

**INDEPENDENT
AGE**

Let's end financial
hardship in later life

The rent can't wait

The impact of the Local Housing Allowance freeze on older private renters

October 2026

Introduction

“If my rent goes up and the Housing Benefit gets frozen, how would I survive?”
Older renter

For the growing number of people living in private rented homes in later life, 2026 has brought vital legislative change in the form of the Renters’ Rights Act, along with progress towards implementing improved energy efficiency and decency standards. Looking further ahead, a focus on the need to build more social homes provides hope for the future.

However, for the third of older private renters living in poverty, one issue still dominates: housing costs. Meeting the cost of rent eats up a large proportion of a low, fixed income, while the level at which Housing Benefit is paid is falling further and further behind market rents.

“The Renters’ Rights Act does give you some protection, but it’s not foolproof... People think ‘we’ve kind of solved the issue’. And you haven’t. There’s still a money issue here.”

Independent Age adviser

Nearly half of older private renters receiving Housing Benefit are experiencing material deprivation, meaning many are going without hot meals or cutting back on other essentials.¹

“I would come home and I was frightened to put the heating on until the evening. So, I would sit watching TV with my jacket on. I actually had my woolly hat on as well, I sat there watching TV with a duvet round me because I was too afraid to put the heating on.”

Older renter

The freeze to Local Housing Allowance (LHA) means an increasing number of private renters of all ages are finding their rents are rising above the Housing Benefit support they receive. LHA rates set the amount of housing cost support that is available to renters in the private rented sector. LHA should cover at least the cheapest 30% of homes in a local area; however, it has been frozen since April 2024 while, at the same time, rents have risen sharply.² Shortfalls are pushing many older renters on a low income into unsustainable spending cuts or leaving them at risk of homelessness. UK Government statistics show that the number of older households facing homelessness is now at its highest level on record.³

At Independent Age, we speak every day to older people in financial hardship who are struggling to make ends meet. Based on research surveys and interviews with our advisers, grantees and older renters themselves, this briefing outlines how the lives of older renters are being affected by the need to plug Housing Benefit shortfalls – and emphasises how vital it is that the UK Government seize the opportunity to uprate LHA in the upcoming budget for all private renters.

¹ *Households Below Average Income: An analysis of the UK income distribution: FYE 1995 to FYE 2025*, Department for Work and Pensions, 26 March 2026, see gov.uk/government/statistics/households-below-average-income-for-financial-years-ending-1995-to-2025/households-below-average-income-an-analysis-of-the-uk-income-distribution-fye-1995-to-fye-2025.

² *Price Index of Private Rents, UK: monthly price statistics*, Office for National Statistics, 16 September 2026, see ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/datasets/priceindexofprivaterentsukmonthlypricestatistics.

³ *Tables on homelessness*, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 13 August 2026, see gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness.

Thank you to the older people who shared their stories and participated in our research surveys, and to our grantees and advisers who shared their experiences supporting older renters. Without them, this briefing would not have been possible.

The reality of rising rents

“If it's private rent, you're pretty much always paying something yourself... I'm not sure if I've ever done a benefit check for someone in private rent where it covers all of the rent, so, something's not right.”

Independent Age adviser

Most older private renters don't receive enough Housing Benefit to cover their rent. The proportion of pension-age private renters receiving LHA who receive less Housing Benefit than the cost of their rent has risen from 65% to 69% in just one year of the freeze (from March 2025 to March 2026). For those receiving the Guarantee element of Pension Credit, who should be entitled to maximum Housing Benefit, the proportion having to cover a shortfall between their rent and LHA has risen from 51% to 56% in the same period.⁴

Average rents have been rising rapidly since LHA was frozen: for one-bed homes, they have increased by more than 18% since the freeze.⁵ In our representative polling of older private renters, two thirds of those receiving Housing Benefit had faced a rent increase in the previous 12 months – and for half of those, that increase was of more than £50 a month.⁶ With LHA rates frozen, this will leave increasing numbers of renters trying to make up shortfalls from a fixed, low, pension income.

Rents rising unsustainably

One community organisation that Independent Age grant-funds told us about a couple they were supporting whose rent had increased by £125 a month during the current LHA freeze over the past two years. Their rent was already £50 above the LHA rate in 2024 so, as of this year (2026), they were paying £175 every month from their pension towards their rent – an amount they were finding unsustainable.

Example of shortfalls increasing during the LHA freeze £ a month



⁴ Housing Benefit claimant data accessed via Stat-Xplore, Department for Work and Pensions, see stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/webapi/jsf/login.xhtml. The proportion of claimants with a gap between their rent and Housing Benefit is after the application of LHA, reductions and deductions. For pension-age recipients of the Guarantee element of Pension Credit, a gap may be caused by a non-dependent deduction (a reduction in Housing Benefit when other adults are living with the recipients) but, in the vast majority of cases, this is likely because of the rent exceeding the LHA rate.

⁵ *Private rent and house prices, UK: September 2026*, Office for National Statistics, 16 September 2026, see ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/private-rent-and-house-prices-uk/september-2026.

⁶ Survation poll of 510 private renters age 65 and over in England, Independent Age, October 2025.

“Our landlord raises the rent too much each year. We are now worried what he will ask for next year. We love where we live and, although we are on the list for older person’s housing, that’s not going to happen – we are number 58 on the list and that’s not changed for 10 years.”

Older renter

While year-on-year rent rises present one type of problem, tenants who are not on the receiving end of routine increases can instead experience sudden ‘rent shocks’ when landlords decide to bring a low rent in line with the market. Some of the older people we spoke to have lived for many years in a home with minimal or no rent rises, reliant on having a good relationship with their landlord, or having a landlord who seemingly has little interest in maximising the rent. However, this can feel like an unstable timebomb – at any time, something could change that upends this situation – and, with LHA rates so low, they risk quickly tumbling into a financial crisis if their current rent rises, or if they needed to find a new home.

During our research, we spoke to older renters living on a low income who had been forced to accept a huge rent increase to stay as sitting tenants when their landlord decided to sell their home. Another was anticipating her landlord passing the property to his son to manage, and feared rents would increase when a benevolent relationship was replaced with something more hard-nosed. Repairs and upgrades can also be a concern, with tenants often worried that if a landlord has to spend money to improve the property, that will be the trigger for an unaffordable rent hike. This can lead older people to feel reluctant to ask for necessary repairs for fear of their rent being re-evaluated.

Our advisers frequently hear from renters whose situation has been destabilised by an unexpected rent increase.

“They’re saying, ‘my landlord put the rent up a lot, £200 a month’ and then that leaves them with £200 a month less. It’s a lot of money for people. It’d be a lot of money for me, you know, let alone people on fixed incomes and Pension Credit. And then you do a benefit check and the rent is over the Local Housing Allowance.”

Independent Age adviser

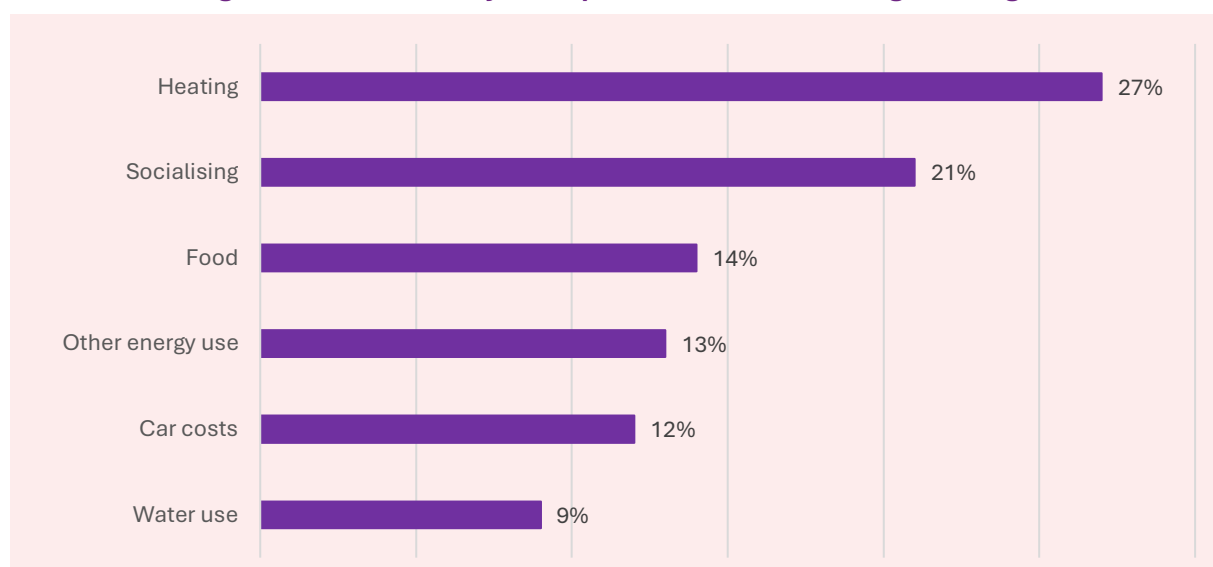
Struggling to make ends meet

“Even if it’s a small amount, even that small shortfall is too much because you’re going to rapidly get into arrears and risk losing your property anyway...even a small amount can be disastrous for people.”

Independent Age adviser

Our polling of older private renters showed that 6 in 10 of those receiving Housing Benefit are cutting back on essentials to pay their rent, with more than 1 in 4 reducing the extent to which they heat their home. Water and other energy costs were also amongst the necessary expenditure that some older renters found themselves trying to cut back on in order to pay the rent, demonstrating the extent to which Housing Benefit was failing to provide adequate support with their housing costs.

Main costs being cut to afford rent by older private renters receiving Housing Benefit⁷



When older renters' financial situation becomes increasingly squeezed, finding ways to cut their spending can mean giving up activities that had previously provided regular opportunities for social contact. Such cutbacks reduced connection, contributing to isolation and loneliness.

"I belonged to a club that would meet once a week – you're out, and you're meeting people, aren't you? Which I think is really, really important when you're on your own. I had to give up all those kind of things because each time it was like £7–8."

Older renter

Giving up running a car was one way that some older renters cut their expenditure, but this could come at a significant cost to other aspects of their lives, such as reduced access to services and social opportunities, and could create additional financial pressures elsewhere. One person we spoke to explained that they had previously relied on finding second-hand items locally when things broke or needed replacing. However, this had become more difficult since giving up their car, leaving them worried about how they would afford to replace essential items such as kitchen appliances and other household goods in the future.

Housing costs were also leading some older renters to cut back on spending that supported their health and wellbeing. This included giving up activities such as exercise classes, as well as reducing spending on food. Some people spoke about making every effort to prioritise fresh food and vegetables, and to make their budget stretch through batch cooking. However, we heard about older renters severely restricting their diets or becoming reliant on charitable food parcels because of the financial pressure created by meeting their rent.

"I've had people say they've gone without eating to pay for rent. They try and pay their rent, they try their best to prioritise it...then everything else seems to drop off: 'I'll just buy a bit of bread in, some beans, some milk, and I'll live off of that.'"

Independent Age adviser

⁷ Survation poll of 510 private renters age 65 and over in England, Independent Age, October 2025.

Trapped in unsuitable homes

Because of rising market rents, older renters on a low income can become trapped living in homes that are unsuitable for their needs, with little prospect of moving or improving their situation. Their home may be unsuitable for mobility issues or disabilities that can come with age, or because they are in disrepair, but LHA rates leave them unable to afford a move to somewhere suitable.

Older private renters are particularly likely to live in homes that are unsafe or in poor condition, with more than a quarter of older private renters living in homes that fail to meet the Decent Homes Standard – the highest proportion of any age group.⁸ They are also disproportionately likely to live in older, colder homes.⁹ Struggles to keep their home warm in winter are particularly common, leading to high energy bills overlaid on the burden of rent, or leading to people drastically underheating their homes because of the fear of high costs.

Older renters spoke to us about living in properties that had deteriorated over time, with problems left unresolved and the condition of the home gradually worsening from landlord neglect. The poor state of the accommodation could affect not only comfort, but also dignity and wellbeing.

Living in disrepair and unable to afford to move

We spoke to a single woman in her 70s who had been renting her home for more than two decades, at a rent that had remained relatively low for the area. However, the landlord had done very little to maintain the property, leaving her living in very poor conditions. Neglect and botched repairs had left the home increasingly difficult to live in.

“It's cold. It's draughty. It costs me a fortune to heat it.”

She told us that the condition of her home had deteriorated to such an extent that it shocked visitors. Although she had made efforts to decorate and improve the property herself, there was only so much she could do. Over time, the embarrassment caused by the condition of the home had led her to stop inviting people round, reducing opportunities to maintain social connections.

She had approached the council about social housing, but received no support, and had found that even a modest one-bedroom flat in her local area was outside what she could afford on Housing Benefit. She felt she had no options and was worried about the future.

“I've been to local authorities, and their attitude is, you've got a roof over your head and, while you've got one, we're not going to help you. Even a one-bedroom flat in this area is over £800 a month... I can't see them paying that somehow. The rents are higher for a one-bedroom flat than they are for my two-bedroom house.”

Older renters can end up taking on a lot of responsibility for maintaining a property themselves, despite this being the landlord's responsibility. While some manage to do so for many years, declining physical capacity and growing financial pressures can make this increasingly difficult.

⁸ *English Housing Survey 2022 to 2023: rented sectors*, chapter 4: Dwelling condition, energy efficiency and local area, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 17 July 2025, see gov.uk/government/statistics/english-housing-survey-2022-to-2023-rented-sectors/english-housing-survey-2022-to-2023-rented-sectors-introduction-and-main-findings.

⁹ *Turning the dial*, Independent Age, April 2025, see independentage.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/Energy_efficiency_report.pdf.

In some cases, rents had remained relatively low because tenants had effectively been managing much of the upkeep directly. As their ability to continue with upkeep diminished, they risked being caught between living in worsening disrepair or facing the prospect of a massive rent increase if they tried to move, or if the landlord decided to sell rather than improve.

“I do feel stuck, actually. Sometimes I get quite depressed about it. I have got bad arthritis, and I do worry – what will happen if I get to a stage where I’m having trouble getting up the stairs?”

Older renter

We spoke to older renters whose homes were becoming increasingly unsuitable for their health conditions or increasing frailty. One person we spoke to explained that they had already fallen down the steep stairs in their home on multiple occasions and had resorted to crawling down backwards to reduce the risk of another accident. She was keen to move somewhere more suitable but was unable to find anything she could access and afford.

Based on our poll,¹⁰ half of older private renters live in a home with two bedrooms, and 1 in 7 in a home with three or more, despite typically only being eligible for the one-bedroom rate of LHA. This is often not a choice. We heard the same challenge consistently from older people, our advisers and our grantees: suitable smaller homes could be extremely hard to find, and were not necessarily any cheaper to rent, leaving them with little alternative than to occupy a home that was “too large”.

Nowhere to go

“They say to us, ‘I’ve tried to look and there’s nothing out there.’ You talk to them about the housing register, contacted sheltered housing accommodation, there’s just nothing...and then the reality of having to get to a point of a homeless application because they can’t afford the rent. It’s really scary for them.”

Independent Age adviser

Many older private renters are being prevented from having any agency within the rental market, because the Housing Benefit levels are too low to enable them to compete for suitable homes. This is exacerbated by the fact that more accessible homes may command a premium.

“I have looked at one bedroom houses, and some of those are like £1,200 a month in the area I live in now, and it is really difficult to find something that’s suitable for someone elderly. There are flats about, that are maybe a little bit cheaper, but they are up three flights of stairs.”

Older renter

A consistent feature from our conversations was that older renters on a low income often lacked the economic means to improve their situation within the private rental market, and social housing was inaccessible unless they reached an extreme crisis point such as becoming homeless.

Commonly, older people we speak to through our advice services, and in our research interviews, would like a social home, for the affordability and security it would provide.

“If you get a chance to see the government, tell them to build social housing.”

Older renter

¹⁰ Survation poll of 510 private renters age 65 and over in England, Independent Age, October 2025.

Questions on how to access the social housing register are some of the most frequent housing-related enquiries we receive. Currently social housing does not provide a solution because it is out of reach for too many. Some of the people we spoke to had been on the waiting list for years, while others had been dismissed entirely, told that they would have to be homeless before they had a chance. We spoke to a number of older people in their late 70s, already suffering from significant health conditions, who had hit a brick wall when approaching the council for support.

“It was this lady [from the local authority] that actually said to me, ‘Oh well, you know, the fact that you’ve got a roof over your head already, you’re very, very low priority.’”

Older renter

“The council won’t entertain me. I mean, they told me even if I got evicted, I would have to live in my car, and become homeless for so long and store my stuff, then they would put me in the shelter and have to get rid of my pets.”

Older renter

Older people struggling to afford the rent of their current home have often looked to move within the private rented sector to find somewhere more suitable and affordable, but find it extremely challenging. Barriers such as discrimination, inflexible affordability checks and difficulty navigating online lettings portals all played a role, but the most consequential issue was clear: nothing was affordable on Housing Benefit.

“I’ll be 79 next year and no one wants me as a tenant... I’m on Housing Benefit. Most people don’t want Housing Benefit. And there are lots of younger people earning money...who wants somebody of 79 who’s got cancer who might not last a year, when they can get a young couple who are on £36,000 a year?”

Older renter

Finding homes that meet needs in later life added an extra layer of difficulty. Looking for a ground floor or accessible home narrows availability even more. One of the community organisations we grant-fund told us that in their experience ground floor flats attracted a premium as landlords know they are in demand.

With so few suitable options available, sometimes the only choice for older renters was to move away from communities in which they were established to find places they could afford within the Housing Benefit limit. Our previous research found that the number of older renters living in deprived rural and coastal communities was increasing because of this exodus.¹¹ We spoke to one woman in her 70s who had had to move away from her home town when her landlord sold the property she was living in, because she could not find anywhere she could afford locally. She had given up her car because of the cost and failing health, leaving her isolated from her previous connections.

Facing homelessness

The most severe impact of not being able to pay your rent is that you could become homeless. With the number of older households facing homelessness at record levels, it was no surprise to find that homelessness was more than an abstract concern for the older renters we spoke to.

¹¹ No place for older renters, Independent Age, January 2024, see independentage.org/sites/default/files/2025-05/Older_renters_report_Independent_Age.pdf.

Our advisers regularly help older people who have become homeless. One older person we supported became homeless after her landlord decided to sell. She needed to stay in the local area to provide support to her daughter and grandson, who had additional needs, but was unable to find anywhere affordable within the LHA rate. As a result of becoming homeless, she spent months in temporary accommodation unsuitable for her health and accessibility needs.

Soaring rents amid growing care needs

Elizabeth and her partner Sid are in their 70s, and live in a small, rented house, a home they share with their pet parrots and cats. They have lived here for more than a decade since they lost accommodation that was tied to Sid's employment. Sid is now suffering from dementia, with a worsening condition requiring lengthy hospital stays.

While the rent was originally affordable, in the time they have lived there it has soared by 60%, taking it above the LHA limit. Despite this huge increase, the rent remains under the market rate for the area, leaving them potentially exposed to continuing large annual increases. Attempts to secure social housing, or a cheaper private rented home, have been unsuccessful.

"I looked into moving to a ground floor flat, but the rent is exactly the same, if not more, than what we're paying here. The council considered us what they call 'suitably housed' and wouldn't consider us."

Elizabeth made a claim for Housing Benefit two years ago, a move forced by redundancy from her job and Sid's growing care needs. This extra support made a huge difference to them at first, enabling them to keep living in the home that Sid knows.

"He needs familiarity. I just hope we can stay here. I know that his condition is going to get worse, but I believe that having him home and seeing the familiar things and having a cat jump on his bed and everything will help."

However, with LHA rates frozen, their finances are under increasing pressure. Rent has increased by £100 a month in the past two years, which, because of the LHA freeze, has not been matched by any increase in their Housing Benefit. Combined with growing costs, including Sid's care, Elizabeth is increasingly worried about what the future will hold.

"We manage, you know, but we don't have a lot of extra. It's very challenging. We're not that far away from being homeless, really."

Impacts on health and wellbeing

Whether older renters on a low income are stuck in unsuitable, cold or unsafe housing, cutting back unsustainably on essentials like food or heating, or being shut out of social opportunities, it is clear that their health and wellbeing is suffering because of the affordability pressures created by inadequate Housing Benefit.

"I did give a lot of things up: when you're on a very low budget, you have to prioritise keeping warm and a decent diet. But I did get to a stage where I got very, very low, I got very, very depressed."

Older renter

The impact could be felt in declining physical health through the inability to keep warm, take regular exercise or eat well, in addition to acute health problems resulting from avoidable trips and falls caused by unsafe or unsuitable conditions.

Mental health was also regularly affected, with older people we spoke to speaking of anxiety, depression and isolation caused by their housing and financial situation.

“You also get the mental health aspects as well. That's something that comes up quite a lot. People will be very upset. Sometimes people think there's no point in going on.”

Independent Age adviser

As well as the costs to individuals of worsening health and avoidable accidents, this has a cost to the public purse through increasing pressure on the NHS and social care – costs that could be avoided if those individuals could access a suitable and affordable home.¹²

The Local Housing Allowance lifeline

Older renters on a low income cannot afford their housing costs.

While we welcome the UK Government's ambitions to build more social housing – something many older private renters tell us would give them the long-term certainty of a home that can't simply be taken away from them – this will take time, and will do little to provide a lifeline for older private renters in financial hardship now.

Right now, security for those who are currently facing retirement in unaffordable rented homes can only come through increasing Housing Benefit support to a level that makes their situation sustainable.

“The rents are so high. They take so much of your income. I don't know what else to say... I don't think the government has any idea how anybody lives.”

Older renter

Independent Age is calling on the UK Government to urgently raise LHA to at least the 30th percentile of local rents, and keep it pegged at that level to help ensure older renters on a low income do not continue to face growing levels of financial hardship, health crises and homelessness.

¹² *The only way is up*, Independent Age, July 2026, see independentage.org/sites/default/files/2026-07/The_only_way_is_up_report.pdf.



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