

Rising Homelessness Among Children in Essex Sparks Concern

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A growing number of children across Essex are now living without permanent homes, as new data reveals a significant increase in families relying on temporary accommodation. The figures have prompted concern from local charities, who warn that the housing system is under severe pressure and urgently requires reform.

Between January and March this year, 5,010 children in Essex were recorded as homeless and living in temporary housing, according to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). The highest number of affected children was found in Thurrock, with 967 children living in temporary settings. Basildon, meanwhile, had the highest number of households without a permanent residence, totalling 737. In contrast, Brentwood reported far lower figures, with just 25 homeless children and 28 households in temporary accommodation.

Charities across the country are raising alarms about the human cost of the crisis. Vanessa Hemmings, Chief Executive Officer of Homeless Action Resource Project (HARP) in Southend, highlighted the emotional and developmental toll on young people. “These figures are worrying and sadly reflect what we’re seeing on the ground every day,” Hemmings said. “Too many families are being forced into unstable, short-term living situations simply due to the lack of affordable, accessible homes.”

Chelmsford-based Churches Homeless Emergency Support Scheme (CHESS) also weighed in. Chief Executive Officer Rob Saggs noted that the current climate, combined with a 47 per cent drop in available homelessness accommodation providers since 200, has made delivering services more difficult. He emphasised that while the charitable sector plays a critical role, sustained support and investment are essential to meet growing demands.

Local councils are also feeling the financial strain. Basildon Council has reportedly allocated approximately 10 per cent of its general fund budget to cover temporary housing costs. Council representatives stated that funds otherwise intended for public amenities are being redirected to manage the crisis. Approximately 500 council and housing association properties are currently being used to house families in need, while around 300 households are placed in nightly accommodations such as hotels and bed-and-breakfasts.

Despite the mounting challenge, local authorities insist they are working to improve the situation. Thurrock Council’s Cabinet Member for Housing noted that less than five per cent of those housed by the council are placed in hostels, with no child staying in a bed-and-breakfast for more than six weeks over the past five years. The council is actively investing in self-contained housing to better accommodate families.

This sharp rise in child homelessness is the highest since local authority data collection began in 2019, when 2,778 children were documented in temporary accommodation. The

total now stands at nearly double that number, underscoring the urgent need for more practical, long-term housing solutions across Essex.