# Social housing tenants face worsening conditions amid rising complaints and health risks



Kerianne Wilson’s struggle to secure safe and healthy living conditions for herself and her son encapsulates a broader crisis facing social housing tenants across the UK. Since 2022, the pair have been enduring a precarious situation in their west London flat, battling relentless mould, deteriorating ceilings, and the constant risk of health complications from their environment. Despite paying rent for a property that should provide sanctuary, Wilson finds herself increasingly anxious about her home’s condition, which has left her son “constantly coughing” amidst the dampness.

The circumstances surrounding Wilson’s housing situation are not unique; they reflect a deepening frustration that has emerged among tenants grappling with similar issues. Calls for action have intensified, with the Housing Ombudsman Service reporting a 474% increase in complaints about poor living conditions since 2019-20. Richard Blakeway, the housing ombudsman for England, has warned that the growing dissatisfaction could contribute to broader social discord if timely interventions are not made.

Wilson’s long tenure in her flat—she moved in when her son was just four months old—has seen her navigate a series of management changes and persisting issues. Managed now by one of London’s largest housing associations, Peabody, Wilson has had to fend off problems ranging from rodent infestations to frequent leaks, exacerbating the sense of neglect she feels from her housing provider. Peabody has stated that it is actively working on repairs and apologised for the delays; however, Wilson remains sceptical about the efficacy and timeliness of their responses. She indicated that communication has broken down entirely, rendering her reliant on complaints which often yield little urgency in resolution.

The significance of these grievances is amplified by the backdrop of the Grenfell Tower tragedy, which continues to haunt the community. The horror of lives lost and the systemic failures highlighted by that incident cast a long shadow over existing concerns about social housing quality. Local MP Joe Powell has recently launched a campaign demanding better conditions and accountability from housing associations, recognising that despite the affluence of the area, many continue to live in unacceptable situations.

Statistics underscore the urgency of the issue. Research by Crisis indicates that an overwhelming 1.5 million households are currently in social housing waiting lists, many living in unsuitable conditions that adversely affect their health and mental well-being. The study suggests that nearly two-thirds of respondents reported their living conditions negatively impacting their mental health, with many feeling trapped in a cycle that not only hinders their current quality of life but also delays crucial life progressions, such as starting a family or pursuing new career opportunities.

Amidst this backdrop, the dilemma surrounding social housing is closely tied to higher eviction rates and the overall housing crisis in England. Recent data indicates that over 25,000 households have faced homelessness due to no-fault evictions—a trend that has escalated markedly in recent years. Charities are advocating for urgent reforms, arguing that addressing issues like no-fault evictions is essential to stabilising housing for vulnerable communities and ensuring better living conditions.

Despite governmental recognition of the housing crisis, with plans for substantial construction initiatives and reforms in the planning laws aimed at increasing affordable housing, critics remain unconvinced. Structural changes are necessary to prevent the loss of social housing stock, especially with the Right to Buy scheme still in place, which has seen a significant reduction in the availability of affordable homes.

Kerianne Wilson’s story, while deeply personal, is emblematic of a systemic failure affecting thousands of social housing tenants. Her worries over her son’s health and their living conditions reflect a societal issue that cannot be ignored any longer. As housing quality remains a pressing concern, the collective voices of tenants like Wilson are crucial in demanding accountability from property managers and the government alike, pushing for a future where safe, secure housing is a guaranteed right rather than a constant struggle.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/29/it-feels-like-theres-no-communication-a-social-tenants-struggle-for-safe-housing), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/29/it-feels-like-theres-no-communication-a-social-tenants-struggle-for-safe-housing)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/29/it-feels-like-theres-no-communication-a-social-tenants-struggle-for-safe-housing), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/565880ad-c0d0-4a70-a6b7-189feb41f805)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/29/it-feels-like-theres-no-communication-a-social-tenants-struggle-for-safe-housing), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/93fd5258-8648-49ed-b76f-44dace53df0d), [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/e2381716-4c7a-4d64-9beb-31dd8b5c5255)
* Paragraph 4 – [[7]](https://www.crisis.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/chronic-shortage-of-social-housing-leaves-families-stuck-in-accommodation-that-is-harmful-to-their-health-new-research-reveals/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/565880ad-c0d0-4a70-a6b7-189feb41f805), [[6]](https://www.reuters.com/breakingviews/uks-housing-mess-requires-costly-fix-2024-08-29/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/e2381716-4c7a-4d64-9beb-31dd8b5c5255), [[6]](https://www.reuters.com/breakingviews/uks-housing-mess-requires-costly-fix-2024-08-29/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/29/it-feels-like-theres-no-communication-a-social-tenants-struggle-for-safe-housing> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/29/it-feels-like-theres-no-communication-a-social-tenants-struggle-for-safe-housing> - This article highlights the struggles of social housing tenants in the UK, focusing on Kerianne Wilson's experience with mould and inadequate repairs in her west London flat. It underscores the broader issue of substandard living conditions faced by many tenants, with a significant increase in complaints to the Housing Ombudsman Service since 2019-20. The piece also touches upon the impact of the Grenfell Tower tragedy on residents' concerns and the efforts of local MPs to address these issues through campaigns for safer and healthier homes.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/565880ad-c0d0-4a70-a6b7-189feb41f805> - In 2023, a record number of households in England faced homelessness due to 'no-fault' evictions enforced under Section 21 notices, with 25,180 households impacted, marking a significant increase from 18,750 in 2019. This rise is attributed to landlords evicting tenants often without providing a reason, amidst soaring rents and limited property availability. Charities like Shelter and Crisis are urging the government to abolish such evictions, as debates continue over a proposed renters' reform bill to fulfill a 2019 Tory manifesto pledge. But the government faces opposition from landlords fearing increased eviction challenges amidst court delays. Official data revealed that temporary accommodation usage soared, with 109,000 households housed temporarily, while rough sleeping increased by 61% over the past decade, highlighting the urgency of addressing the homelessness crisis. The government has allocated £2.4 billion to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping, but campaigners argue more robust reforms are needed to end no-fault evictions definitively.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/93fd5258-8648-49ed-b76f-44dace53df0d> - Irene, a middle-aged film production worker, has faced instability in London's rental market for decades and has been priced out of homeownership. This issue reflects a broader trend in the UK, where over 35s, who now make up a significant portion of renters, struggle with affordability and stability in the private rental sector. Corporate landlords and the growing build-to-rent sector are stepping in to address this demographic by offering more stable, long-term tenancies and targeting investments towards this expanding market. However, the UK rental market still lacks sufficient legal protections for tenants, contributing to ongoing instability and high costs. Renters also face pressure from rising rents and limited housing supply, creating an urgent need for regional housing strategies and legislative reforms to improve tenant conditions and affordability.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/e2381716-4c7a-4d64-9beb-31dd8b5c5255> - Property company JLL has called on the next UK government to end the Right to Buy scheme, which allows council home tenants to purchase their homes, to address the severe social housing crisis. The scheme has resulted in a significant reduction in social housing, with over 14,000 properties sold off last year leading to a net loss of 11,700 homes. More than 2 million properties have been sold since 1980s when the scheme was introduced by Margaret Thatcher. Critics argue that it depletes the social housing stock as councils are underfunded to replace sold homes. JLL estimates that it would cost £205 billion to build enough social homes to clear the current waiting list of over 1.2 million households. Labour party leaders have pledged to significantly reduce the discounts for buying council properties if elected. Additionally, various stakeholders, including Shelter and the Mayor of London, advocate for pausing or ending the scheme until more social homes can be constructed.
6. <https://www.reuters.com/breakingviews/uks-housing-mess-requires-costly-fix-2024-08-29/> - UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer is committed to addressing the housing crisis by building 1.5 million new homes during his parliamentary term and reforming planning laws. The housing crisis is exemplified by skyrocketing house prices, especially in London, and a significant shortfall in housing construction over the past thirty years. The government plans to employ more planning officers and enforce strict housing targets. However, private developers are cautious due to high construction costs and subdued demand. The stock prices of housebuilders and analysts' forecasts reflect skepticism about a housing boom. To increase the supply of affordable homes, Starmer is expected to raise rents for affordable housing and increase government subsidies for local councils and housing associations. Achieving these ambitious goals will likely necessitate significant public funding amid existing budget constraints.
7. <https://www.crisis.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/chronic-shortage-of-social-housing-leaves-families-stuck-in-accommodation-that-is-harmful-to-their-health-new-research-reveals/> - New research reveals the stark reality of waiting for a social home, with nearly three-quarters of people trapped in unsuitable properties that are impacting their health. The study, conducted by Crisis, Lloyds Banking Group, and Simon Community Northern Ireland, surveyed over 1,000 adults on social housing waiting lists or in social housing. It uncovers the impact the chronic shortage of social housing is having on people’s lives. Nearly two-thirds (62%) said the condition of their current property had negatively impacted their mental health. Many expressed how the lack of a stable home has left them feeling drained, with some being diagnosed with anxiety and depression as a result. With over 1.5 million UK households stuck on social housing waiting lists, the new research also reveals how over half of those surveyed (55%) felt like their lives were on hold. Almost half (47%) said that they’re putting off starting a family, two in five (42%) have delayed changing jobs or starting new careers out of fear of unsettling their housing situation further, while others have postponed going back to school or university – robbing them of a chance at building a stable future.