will be targeted in areas of demonstrable need, identified through strategic needs assessments. Funding will be drawn from the Landlord Rental Income Reserve, with properties retained and managed by the Housing Executive.

Strategic Homeless Prevention Programme

For the financial year 2026/27, the Housing Executive secured £2.7 million in-year funding to deliver a Strategic Homelessness Prevention Programme, with support in principle for a multi-year approach aimed at scaling up early intervention and prevention services to drive system-wide change.

The programme has been shaped by key demographic, social, and economic factors influencing homelessness demand, and is focused on delivering against a set of strategic prevention priorities:

- Private Rented Sector Access and Sustainment: Developing services that support entry into and stability within the PRS.
- Financial Inclusion: Providing debt advice and money management support to reduce housing insecurity.
- Youth Homelessness Prevention: Targeted early intervention for care leavers and young people aged 16–17, aligned with the Youth Homeless Action Plan and New Foundation initiatives.
- Support for Women Experiencing Chronic Homelessness: Delivering gender-informed services to address long-term housing instability.
- Domestic Abuse Prevention: Enhancing services for individuals affected by domestic abuse, aligned with the Domestic Abuse Action Plan and Programme for Government priorities on violence against women and girls.
- Complex Lives Programme: Strengthening multi-agency responses to rough sleeping and chronic homelessness in Belfast.
- Prison Release Support: Facilitating transitions from custody into settled accommodation through early intervention.

Domestic Abuse Action Plan

The Housing Executive has published a Domestic Abuse Action Plan with 2024/25 representing Year 1 of a 3-year action plan that will conclude in March 2027 and coincides with the delivery cycle of the current Homelessness Strategy 2022-27. Key achievements over 2024/25 have included:

- Engagement with the voluntary and community sector to increase understanding of difficult to reach groups and their experiences of domestic abuse. This has included engagement with representatives from NI Youth Forum, NW Migrants Forum, Rural Community Network, Hourglass, VOYPIC, CRJI, MAP, Rainbow Project and Disability Forum to gain an understanding of the specific challenges their client group face and ways in which the Housing Executive could help them engage better.
- 22 members of staff completing training to become a Domestic Abuse Advocate with a further 18 due to complete their training in the first quarter of 2025/26.
- A review of all training packages with updates reflecting the changes in legislation that have guided the Housing Executive's response to domestic abuse. A new bespoke training course for assessing officers was developed and at the conclusion of Year 1 of the Domestic Abuse Action Plan, almost 500 staff had received the training.
- There has been a significant focus on increasing awareness and updating of the Sanctuary Scheme. This has involved promotion of the Sanctuary Scheme during training and increased engagement with the PSNI, including the development of referral form implemented in May 2025. This will provide further support and assistance to those experiencing domestic abuse.
- The Housing Executive has worked with Women's Aid to review the existing protocol with a revised protocol having been launched in November 2025.

Youth Homelessness Action Plan

In November 2024, the Housing Executive introduced its first Youth Homelessness Action Plan, focusing on supporting young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Three groups of 'young homeless' have been identified as central to the Action Plan. Owing to age changes throughout their personal journeys, there can be interchanges between the groupings, for instance when a young person initially presents at 17 years old, and then on reaching their 18th birthday.

- 1 Young people who have been part of the care system prior to reaching 16 years of age, and then become homeless at a later point.
2. Young people aged 16/17 years, not known to Social Services or who do not have care experience in their background, and present as homeless.
3. Young people aged 18-25 years, who present to the Housing Executive as homeless.

Key priorities include:

- A stronger emphasis on early intervention and prevention.
- Enhanced collaborative working with statutory and voluntary partners.
- Ensuring the voice of lived experience informs service design and delivery.

Key achievements over the first year's delivery of the action plan have included:

- The introduction of 24 dedicated Youth Homelessness Housing Advisors/Team Leaders which are now located in each Housing Executive Area offices.
- The delivery of a range of training for staff which included:
 - Joint awareness sessions with Health and Social Care Trust staff in relation to existing guidance.
 - Training delivered by the Children's Law Centre in relation to Article 21 of the Children's (Northern Ireland) Order.
 - Training delivered by Include Youth- 'Children and Young People in Care awareness training'.
- There has been initial work on reviewing the Regional Good Practice Guidance, 'Meeting the Accommodation and Support Needs of 16 - 21 year olds'. The review will also incorporate additional information about use of assessment beds and procedures to adhere to when a young person who has parental responsibility in their own right presents for support with accommodation.
- A key achievement over the past year has been the commitment from DfC to award an interim funding allocation of £2.8m to support the New Foundations programme. This funding will play a key role in supporting young people leaving care.

Through the Strategic Prevention Programme, the Housing Executive has invested in 12 early intervention projects that directly support the delivery of both the Youth Homelessness Action Plan and the New Foundation Action Plan. This includes support for the pilot introduction of Upstream which is an innovative schools based prevention programme which is designed to identify and support students at risk of homelessness.

New Foundations

The New Foundations Programme is a strategic, cross-departmental initiative which aims to prevent homelessness among young people leaving care (YPLC) in Northern Ireland by embedding permanent systems change through coordinated cross-sector action.

Aligned with Commitment Six of the Programme for Government, the initiative promotes a corporate family approach across housing, health, education, and justice sectors. It focuses on increasing the supply of safe, affordable, and well-managed accommodation, supported by wraparound services that foster independence, wellbeing, and long-term stability.

The objectives of the New Foundations Programme are to:

- Increase supply of safe, affordable housing accommodation for Young People Leaving Care.
- Embed early, housing-led, person-centred support to reduce homelessness risk.
- Provide wraparound services to build life skills, wellbeing, and independence.
- Strengthen inter-agency collaboration to improve education, employment, and wellbeing outcomes.
- Reduce reliance on temporary accommodation and improve service efficiency.
- Deliver eight core actions under the New Foundations Action Plan including gap analysis, accommodation supply, pathway planning, support provision, early intervention, education/employment access, and legislative/policy reform.

Supporting People Programme

Aligned with the Homelessness Strategy, Ending Homelessness Together (2022–2027), Supporting People is working to increase funding for temporary accommodation models addressing unmet need, particularly for women at risk of chronic homelessness. Actions include enhanced crash services, additional bedspaces in Belfast, and gender-specific wellbeing support. The programme also focuses on optimising the current portfolio, ensuring best fit for tenants, and supporting readiness for move-on accommodation- especially for those not owed Full Duty Applicant status.

Key Conclusions

Demand for temporary accommodation (TA) in Northern Ireland has grown significantly, rising by 155% between April 2019 and April 2024. This increase reflects structural pressures within the housing system, including limited social housing supply, affordability challenges in the private rented sector, and wider economic factors. Monthly placement data shows that new placements consistently exceed exits demonstrating the importance of measures to improve throughput into sustainable housing options, and the successful resourcing of case management over a sustained period.

Changing Household Profile and Complexity of Needs

The profile of households in TA has shifted markedly since before the COVID-19 pandemic. Single males now account for 50% of placements, with numbers rising from 1,123 in 2018/19 to 5,887 in 2024/25. Family placements have also more than doubled, highlighting increased vulnerability among households with children, often linked to loss of private rented accommodation and domestic abuse. The age profile of single persons shows the largest increase among males aged 26-59, reflecting gaps in one-bedroom housing stock. These trends underscore the need for tailored accommodation models and integrated support services.

Extended Duration and Throughput Challenges

The average length of stay in TA has increased by 51% over five years, from 175 days in 2020/21 to 265 days in 2024/25. Longer stays reduce turnover and increase system strain, while the gap between homeless acceptances and allocations remains around 50%, limiting movement into permanent housing. Improving throughput is critical to maintaining capacity and supporting positive outcomes for households.

Evidence-Led Improvement and Strategic Partnerships

The Housing Executive's partnership with the Centre for Homelessness Impact (CHI) has reinforced the importance of data-driven decision-making. CHI's review recommended maximising data use, early needs assessment, improving TA suitability, and strengthening prevention work. An Action Plan is underway to consolidate and analyse TA and homelessness data to inform future policy and service design.

Strengthen Prevention and Early Intervention

Preventing homelessness before it occurs remains a cornerstone of an effective strategy. Expanding programmes that target high-risk groups - such as care leavers, prison leavers, and survivors of domestic abuse- will reduce inflows into TA. Enhancing financial inclusion services and improving access to the private rented sector (PRS) are key measures to prevent tenancy loss and support housing stability.

Expand Housing Supply and Improve Move-On Pathways

Increasing the supply of permanent housing is critical to reducing reliance on temporary accommodation (TA) and alleviating system pressure. Accelerating social housing delivery and implementing stock acquisition programmes, such as the Housing Executive Stock Acquisition initiative, will help meet demand. In parallel, developing clear pathways for households not owed Full Duty Applicant (FDA) status is essential to improve throughput and prevent long stays in TA.

Enhance Support for Vulnerable Households & Those Experiencing Chronic Homelessness

Homelessness is often intertwined with mental health, addiction, and other vulnerabilities. Rolling out Housing First models for chronic homelessness and youth-specific services will provide long-term solutions for those with the greatest needs. Greater integration with health and addiction services is essential to deliver wraparound support and improve outcomes for individuals with multiple and complex challenges.

Improve Data and Evidence Use

Evidence-led decision-making must underpin all strategic actions. Implementing the recommendations from the Centre for Homelessness Impact (CHI) will strengthen the Housing Executive's ability to plan and deliver services effectively. This includes consolidating TA and homelessness data, introducing early needs assessments at the point of entry, and using insights to inform prevention priorities and resource allocation.

Fundamental Review of Allocations

The Housing Executive is mindful of the importance of the Fundamental Review of Allocations, and particularly the potential impact of Proposal 4 which relates to Tenure Neutral Discharge. The Housing Executive has previously only been able to discharge our statutory homelessness duty by means of a social rented housing allocation while Proposal 4 relates to widening this discharge to the Private Rented Sector. The Housing Executive is currently engaging with the Strategic Investment Board who are assisting in identifying options for the implementation of Tenure Neutral Discharge in Northern Ireland and will work with key stakeholders in bringing forward recommendations arising from this work.

List of abbreviations

BRMA	Broad Rental Market Areas
DFC	Department for Communities
DPG	Development Programme Group
EQIA	Equality Impact Assessment
EU	European Union
FDA	Full Duty Applicant
FRA	Fundamental Review of Allocations
FRS	Family Resource Survey
FTB	First Time Buyer
FTC	Financial Transactions Capital
HAG	Housing Association Grant
HCS	House Condition Survey
HMA	Housing Market Area
LA	Local Authority
LDP	Local Development Plan
LPP	Local Policies Plan
LPS	Land and Property Services
MMC	Modern Methods of Construction
NHBC	National Housing Building Council
NI	Northern Ireland
NICEI	Northern Ireland Composite Economic Index
NIHE	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PBMSA	Purpose Built Managed Student Accommodation
PRS	Private Rented Sector
SES	Socioeconomic Status
SHDP	Social Housing Development Programme
SHMA	Strategic Housing Market Area
T:BUC	Together: Building a United Community
UK	United Kingdom
UU	Ulster University

