# Birmingham faces worsening homelessness crisis with families trapped in inadequate temporary housing



In Birmingham, a significant homelessness crisis is unfolding, with families like Sumaira Fareed and her three-year-old son Ezaan living in challenging conditions in temporary accommodation at Oscott Gardens, a converted former student residence. Fareed has been homeless for more than three years, forced to move into this council-managed complex after being asked to leave a single persons’ hostel when she gave birth, as children were not permitted to live there.

Oscott Gardens, situated about four miles from Birmingham city centre, now houses hundreds of homeless families under strict regulations that include no visits from friends or family and a 10pm curfew. Families living there have described the environment as grim, citing cramped rooms, mice infestations, and antisocial behaviour. The Guardian has documented these conditions through images and residents' testimonies.

Across the road from Oscott Gardens lie nearly 1,000 new-build flats at Perry Barr village. Originally intended to accommodate world-class athletes for the 2022 Commonwealth Games, the flats were not finished in time due to Covid-related delays and remain mostly unoccupied. This situation has caused controversy, especially after Birmingham city council sold 755 out of 968 homes to a private buyer at what the council described as a “significant loss to the public purse.” Despite this, some of these homes are now being let, with 63 households expected to move in by June.

Fareed’s son, Ezaan, who has spina bifida and relies on a walking frame, faces particular hardships living in Oscott Gardens. The shared kitchen space is often overcrowded, preventing Ezaan from sitting comfortably in his pushchair during meal preparation and forcing him to remain on his standing frame. Additionally, the bathrooms are equipped only with showers, complicating his hygiene routine. Washing machines and postboxes are located outside the block, creating further difficulties for Fareed, who cannot leave her son unsupervised. The restrictive conditions also limit Ezaan’s physical development, as the small living space and lack of outdoor areas impede his ability to crawl and move freely. Fareed has expressed anxiety about local schooling for Ezaan due to their uncertain housing situation.

Birmingham city council has stated that households can request a suitability review if they feel their temporary accommodation is inadequate, and welfare checks are carried out in Oscott Gardens. The council maintains that the site is staffed round-the-clock by security and support personnel to ensure safety and support for residents. The council also justified the visitor restrictions as safeguarding measures, allowing access only to certain professionals and health visitors.

Donna Prescott, manager of Home-Start’s centre in north-west Birmingham, highlighted the detrimental impact of these conditions on residents: “People in Oscott Gardens can’t live their lives because they’ve got no routine or normality. Mentally and emotionally it has a massive impact on these families.” Home-Start, a family support charity, has found its ability to assist families hindered by the visitor ban, limiting volunteers’ access to those in need. Vivian Ellis, the charity’s family and volunteer coordinator, described the complex’s atmosphere as prison-like: “The only thing is they don’t have a tag on their ankle, that’s probably the difference.”

Approximately 500 to 600 children live in Oscott Gardens, according to Prescott. While the charity hosts a weekly stay-and-play group within the development, the limited indoor space and absence of outdoor play areas mean children have few opportunities for recreation, often resorting to the car park as a playground. Ellis remarked, “They’re very bored children. There’s less play and less stimulation for them.”

Birmingham council is dealing with a deepening homelessness problem. With over 5,000 households currently in temporary accommodation, the city ranks second in England for this issue after Newham in east London. The council has reported spending £2.2 million monthly on emergency accommodation, much of which is provided through the private sector in hotels and bed and breakfasts. Freedom of information requests obtained by The Guardian reveal a sharp increase in the length of time households spend in temporary accommodation: those residing between one and five years rose from 209 in 2013 to 2,538 in 2023, while those in such housing for more than five years increased dramatically from four to 533.

The growing crisis has placed additional strains on organisations like Home-Start, which has had to address an increased number of housing-related cases. Prescott noted that 32% of the families supported by the charity are living in temporary accommodation. She observed, “We’re not housing officers. It’s really hard to tell a family that we can signpost you, or to keep bidding [for council housing], but there’s nothing more we can do for you.”

Further complications arise as some councils, including those in London, have relocated homeless families to Birmingham, while others in Birmingham reportedly threaten eviction for families who refuse private tenancy offers outside the city, pushing them further down housing waiting lists.

Prescott emphasised that housing insecurity is often at the heart of many struggles faced by these families, impacting mental health and employment prospects. “Housing just is becoming the bigger picture. When you’ve got a family that don’t know where they’re going to be or don’t know what’s happening with housing, it naturally takes over everything else,” she said.

The situation in Birmingham reflects the complex challenges city officials, families, and support organisations face in addressing homelessness and providing suitable, stable accommodation for vulnerable populations.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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5. <https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/i-want-to/see-council-meetings-and-agendas> - This link provides access to Birmingham Council meetings and agendas, which could include discussions on homelessness strategies and temporary housing policies like those affecting Oscott Gardens.
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7. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/apr/27/it-feels-very-much-like-a-prison-inside-a-cramped-birmingham-homeless-hostel> - Please view link - unable to able to access data