# Young father’s housing plea highlights worsening rat infestations amid Birmingham crisis



A young father’s plea for a safe and stable home for his family has illuminated the ongoing housing crisis in Birmingham, where escalating issues surrounding sanitation and pest infestations have added significant stress to vulnerable households. Kian Jones, 25, has voiced his concerns for his six-month-old daughter as rats were recently filmed scuttling about outside their temporary accommodation, which is situated on Fox Hollies Road in Acocks Green. This alarming situation presents not simply a personal struggle but highlights broader systemic challenges faced by many families in the city.

The images of rats weaving through rubbish heaps present outside the property paint a grim picture. Jones and his partner, aged 23, have been living in temporary housing, and despite being categorised in Band A—the highest priority for housing assistance—they frequently find themselves over one hundred places down the bidding list for suitable properties. As Jones stated during an interview, “There’s rubbish all over the property… It’s a big issue because we use the outside for the baby,” underscoring the distress of navigating life amid unhygienic and unsafe conditions. His worries are exacerbated by the fact that their daughter was born prematurely, making her particularly vulnerable to health risks posed by the environment.

Birmingham City Council acknowledges the enormity of the housing demand, which has surged to unprecedented levels, amidst what has been identified as a national housing crisis. In a recent statement, a spokesperson noted the essential need to create “new, warm, safe, sustainable homes” to alleviate the reliance on temporary accommodations. Yet, their capacity to meet demand is severely restricted by a combination of factors, including a chronic shortage of available housing and financial constraints that have recently hampered council operations. Reports indicate that the Council is currently spending an astonishing £2 million each month on temporary housing, a situation deemed unsustainable.

Compounding these challenges is a current refuse collection strike, driven by a dispute between the Birmingham City Council and workers' union Unite, which has left around 17,000 tonnes of waste uncollected across the city. This disruption has led to a concerning upsurge in public health risks, as mountains of rotting rubbish become breeding grounds for vermin. The Health Secretary and Deputy Prime Minister have publicly expressed their worries about the health implications for residents in stricken areas, where families are marred by inadequate sanitation and overwhelmed living conditions.

Across the UK, similar scenarios are unfolding. In other regions, families are grappling with the consequences of extended stays in temporary accommodation, often marred by illnesses associated with poor living conditions, including respiratory issues linked to mould and vermin infestations. Reports from areas such as Lewisham highlighted that children are particularly vulnerable, with many facing chronic health issues directly arising from inadequate housing conditions. Experts warn that ongoing instability in housing significantly impacts children's education and mental well-being, as families are often moved without choice into unsuitable or dangerous environments.

As for Birmingham, it continues to grapple with high demand amid a shrinking supply of social housing. The council’s motion calling for increased governmental support for funding new housing alternatives reflects a dire need for immediate reform. It is crucial to establish a long-term strategy that adequately addresses homelessness and provides sustainable living conditions for families. The current focus on short-term accommodations does not resolve the fundamental issues of affordability and availability that plague residents.

For Kian Jones and his family, the desperation for a proper home is palpable. “I’d just like them to give us a property really, that’s it,” he remarked, articulating a sentiment shared by many families caught in the web of Birmingham’s housing crisis. His plea is a resonant reminder of the urgent necessity for systemic change, lest countless others endure similar hardships.

The intersection of housing, health, and welfare in Birmingham underscores a growing urgency for innovative solutions to mitigate the ramifications of this crisis. Addressing the systemic shortfall in housing will be essential to ensuring that families can live in safe, secure environments, free from the indignities brought about by neglect and systemic failures.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/new-dads-plea-housing-rats-31697095), [[4]](https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/birminghams-housing-crisis-shame-city-22192417)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/new-dads-plea-housing-rats-31697095), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/rats-feasting-rubbish-lead-health-warnings-britains-second-city-2025-04-09/), [[5]](https://www.housingtoday.co.uk/news/birmingham-city-council-calls-for-increased-grant-funding-for-temporary-accommodation-alternatives/5132644.article)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/apr/17/rat-bites-and-chronic-asthma-schools-on-frontline-of-uk-housing-crisis), [[6]](https://www.thenewmidlands.org.uk/reforming-social-housing-delivery/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/birminghams-housing-crisis-shame-city-22192417), [[7]](https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/birmingham-housing-city-council-shelter-28268729)
* Paragraph 5 – [[6]](https://www.thenewmidlands.org.uk/reforming-social-housing-delivery/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/new-dads-plea-housing-rats-31697095), [[5]](https://www.housingtoday.co.uk/news/birmingham-city-council-calls-for-increased-grant-funding-for-temporary-accommodation-alternatives/5132644.article)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/new-dads-plea-housing-rats-31697095> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/rats-feasting-rubbish-lead-health-warnings-britains-second-city-2025-04-09/> - A refuse collection strike in Birmingham, the UK's second-largest city, has sparked public health concerns as piles of rotting rubbish attract rats and overwhelm residential areas. The ongoing dispute between Birmingham City Council and the Unite union, triggered by disagreements over job roles, pay, and conditions, has led to approximately 17,000 tonnes of uncollected waste. The strike, which the Labour-led council declared a major incident, escalated tensions, especially with Unite—historically aligned with the Labour Party—now critical of Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s handling of the situation. Social media and local news have highlighted scenes of rats feeding on garbage and residents struggling with overflowing refuse, particularly in disadvantaged neighborhoods lacking private transport for waste disposal. The council, financially strained after a 2023 effective bankruptcy due to historic equal pay claims, defends its offer to workers, denying allegations that it forces pay cuts. Meanwhile, the government is urging both sides to resolve the impasse, with Health Secretary Wes Streeting and Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner expressing concern over the growing public health risks.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/apr/17/rat-bites-and-chronic-asthma-schools-on-frontline-of-uk-housing-crisis> - In Lewisham, south London, over 3,800 children live in temporary accommodation, with 11 headteachers warning that the housing emergency jeopardises students' health. Many children face health issues like rat bites and chronic asthma due to poor housing conditions. The National Education Union found that 59% of teachers in England and Wales observed frequent ill health among students due to poverty, with housing being a major factor. Temporary housing supplied to a mother and children, with visible signs of rat infestation. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian. Beecroft Garden primary school is a microcosm of Lewisham as a whole. About one in five children at the school live in temporary accommodation, the same proportion as across the borough. The school is situated in Crofton Park, a gentrified pocket of the borough where a small bridge divides multimillion-pound homes and council estates. Some students come from rooted, affluent homes while others are being shifted around by the council or forced to live in squalor by negligent landlords. Where a child calls home has become increasingly clear by the condition they turn up to school in, if they turn up at all. Naomi Lothian. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian. “Some children are unable to bathe or wash their clothes. It affects our students’ self-esteem. A lot of them are worried that their friends will know how they’re living. It’s drastic on their physical and mental health,” said Naomi Lothian, the school’s family support officer. She grew up in an estate near the school, across the bridge that divides the area into up-and-coming and left behind. She is on the frontline of a housing crisis affecting the school’s poorest students. Those living in homes with damp and mould are coming into local schools with coughs and chest infections, others are being bitten by mice and rats in pest-filled homes. When the Guardian visited the school last month, Lothian was zooming around dealing with the needs of numerous students under her watch, including one long-running case. Two boys at the school had been living in mould-filled, rat-infested temporary accommodation for over a year with their mother. They had had no electricity or hot water for months after rats had bitten through wires and damaged the boiler. Their mother was bitten twice by rats and her three-year-old son had had repeated chest infections due to the mould. Her older son did not attend school for two weeks after being woken up by rats on his chest. When the Guardian visited the home, rat droppings were visible on the floor and sofa and large holes in the floor and walls where rodents roamed remained exposed. The family were sent to live there by Southwark council. The letting agency that manages the property on behalf of the private landlord ignored the complaints about rats and mould. After months of emails and phone calls, Lothian was told that the family were being rehoused nearby. Moments after signing the new tenancy agreement, the family’s current landlord rang up to say they needed to leave the property within 24 hours. Temporary accommodation for many families is no longer temporary. Data obtained by the Guardian through freedom of information requests shows that in Lewisham, 297 households had been in temporary accommodation for more than five years by the end of 2023. In nearby Lambeth, 1,006 households spent more than five years in such housing, and 311 for over 10 years. At Rushey Green primary school in Catford, the majority of students live in social housing. Some have been without heating for months, others live in rooms blighted by damp and leaking sewage. One seven-year-old girl lives in a single room with her mother. She has an oven as a bedside table. They were put into temporary accommodation four years ago by Lewisham council. “They put us in that building and abandoned us there,” said her mother, who does not want to be named. Cheryl Powell with her son Jaheen. Photograph: Andy Hall/The Observer. Her daughter often wakes up in the night due to the smell of sewage and has injured herself playing in the cramped room. “She was doing a handstand and she banged her mouth, it was full of blood,” said her mother. “In the middle of the night, I just lock myself in the bathroom and cry because I don’t want my daughter to see me. I want her to see me as a strong mum.” Lisa Williams, the school’s headteacher, said some of her students have developed chronic asthma due to damp and mould and others have been bitten by mice or bedbugs. “It’s horrendous,” she said. The Guardian spoke to a number of parents at the school who shared similar stories. One mum, who has two children attending the school, lives in a flat with one working window that was so mould-infested a mushroom grew out of the doorway. Teachers say the council has been sending families out of the borough, as far away as Kent. These students often arrive exhausted and end up missing school. Cheryl Powell, 47, was sent to live in temporary accommodation in Woolwich two years ago. She has to take three buses to bring her son Jaheen to school. “He has no life. I get him up for 6am and we leave at 7am. School doesn’t start until 8:45am,” she said. He eats his dinner, usually a takeaway, on the bus home before sleeping shortly after getting in. Staff at the school are also not immune. Rosaline Fofornah is a supervisor at the school. She lives in a mould-infested council home. “It’s going to make me and my children sick,” she said. For many children, staying put in such conditions is their only option. “I’ve got so many families that are literally living on top of each other. They either try to get private accommodation, which they can’t afford, or they stay where they are. There is literally nowhere to go,” said Lothian. Rosaline Fofornah at the door of her bathroom, covered in damp mould on the ceiling. Photograph: Andy Hall/The Observer. Southwark council said they were made aware of the issues at the home in Crofton Park in February and agreed that the family should be moved after visiting the property.
4. <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/birminghams-housing-crisis-shame-city-22192417> - A report exposes the dire living conditions in Birmingham, highlighting issues such as rats in cots, mould in wardrobes, and overcrowded accommodations. Over 6,000 individuals are currently residing in temporary housing, with many facing unaddressed complaints about poor conditions. Residents in council temporary accommodations report damp and rat infestations, with some families sharing rooms in emergency accommodations. The report also highlights the challenges faced by private renters, including high housing costs and overcrowding. The findings underscore the urgent need for improved housing standards and support for vulnerable residents in Birmingham.
5. <https://www.housingtoday.co.uk/news/birmingham-city-council-calls-for-increased-grant-funding-for-temporary-accommodation-alternatives/5132644.article> - Birmingham City Council has passed a motion urging the government to increase grant funding to help councils and housing associations acquire more properties for use as temporary accommodation. The council seeks fair funding, investment in alternatives to temporary accommodation, and increased supply of social rented homes. The new West Midlands mayor, Richard Parker, aims to secure £146 million for social housing, targeting an additional 2,000 social homes. The council is currently spending £2 million per month on temporary housing, which is deemed unsustainable. The motion also criticises the council's failure to meet its 35% affordable housing goal, with recent projects delivering significantly below the target.
6. <https://www.thenewmidlands.org.uk/reforming-social-housing-delivery/> - The Midlands faces a significant housing crisis, with Birmingham experiencing a shortage of social housing and a rise in temporary accommodation. As of March 2024, there were 4,300 households in temporary accommodation, costing the council £21 million annually. The Right to Buy scheme has led to a loss of over 37,000 council homes in Birmingham, with only about 10% replaced. Poor housing conditions are impacting health and education, with children in temporary accommodations twice as likely to develop respiratory issues and 40% more likely to underperform in GCSEs. The report calls for a long-term homelessness strategy and increased investment in social housing.
7. <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/birmingham-housing-city-council-shelter-28268729> - A report exposes the dire living conditions in Birmingham, highlighting issues such as rats in cots, mould in wardrobes, and overcrowded accommodations. Over 6,000 individuals are currently residing in temporary housing, with many facing unaddressed complaints about poor conditions. Residents in council temporary accommodations report damp and rat infestations, with some families sharing rooms in emergency accommodations. The report also highlights the challenges faced by private renters, including high housing costs and overcrowding. The findings underscore the urgent need for improved housing standards and support for vulnerable residents in Birmingham.