



## **‘One in 50’ London homes potentially used as short-term let**

- By JackGraves      22 January 2020

New research from London Councils suggests one in every 50 homes in the capital is let on a short-term basis, raising fresh concerns about the impact on London’s housing stock and communities.

London Councils, a cross-party group representing all 32 boroughs and the City of London Corporation, found 73,549 listings for London homes on online letting platforms such as Airbnb in December 2019 [1]. This is the first time the total number of London listings across the leading platforms has been compiled.

Calling for improved regulation of the booming short-term lets market, London Councils warns that the growth in short-term lets deprives the capital of much-needed permanent accommodation.

London currently faces the most severe homelessness crisis in the country. Around 56,000 London households live in temporary accommodation – accounting for nearly 70% of the national total. A recent report from Shelter showed that one in every 52 Londoners can now be considered homeless [2].

Boroughs are concerned that the proliferation of short-term lets means less housing supply for permanent residents while driving up prices in the private rental sector – worsening the affordability of housing in the capital.

Short-term lets are also increasingly associated with spikes in crime and anti-social behaviour. Boroughs report growing numbers of complaints from local residents about short-term lets used as ‘party houses’ and bases for prostitution and drug dealing.

Boroughs believe London risks lagging behind other global cities in its response. Cities such as Paris and Barcelona have implemented mandatory registration schemes for short-term lets, impose heavy fines on rule breaches, and invest significant resources into monitoring the market and enforcing standards.

London Councils also points to the recent announcement by the Scottish government that councils north of the border will be able to introduce licensing schemes for short-term lets from 2021 [3].

The umbrella body is calling for similar measures, including mandatory registration of short-term lets and stronger powers for local authorities to protect housing stock and clamp down on irresponsible property owners [4]. Legislative action is required at a government level for London to be given such powers.

**Cllr Darren Rodwell, London Councils' Executive Member for Housing & Planning**, said:

“At a time when almost one in 50 Londoners is homeless, it’s ridiculous that potentially one in 50 London homes is rented out as a short-term let.

“Although short-term lets listed on digital platforms offer benefits to some Londoners, the market is growing out of control. Boroughs are hearing more and more complaints about short-term lets linked to antisocial behaviour and even criminality.

“The priority has to be protecting Londoners’ interests. That’s why we’re calling on the government to introduce much stronger regulation of this sector. Changes to government legislation are essential for giving local authorities the powers we need to keep check on short-term lets in our communities and defend our residents.

“The Scottish government’s recent announcement shows London risks being left behind on this issue – especially when you look at the regulatory powers and resources other cities around the world have already got. We look forward to working with ministers so we can ensure London is better placed to tackle this challenge.”

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1. London Councils commissioned the tourism data research company Talk&Code to undertake a data scraping exercise investigating London lettings on six online letting platforms (Airbnb, Booking.com, Homeaway, Housetrip, Niumba and Trip Advisor) throughout December 2019.

The research found a total of 108,102 listings in London. Of these, 73,549 were listed as entire homes (as opposed to rooms within homes).

There are approximately 3.56 million dwellings in London (source: <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/housing-london>), suggesting that one in 50 homes is listed as a short-term let.

As a result of the duplication of property listings across the six letting platforms, it is likely that 73,549 is higher than the actual number of unique properties being advertised. However, additional properties are also advertised on alternative platforms not included in this research.

London Councils is sharing this figure as an indicative snapshot of the scale of the capital’s short-term lets market and will continue to seek more detailed data.

2. Source:

[https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press\\_releases/articles/280,000\\_people\\_in\\_england\\_are\\_homeless,\\_with\\_thousands\\_more\\_at\\_risk](https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_releases/articles/280,000_people_in_england_are_homeless,_with_thousands_more_at_risk)

3. Source: <https://www.gov.scot/news/regulating-short-term-lets/>

4. Before the introduction of the Deregulation Act 2015, planning permission was required to let out properties in London for any length of time. The Act removed the need for homeowners in London to receive planning permission to let their property for less than 90 nights in a calendar year.

Permission is still required when homeowners rent their property for more than 90 nights per year – but monitoring lettings numbers and taking enforcement action is proving a near-impossible task for hard-pressed local authorities.

Weak legislative control means that enforcement of breaches is extremely resource intensive for councils. Very few boroughs are able to provide the resources necessary to employ a dedicated team to proactively combat regulatory breaches. The response to breaches is therefore often reactive and reliant on residents' complaints.

However, there have been very few prosecutions in relation to breaches against short-term letting rules due to the challenge of demonstrating that the property has been let out every night for at least 91 occasions.

To improve regulation, London Councils is calling for the government to legislate for a mandatory short-term lets registration scheme. London Councils would work with ministers to ensure the legislation enables better monitoring of short-term lets properties, collaboration with online lettings platforms, and practical powers to ensure hosts are not able to circumvent the rules (for example, by switching platforms).