

Life in Limbo: Temporary Accommodation the Lived Experience

“Within the system, people fade away”



**citizens
advice**

Somerset

Summary

Somerset is facing a well-documented housing crisis, marked by a severe shortage of affordable homes and increasing pressure on homelessness services. This has led to a growing reliance on temporary accommodation - particularly bed-and-breakfast (B&B) hotels. This pressure is not the fault of those experiencing homelessness; it is the result of a housing system under sustained strain, yet it is the individuals and families in crisis who absorb the consequences.

While this is not a new issue, the human impact remains largely ignored.

“Because you are homeless, you are in effect a nobody. I was invisible. I just felt substandard like I wasn't worth it.” Ester¹

All the quotes in this report are the voices of people recently living in bed and breakfast hotels and hostels. It highlights the destabilising effects of homelessness and the compounded harm caused by inadequate facilities, inconsistent support, and poor communication at a time of acute vulnerability.

Too often, life in temporary accommodation is reduced to numbers. The reality of living in one room without basic facilities, stability, or certainty, is often overlooked.

¹ All names have been changed to protect anonymity

Key Recommendations

1. Strengthen Support Coordination

- Assign caseworkers for continuity and proactive, regular check-ins
- Provide clear information and access to support services

"if you needed support before ... you're definitely going to need support while you're in temporary accommodation.....we need to make sure that it doesn't get lost along the way."

Ester

2. Improve Communication with the Council

- Clear, consistent updates with realistic timelines and expectations
- Faster reliable responses

"I don't get the system. I don't get it at all.... there's some rules some days and there's some rules another day." Mel

3. Ensure Basic and Decent Living Standards

- Set minimum accommodation standards for cooking, laundry and Wi-Fi facilities
- People gave more positive feedback once moved into hostels with kitchens

"People need to have hot food to survive... it's not healthy to be surviving off of sandwiches all the time." Ted and Emily

4. Ensure Placements Meet People's Needs

- Prioritise placements on transport routes in towns and villages near support networks and schools
- Set targets for minimum time in Bed and Breakfast for all households

"I'm literally on a roundabout in the middle of nowhere." Jaz

5. Provide Financial Support to Address Hardship

- Provide financial support reflecting additional costs
- Consideration of travel and food expenses

'There were times that we were having to ask family members to borrow money.' Ted

Background

Since the Homeless Persons Act 1977, local authorities have had a duty to provide accommodation to certain individuals experiencing homelessness. Temporary accommodation can include hostels, accommodation leased from the private rented sector or provided by the local council or housing associations. As a *last resort* Councils may use bed and breakfast hotels, but only for an absolute maximum of six weeks for households with children.

Despite this, the use of bed and breakfast accommodation remains widespread, at significant financial cost to local authorities and profound personal cost to residents.²

Tackling the lack of housing and sourcing more suitable temporary accommodation is the domain of national and local government. We welcome the vision set out in the Government's policy paper 'A National Plan to End Homelessness'³ and Somerset Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy,⁴ which declares:

"Our ambition is to eradicate the use of bed and breakfast."

In the meantime, bed and breakfast accommodation is the reality for hundreds of Somerset households each year who are left to bear the burden of the homelessness crisis living without basic essentials and facing impoverishment, stress, isolation and loss of dignity.

² See National Citizens Advice report [The Hidden Costs of Homelessness: how the cost of living in temporary accommodation is pushing families deeper into poverty - Citizens Advice](#)

³ [A National Plan to End Homelessness - GOV.UK](#)

⁴ [Appendix+A+-+Somerset+Homelessness+Rough+Sleeper+Strategy+2025-2030.pdf](#)

Local evidence

Citizens Advice Somerset supports individuals experiencing homelessness through crisis assistance, debt and housing advice. This frontline work provides valuable insight into the reality of living in temporary accommodation.

In the year April 2025 – March 2026 Citizens Advice Somerset has advised:

- **418** people experiencing homelessness
- **177** clients in temporary or emergency accommodation.

In December 2025 in Somerset there were⁵:

- **346 households⁶** living in temporary accommodation
- **184 households in bed and breakfast**, 15 of which had children

Our research analysis includes:

- **32 evidence forms⁷** on the issue completed by frontline advisers
- **18 Village Agents⁸** surveyed
- **7 in-depth interviews⁹** with people in, or recently in, Bed and Breakfast or hostel accommodation

⁵ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Homelessness statistics [Detailed local authority level tables: October to December 2025 - Accessible.](#)

⁶ This figure is a snapshot on the day. During 2025 there will have been many more households who have experienced B n B accommodation.

⁷ Evidence forms can be filled out by advisers when they see examples of unfair policy or practice negatively impacting our clients.

⁸ Village Agents are employed by [Thrive](#) to provide confidential, practical community-based solutions for anyone in Somerset. With thanks to Lauren Giddins from Thrive for her help in surveying the Village Agents

⁹ With thanks to our clients who gave their time to recount their stories

Ted and Emily's Story

Ted, Emily, and their 2-month-old baby Freddy stayed in two bed and breakfast hotels and a hostel in 3 different areas while they were homeless.

In the hotels, they had no cooking facilities, and they couldn't afford take aways. They were worried about the effect on Emily and Freddy as she was breastfeeding, so they bought a hot meal for her occasionally.

They had no help with their move to their second hotel. Ted had to make two trips by bus and train to carry everything. It took 7½ hours and cost £48.

The three of them lived in a small, overcrowded damp room in the hotel: *"There was hardly any space for us to put anything. It was very claustrophobic."*

Whilst in the hotel their baby became seriously ill. *"We took him to the hospital and they said it was due to the mould, and that we needed to try and get out of there."*

Freddy was put on medication, but when they asked to move, they were told: *"they can't move us ... we have a six weeks probation period in a hotel until we can get moved to somewhere with cooking facilities."*

After six weeks, they were moved again. This time they had transport but with just one hour's notice they learnt of their destination from the taxi driver.

At the hostel, conditions improved with cooking facilities and support from the manager which they found particularly helpful. Two months later, they moved into a housing association flat.

"We were homeless for four months, and those six weeks being in that hotel was probably the worst we've ever had."

Key Findings

1. Instability, Frequent Moves and Poor Communication

"You literally don't know what you're doing... living in limbo." Teresa

Uncertainty defines life in temporary accommodation.

People described:

- **Being told to move with hours' notice** *"We had a phone call... saying we have booked you a taxi for 11 o'clock."*
- **Not knowing where they were going** *"They didn't give us any information... we had to be told by the taxi driver."*
- **Repeated packing and disruption** *"Most of our stuff had to get chucked into black bags."*
- **Communication breakdowns** *"I would call my housing officer, she wouldn't answer. I'd email five times asking questions and she wouldn't get back to me."*

This uncertainty disrupts schooling, employment, healthcare, and mental wellbeing. Households were often moved to completely new areas so they couldn't maintain contact with their GP, children had difficulty attending their school, people with young babies lost contact with their health centres and it was too far and too costly to visit friends and family. The frequency of the moves also presented a problem for support services as they were forever playing catch up.

Similar findings were also highlighted by the Village Agents supporting people in temporary accommodation. It was their experience that the frequent moves between placements undermined engagement and wellbeing and that people were often unclear about how long they would be staying and what would happen next.

They also commented that their ability to get involved was affected by the instability as referrals are often made very late, close to move-on, creating crisis demand. Difficulties contacting relevant housing officers were also cited as a barrier that reduces the effectiveness of their support.

Teresa's story: Difficulty in communication

Teresa described her frustration when she had been told she was moving then didn't hear anything.

"On a Friday, I was told 'you need to get all your stuff packed up and you need to get ready to leave. Sign these documents and get them back to me by Monday'. So I packed up everything, got the papers back to her and then I got an automated reply saying she was on annual leave until the following Friday."

Teresa tried contacting someone else for help, but she was passed between different people and repeatedly promised a call back that never came. Meanwhile, the situation became more urgent as the bed and breakfast informed her that she would need to leave because her booking had not been renewed.

"I was having panic attacks because I thought I was going to be on the street. At this point I had had my bags packed up for days. I ended up ringing four or five times on the Tuesday saying please can you just tell me what is happening, the hotel want me out in the morning."

The following day, it was the hotel that told her the booking had been reinstated but she still hadn't had any communication with her housing officer.

A few days later she had a call at 10am telling her she had to leave in 2 hours which put her in a panic as she didn't know how she would be able to coordinate moving her stuff and get back to pick her children up from school in time.

"I said I just need a day's notice because I need help, I'm on my own. I had these bags for life with all my stuff in and had to put the seats down to fit them in my car so couldn't pick my children up from school."

2. Location, Isolation and Disconnection

"I'm very, very thankful for the roof over my head... but I can't live here." Jaz

Placement far from home communities disrupts access to support, services, and daily life.

People described:

- **Being placed far from home communities and support networks** *"I'm literally on a roundabout in the middle of nowhere"*
- **Long, costly journeys to accommodation and being left to find their way without support** *'there were times that we were having to ask family members to borrow money.'*
- **Disruption to education, employment and healthcare** *"I wasn't working because obviously I wasn't sure where we were going to end up."*
- **Limited or no access to public transport:** *"To get to the nearest bus, it's an hour's walk... that's how isolated I am."*

People find themselves in environments that affect their wellbeing. The Thrive Village Agents reported that some people feel unsafe and disconnected from familiar support networks and that shared placements can be unsafe or unsuitable for individuals with complex needs.

This was reflected in our evidence forms and interviews.

- Families reported children feeling frightened and affected by the noise.
- Rules about curfews or people staying meant that some people couldn't access family support. The inability to use babysitters in the hostel resulted in one mother having to give up a college evening course.
- People without children left in bed and breakfast for indeterminate periods of time.

Jaz's Story

Jaz had hoped to be placed near his children in Taunton and Bridgwater. Instead, he was housed over two and a half hours away. On the day of placement, he spent £70

on train and taxi fares—almost half his weekly budget and therefore had to make a food bank request to get by.

“To get to the nearest bus, it’s an hour’s walk... that’s how isolated I am here. I can’t even get out to get a haircut.”

Jaz lives with bipolar disorder and ADHD. Walking his dog is essential to managing his mental health, but his accommodation is on a dangerous trunk road with no pavement.

“The roads are so dangerous around here I wouldn’t even walk on that road with my dog.”

This isolation has significantly impacted his mental health and ability to maintain family relationships.

Ester’s experience

Ester found her 18 month stay in a bed and breakfast hotel very challenging. There were drug users on the premises, and the police were regularly called. She said the staff were very supportive of her and would text her to warn her to stay in her room if anything was happening.

“This was a world I’d never seen before; a world I never want to see again. There were fights outside, police, ambulance, that kind of thing. I could be watching Casualty or The Bill and come out and it’s reality”

Time off school – the least harmful option?

Families face difficult decisions about children’s education. One family reported home-schooling because they did not know where they would be living. Others travel long distances at significant cost to maintain stability.

Tamsin’s story

Tamsin, who contacted us for a food voucher, described the challenges she faced while living in a hotel with her two children, both of whom have special educational needs. The sudden change in routine and the constant noise in the accommodation was having a severe impact on the family.

"I'm totally overwhelmed with the situation."

In an effort to maintain stability, Tamsin was driving her children to school each day, which resulted in high fuel costs. Combined with the additional expense of having no access to cooking or laundry facilities, she had spent her usual monthly food budget within just one week.

For some families, taking time off school becomes the least harmful option: another client Fiona's 11-year-old neurodiverse son had only just settled into school when they were made homeless. Sending him to live with grandparents was considered but ultimately rejected. With the school's agreement, he took time off as the least disruptive option.

Evidence from Shelter supports these experiences. Their report *Homelessness in the Classroom* (December 2025) highlights the significant impact of temporary accommodation on children's education, health, and emotional wellbeing, as well as the potential long-term consequences.

The report found that:

- 57% of parents reported negative impacts on children's health
- 26% said their child was often unhappy or depressed
- 44% of parents of neurodivergent children reported worsening behaviour

3. Living Without Basics: Food, Cooking and Laundry

"We had nothing there at all. No way of cooking food... no way of making food." Ben

Many of the placements lack essential amenities.

People reported

- **Lack of Cooking facilities** *"Anybody will tell you that you can't continuously cook with a kettle."*
- **No Laundry access** *"We have nowhere to cook or wash our clothes and honestly, I don't know what to do"*
- **Lack of Wifi** affecting access to services and education: *"You had to pay a certain amount a day but I just ended up hanging out the window if I wanted to speak to anyone".*

- **Anxiety around where to store possessions** and the high associated costs.
"I stored everything in my van but it's all covered in mould"

Without cooking facilities:

- People rely on takeaways
- Food bank use increases
- Nutrition and health conditions suffer
- Finances are put under strain

Some households reach crisis point because of the lack of facilities. One mother applied for a grant for a BBQ just to cook food.

Laundry access is similarly limited, forcing people to travel and incur additional expense. For those who don't have help from family or friends they have costly trips to laundrettes.

By contrast, hostel accommodation with shared facilities was reported as more suitable and supportive.

Access to the internet is no longer a luxury; contact with the council is mainly by email, benefits are managed on smart phones, students rely on the internet for study and most of us use it for contact with friends and family, yet not all of the accommodation used provides Wi-Fi as part of the booking.

This was a particular problem for Fiona's 16-year-old daughter who was studying for exams while they were staying in hostel accommodation. With no Wi-Fi and insufficient mobile data she had to do extra hours at college.

The difficulty and cost of storing belongings was also raised. Some people move into bed and breakfast accommodation with very few belongings, but others have a full house of furniture to deal with.

- Teresa stored her furniture in a van but became all mouldy and she is unsure what will be able to do about it when she finally moves.
- Fiona decided she couldn't keep her furniture as she couldn't afford to store it as she didn't know how long she would be in temporary accommodation.
- Peter, who was being helped by our debt team, told us he was paying £160.00 a month to store his furniture.

4. Harm to Physical and Mental Health

“My Mental health took a massive dive – I was struggling mentally and with insomnia - I just felt all of a sudden really isolated.” Teresa

Bed and Breakfast accommodation is often unsuitable and can be actively harmful to health.

People described:

- Anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts. *“There were times I was feeling quite suicidal...”*
- Worsening chronic health conditions. *“Being locked up in a room with ADHD and bipolar is not a good thing”*
- Illness linked to poor living conditions (e.g. mould): *“We took him to the hospital and they said it was due to the mould”*

Prolonged stays in unsuitable temporary accommodation can have lasting impacts on both physical and mental health, particularly for those already managing existing conditions and caring responsibilities.

Overcrowding, lack of space, and unsafe environments further compound these issues - particularly for families with young children.

Ester lived in unsuitable accommodation for 18 months during which time she put on over 2 stone in weight because of her reliance on supermarket sandwiches and take aways and believes this poor diet has exacerbated problems with her kidneys and other health issues.

Mandy and Ollie’s Story

Mandy and Ollie had lived in one room for six months when we spoke to them. Mandy worked, while Ollie, who has physical and mental health conditions including social anxiety, rarely left the room.

The accommodation was too far from his GP, but they had not transferred services due to uncertainty about their stay.

Although Ollie was the one with identified mental health needs, Mandy was clearly under significant strain in her role as his sole carer. She experienced a panic attack while speaking to one of our advisers about accessing a food voucher. During her interview with us, she also became very distressed when describing the impact of their situation, including being separated from her cat for six months, which she described as “a massive part of her life.”

What Needs to Change?

1. Strengthen Support Coordination

“They’ve never met me... they don’t know me.”

The stress of homelessness is exacerbated by the apparent lack of care in ensuring that the individuals concerned can cope in the temporary accommodation. This could be helped by:

- Clear information and access to support services
- Face to face engagement with assigned housing officers and support staff
- Assess the needs of the individual and not making unreasonable demands
- Arrival packs with locality specific information

“I think at the start it would have been nice to know about the food banks and the basic things (like eating and washing my clothes) that would have helped me at that time because my capacity was already so low.” Teresa

2. Improve Communication with the Council

Ester advocates for mandatory, regular contact from housing officers, even a simple email, to ensure individuals do not feel forgotten or undervalued. We agree.

People dealing with the disruption, uncertainty and wellbeing impacts of homelessness and temporary accommodation need:

- Clear timelines
- Consistent updates
- Simply overviews of rights and responsibilities

"I think they should let you know in a little bit more time of where you're going and when you're going." Ted

3. Ensure Basic and Decent Living Standards

"You can't continuously cook with a kettle."

Accommodation provided should have the basic necessities for day-to-day living:

- Cooking facilities or meal provision
- Laundry access or support
- Reliable internet access

"I think they need to take into consideration that people do need to have hot food to survive; it's not healthy to be surviving off sandwiches all the time." Ted

4. Ensure Placements Meet People's Needs

"I can't live here."

Consideration must be given to where people are placed so they have access to facilities and regard given to the length of time they are expected to live in such restricted conditions. This includes:

- Placements within towns or villages near support networks
- Ensuring accommodation is on a public transport route
- Setting targets to reduce time spent in bed and breakfast by single people and couples

"Don't put vulnerable people in anywhere they are so isolated." Jaz

5. Provide Financial Support to Address Hardship

"We have now run out of money for food and Wi-Fi" Mel

Recognise that the additional costs are the result of the lack of independent accommodation and so shouldn't be met by the individuals. Arrangements should be made for:

- Financial support reflecting additional costs of travel and food expenses

Conclusion

Temporary accommodation should provide safety and stability. Instead, many people who are placed in bed and breakfast experience isolation, uncertainty, financial distress and declining health or wellbeing.

This is not because of who they are – but because of the system they are in.

“Because you are homeless, you are in effect a nobody... but we are all human beings.”

Ester

The reliance on bed and breakfast accommodation reflects a wider housing crisis. But while that crisis continues, the conditions people are living in must not be ignored.

Without urgent improvements, the use of bed and breakfast accommodation will continue to compound vulnerability rather than relieve it. When a system is confusing, inconsistent and overstretched, it is people in crisis that absorb the impact.

People experiencing homelessness deserve basic living standards, stability and dignity.

This report was written by: Iona Sharkey and Lynne Bates, Research & Campaign Lead and Volunteer respectively.

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For further information or to discuss email: improvement@casomerset.org.uk