



# **A LONG WAY FROM HOME:** IMPROVING THE EXPERIENCES OF PEOPLE IN TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

MAY 2025

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Most importantly, we would like to thank everyone that was generous with their time and shared their expertise – and in particular those with experience of temporary accommodation.

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BRINGING  
COMMUNITIES  
**together**

## **FOREWORD**

As a community leader I've been involved in housing campaigning for a long time now. It's an issue I care about because I live in temporary accommodation with my husband and my two young children.

In the past four years we have been moved five times across South, East, and North London. My daughter asked, "what is our next destination, is it the West?"

We were told only one month ago that we had to move again. I felt the same sense of uncertainty I've felt so many times before: where will we go? What will happen to the kids' education? Will we have to leave our community? I could barely sleep, I was so worried.

My kids haven't had a stable home. I decided to keep them at their same school to maintain some sense of stability, but now we have to travel over 40 minutes to get there.

As a leader in South London Citizens and with participatory arts organisation Creating Ground, I have connected with other families suffering from poor conditions in temporary accommodation. Many of us lack cooking and laundry facilities, affordable storage for belongings we couldn't bring into temporary accommodation, and Wi-Fi access, making everyday life a struggle. Coming together with others facing these hardships has enabled us to share

stories, support one another, and most importantly, campaign for real change. Together we won changes at Greenwich Council, including improved communication and training for housing officers and free internet access. We're now working to reform storage practices.

In November, I had the opportunity to speak to the Deputy Prime Minister about my experience. I shared how being in temporary accommodation is not just about not having a permanent address; it's about feeling invisible, like your family does not belong anywhere. It's about the emotional weight that children carry when they hear their parents say they don't know where we will be living next month.

Meetings with senior politicians have given me glimmers of hope that real change might be possible if those in power truly listen to the voices of lived experience. I speak not only for myself, but for thousands of families still facing the same uncertainty, when I say that we need long-term solutions not short-term fixes. Our children deserve more than a roof over their heads, they deserve a home.

**Fatiha Benmerzouk,**  
**Citizens UK Leader in South London Citizens,**  
**and part of member organisation Creating Ground**



Over decades local authorities have had to navigate a housing crisis without appropriate funds or resources. The lack of social housing has culminated in a situation where one in every 49 households in London are homeless and living in temporary accommodation. Many councils are operating close to bankruptcy, and in places such as Eastbourne, 49p of every £1 that the council collects in its share of council tax is currently spent on temporary accommodation.

That being said, there is no excuse for providing accommodation that does not meet people's basic human rights.

As Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Households in Temporary Accommodation, I am saddened, yet not surprised, at the state and lack of provisions we as a society are providing.

To live in accommodation without the ability to cook meals, access the internet, store your belongings safely or even have basic access to a toilet and washing facilities is quite simply abhorrent.

If London and Manchester are serious about becoming UNICEF Child Friendly Cities, then they must work towards providing safe and supported accommodation for all children in their local areas. In fact, by placing families in substandard Temporary Accommodation, local councils are violating at least 12 Articles of the UN Rights of the Child.

I am glad to support the recommendations set out in this report, which include the need to establish a national notification protocol when children are placed into temporary accommodation and collecting better data when households access the NHS.

We can do better, and we must do better now.

**Dame Siobhain McDonagh MP,  
MP for Mitcham and Morden and  
Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for  
Households in Temporary Accommodation**

As a London council leader, ending the temporary accommodation crisis is one of my top priorities. It's terrible for families, who spend years without a real home, and often in poor conditions. But the effects go wider than that—money spent on temporary accommodation is money we can't spend on other essential services for our residents.

This report shows how serious the problem is, and how much it's growing. In an average London classroom, one child will be homeless, perhaps worrying about where they'll sleep tonight when they should be worrying about spelling. But it's no longer just London—only one local authority in England reports no use of temporary accommodation, and in Manchester and Birmingham the numbers are approaching London levels.

I'm proud of the progress we've made in tackling the problem in Greenwich—our use of hotels is down 80% and our successful programme of building and acquisitions means we've been able to move hundreds of families who have been homeless into secure council tenancies. I'm also proud that we provide free internet to those in temporary accommodation and of our work with Creating Ground, a local group who use theatre to tell refugee women's stories of homelessness, to improve the experience of people in temporary accommodation.

This report asks us to go further than that, offering more services for families in temporary accommodation. I'd love for us to do that—and we will look at how we can achieve it—but systemic change is only possible if it is funded properly. Without support from the government, we would have to find savings in other essential service areas.

Ending the temporary accommodation crisis would transform lives for millions. It's going to be tough, but I believe that if central government, councils and civil society work together, we can achieve it.

**Cllr Anthony Okereke,  
Leader of the Royal Borough of Greenwich**

# INTRODUCTION

The number of people living in temporary accommodation (TA) in England is the highest since records began.<sup>1</sup> There is now a ‘tsunami’ of demand.<sup>2</sup> According to the Government’s latest data there are over 126,000 households in TA, including more than 164,000 children. Over half of those households—56 per cent—are based in London. One in every 49 households in London are now in TA, with one in every 186 households in TA in the rest of England. Birmingham and Manchester lay claim to the second and third cities respectively with the highest concentration of households in TA.<sup>3</sup> While the public are sceptical that the crisis will improve—in fact 61 per cent of people in England take the view that homelessness will get worse over the next two years—it is not inevitable.<sup>4</sup> Though it has been rising since 2010, between 2004 and 2010 the number of households in TA more than halved.<sup>5</sup>

Behind the statistics are real people. In many cases, ordinary people are living in extraordinary circumstances. At the same time households in TA are also more likely to be marginalised, with 38 per cent classified by the Government as vulnerable.<sup>6</sup> This report provides a critical analysis of the current state of TA and the approaches used by local authorities, in which we identify a postcode lottery of provision. It reveals that people in TA cannot access basic amenities—a toilet, washing machine, somewhere to cook a nutritious meal—because of the barriers imposed on them. In shared accommodation, reports of anti-social behaviour and concerns associated with safeguarding are common. When asked by the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, the most egregious examples experts spoke of included drug-dealing, criminality and women being propositioned and asked to enter into sex contracts.<sup>7</sup> This research also identifies cases where authorities are encouraging households to pawn their belongings, and people are getting into debt for putting their items in storage while they stay in hostels and hotels. Not only is accommodation insecure and poor quality,

households are living in such accommodation for longer. They are ill-served by public services that cannot cope with the demands placed on them and as a result they routinely report being ignored, unable to access services and too often are living without dignity. A more effective and compassionate approach to homelessness in England is urgently needed.

TA was never intended to be used for anything other than emergencies, but it has become a long-term housing tenure. This is not a new challenge, but a reality facing the UK Government on an industrial scale. In its first months in office, the Government has taken some steps to tackle homelessness. It announced an additional £230 million for homelessness interventions as part of its 2024 Budget.<sup>8</sup> It has adopted a ‘whole of government’ approach, with an Inter-Ministerial Group on Homelessness and Rough Sleeping established and chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister. The Group has yet to report on progress. New TA programmes in Essex and Liverpool have been announced as have new Emergency Accommodation Reduction Pilots across two dozen authorities—many of them in London.<sup>9</sup> These are positive signals from the Government. And it is underpinned by a commitment to address the fragmentation of public services—across health, local government and crime—which may facilitate more multi-disciplinary approaches to tackling homelessness in the future, as may the Government’s promotion of artificial intelligence in streamlining public services. That said, there is no sign of a national strategy designed to reduce the use of TA, even if authorities are statutorily required to publish homelessness reduction strategies.

On top of the Government’s public service reform agenda, it has also signalled its intent by prioritising housebuilding through a forthcoming Planning and Infrastructure Bill, banning the use of Section 21 evictions—one of the leading causes of homelessness—and injecting £800 million in the

<sup>1</sup> We define temporary accommodation, similar to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, as housing provided to individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Within that definition, there are different forms of TA, including B&B, nightly-paid, the private rented sector and hostels. Accommodation provided by the Home Office is not included in this definition.

<sup>2</sup> Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, [Children in temporary accommodation – oral evidence](#), 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Authors’ analysis of Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government [homelessness live tables](#), July-September 2024; Office for National Statistics, [Number of households](#), 2023.

<sup>4</sup> Centre for Homelessness Impact, [What do the public think about homelessness?](#), 2025.

<sup>5</sup> Between December 2004 and June 2010, when the number was reduced from 101,030 to 50,400 households.

<sup>6</sup> MHCLG, [homelessness live tables](#), July-September 2024.

<sup>7</sup> HCLG Committee, [Children in temporary accommodation](#), 2024.

<sup>8</sup> HM Treasury, [Autumn Budget: Fixing the foundations to deliver change](#), 2024. See p.55.

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [Emergency Accommodation Reduction Pilots](#), 2024.



Affordable Homes Programme (as well as a £2 billion ‘down payment’ in 2026-27) which are expected to help build 25,800 social and affordable homes.<sup>10</sup> These are welcome developments, but they are not sufficient to stem the rise in homelessness and in many cases interventions will take time to come to fruition. With over a quarter of a million people in England living in TA tonight, moving at speed is crucial.

That is why Citizens UK and Trust for London joined forces to explore existing practice across TA—in London, Birmingham and Manchester. Working with households with lived experience of homelessness, community activists, campaigners, school leaders, health practitioners and local authorities, provides a more granular analysis of experiences of TA. And in setting out recommendations that authorities can unilaterally adopt, this report draws on the ‘Standards and Five Basics’ campaign Trust for London has developed in collaboration with a coalition of organisations working to support Londoners in TA. The basics households in TA should expect include good quality and free Wi-Fi, access to adequate cooking and laundry facilities, safe and secure storage for their belongings, and to be kept informed of their situation as it develops.

This report charts how the rules governing TA—set out in guidance or primary and secondary legislation—are operationalised in practice and experienced by the people living by those rules. To take the example of storage, in some cases households pay extortionate costs to store their belongings while in TA and can’t access them when they need them. There are cases where storage facilities are a significant distance from where they are living, or households are getting into debt because of the costs of storage. Yet the guidance on how authorities should ‘protect the property’ of homeless families is non-existent.

Using the Five Basics as a starting point, it is clear that a national rules-based framework for standards in TA is desperately needed. Those standards need to be reflected in practice by authorities—which rarely feel empowered by the Government—as well as monitored and enforced. Authorities’ policies need to be publicly accessible and consistent if they are to execute their responsibilities more effectively and significantly improve the experiences in households in TA.

Though authorities are in significant financial distress for reasons that are outside of their control, they do have agency to improve the lives of their residents living in TA—as different approaches pursued by authorities attest. This report does, however, also recognise that, as a national issue requiring national solutions, the Government needs to take more action to ensure that the basic standards necessary are established. As a starting point, the dignity of households needs to be protected. That means placing higher accommodation standards on landlords by revising the Homelessness Code of Guidance—which is a ‘living’ document and has gone through 23 versions since it was established in 2018—as well as dissuading authorities from charging families to wash their clothing, or leaving them to procure storage services in times of distress. It also means improving policy-makers’ understanding of the ‘geography of homelessness’, strengthening legislation through the provision of guidance for practitioners and holding authorities to account for their performance. The stakes are high: 80 children living in TA died between October 2023 and September 2024, equivalent to three per cent of child deaths over that period.<sup>11</sup> Improving the experiences of households living in TA provides a stronger foundation through which longer-term, systemic reform can be achieved. It is to both of these ends—pragmatic change in the short-term, reform in the long-term—that we must turn.

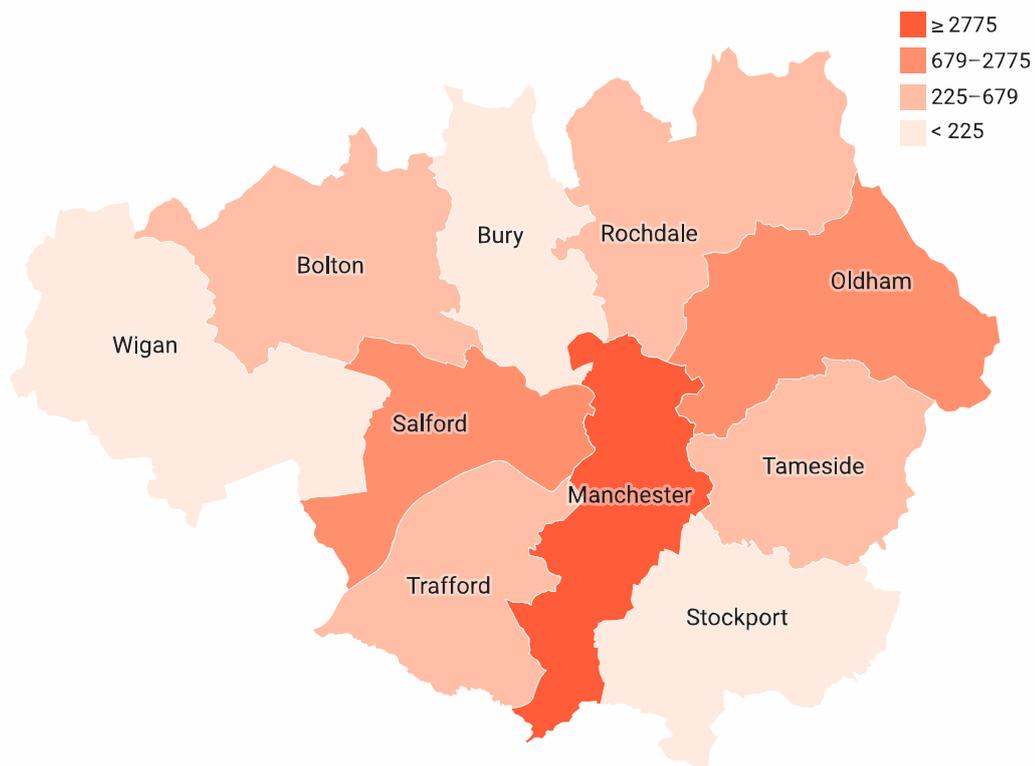
<sup>10</sup> HM Treasury, *Spring Statement*, 2025. See p.3.

<sup>11</sup> Shared Health Foundation, *Child mortality in temporary accommodation*, 2025.



Across England's regions, cities are responsible for placing the largest numbers of households in TA. There are over 8,200 households in the North West in TA, with nearly 2,800 of them—equivalent to 34 per cent—placed in accommodation by Manchester City Council. Over 1,000 of those, 2,800 are placed in accommodation outside of Manchester's boundaries. Our research highlights for the first time a household being placed outside of England—in this case in Wales, which has a different regulatory and legislative regime. Manchester City Council placed a household in Cardiff and Wandsworth placed a household in Gwynedd.<sup>14</sup> In Birmingham, the situation is worse. Over 5,200 of the West Midlands' 8,400 households in TA are placed there by Birmingham City Council, equivalent to 62 per cent of households across the sub-region. There is now only one authority across England that hasn't placed a single person in TA: Cannock Chase. Curiously, it is only ten miles from Birmingham.<sup>15</sup>

**FIGURE II:** Total number of households in temporary accommodation in Greater Manchester

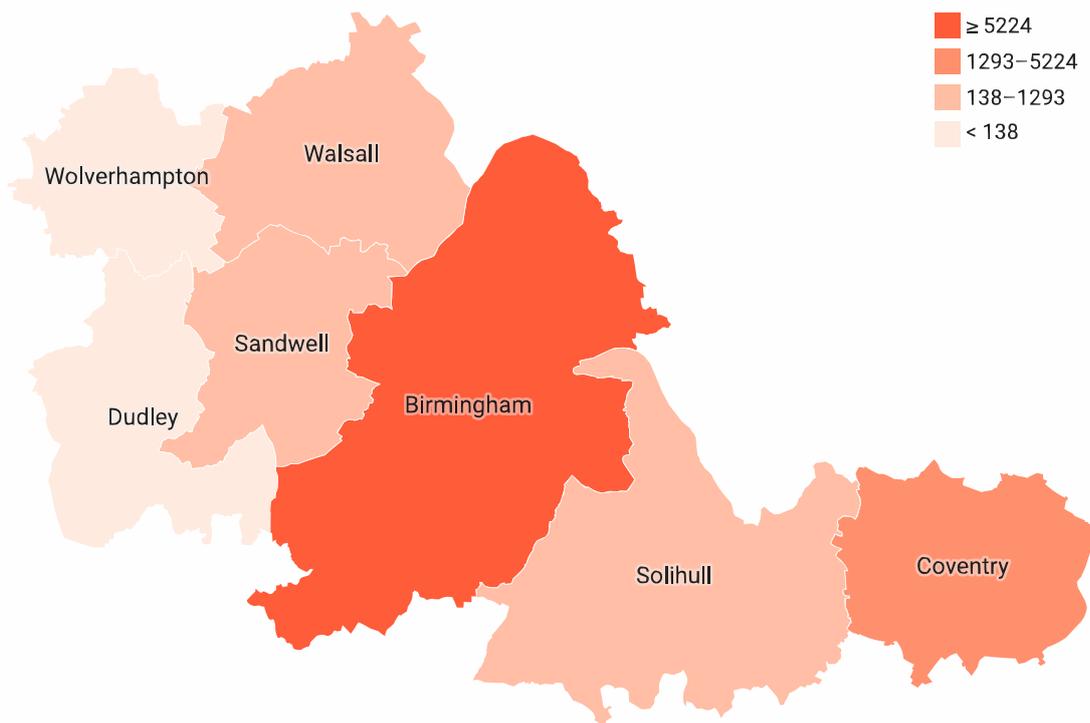


**SOURCE:** Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Homelessness live tables, July to September 2024.

<sup>14</sup> Data supplied under the Freedom of Information Act. Available on request.

<sup>15</sup> Authors' analysis of homelessness live tables, July-September 2024.

**FIGURE III:** Total number of households in temporary accommodation in the West Midlands



**SOURCE:** MHCLG, Homelessness live tables, July to September 2024.

**FIGURE IV:** Which authorities are supporting the highest number of households with temporary accommodation?**LONDON:**

Newham	6,667
Croydon	3,520
Wandsworth	3,508
Hackney	3,446
Ealing	3,219
Tower Hamlets	3,159
Enfield	3,088
Lewisham	2,729
Haringey	2,644
Barnet	2,623
Kensington & Chelsea	1,992
Bromley	1,876
Greenwich	1,861
Islington	1,551
Hillingdon	1,455
Waltham Forest	1,443
Hammersmith & Fulham	1,403
Havering	1,267
Barking & Dagenham	1,045
Sutton	1,027

**ENGLAND (NOT INCLUDING LONDON):**

Birmingham	5,224
Manchester	2,775
Brighton & Hove	1,655
Bristol	1,585
Coventry	1,293
Bedford	1,105
Luton	1,072
Milton Keynes	1,047
Liverpool	1,046
Leicester	924
Cornwall	876
Salford	775
West Northamptonshire	752
Nottingham	749
Sheffield	720
Basildon	710
Oldham	679
Portsmouth	601
Medway Towns	586
Hastings	567

**SOURCE:** MHCLG, Homelessness live tables, July to September 2024. Over a dozen authorities haven't shared their homelessness returns with the Government, so they haven't been included. They are: Brent, Camden, Doncaster, East Staffordshire, Harrow, Lambeth, North Kesteven, North Warwickshire, Redbridge, Southwark, Westminster, Woking and Wolverhampton.

The quarterly snapshot of the number of households authorities are supporting in TA has become a regular media feature, but much less attention has been given to precisely where those households are being placed, despite high-profile legal disputes such as the *Nzolameso v City of Westminster* ruling by the Supreme Court in 2015, which found that an out-of-area placement in Bletchley, near Milton Keynes, was not justifiable.<sup>16</sup>

Where households are placed raises questions of equality and equity, and the concentration of placements can add further pressure on local housing markets. Previous analysis has suggested that more affluent authorities place families into areas of deprivation. For example, only eight

households were placed in Kensington and Chelsea and 18 households in Richmond upon Thames by other London authorities, but Kensington and Chelsea and Richmond placed 315 households in TA outside of their boundaries over the same period.<sup>17</sup> London authorities place on average 43 per cent of households outside of their boundaries, but some of London's most affluent authorities place significantly higher percentages. Bromley, Richmond upon Thames and Merton are among the least disadvantaged but place some of the highest percentages of their residents outside of their boundaries at over 75 per cent.<sup>18</sup> Brent and Barking & Dagenham, on the other hand, which are in the top quintile for disadvantage, placed six per cent of their households in TA outside of their boundaries.

<sup>16</sup> UK Supreme Court, *Nzolameso (Appellant) v City of Westminster (Respondent)*, 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Prospect Magazine, *Temporary accommodation nation*, 2024.

<sup>18</sup> Authors' analysis of MHCLG, *homelessness live tables*, July-September 2024.



**FIGURE V:** What's the furthest authorities placed households in temporary accommodation?

Barking and Dagenham	Southend-on-Sea
Bexley	Thanet
Brent	Brighton and Hove
Bromley	Wolverhampton
Croydon	North Northamptonshire
Ealing	Newcastle
Enfield	Liverpool
Greenwich	Barnsley
Havering	Harwich
Hounslow	Durham
Islington	Wolverhampton
Kensington and Chelsea	Thurrock
Kingston Upon Thames	Bexley
Lambeth	Birmingham
Lewisham	Wolverhampton
Newham	Blackburn
Redbridge	Wakefield
Richmond upon Thames	Medway
Sutton	Sheerness
Wandsworth	Gwynedd

**SOURCE:** Freedom of Information requests, available on request. Not all authorities responded to our request for information.

The former chair of the Mayor of London's Housing Panel, Professor Loretta Lees, has been critical of what she describes as marginalising the poorest in local communities. And that has real repercussions. According to polling by Shelter, 27 per cent of households they spoke to told them that they were placed more than an hour from their original accommodation, with 19 per cent of households with school-aged children reporting that they travel more than an hour to get to school.<sup>19</sup> Absenteeism is one of the routinely cited concerns with placing families outside of their local areas, which is having an adverse effect on educational attainment, with a quarter performing below expectations. Research by the Children's Commissioner found that the more times children move home between Reception and Year 11, the worse their GCSE results.<sup>20</sup> School leaders told us that the living conditions of their students were creating behavioural and mental health challenges too.

Travelling further is creating new cost burdens for parents and their children. Guidance by the Local Government Association suggests that authorities should provide support toward travel costs, but we were not able to find examples of authorities subsidising those costs. While guidance by the Department for Work and Pensions suggests that households should not be expected to travel further than 90 minutes to work, and Department for Education guidance suggests that figure is 45 minutes for children in primary school each year and 75 minutes for children in secondary school, authorities routinely breach

<sup>19</sup> Shelter, *Still living in limbo: why the use of temporary accommodation must end*, 2023.

<sup>20</sup> Children's Commissioner, 'No child should be homeless: how housing instability affects a child's GCSE grades', 2025.

those distances.<sup>21</sup> Transport authorities, such as Transport for London (TfL), are obvious candidates to support households in TA, especially given TfL already provides subsidies to Londoners for a range of reasons.<sup>22</sup> And while further research is required to determine the cost burden this would place on TfL, it is clear that the costs associated with travelling further distances are imposing additional financial distress on households, and not only because parents need to travel further to take their children to schools. Working households in TA are also having to make difficult decisions—which to provide some perspective, 11 per cent of the households Islington supports in TA are in full-time employment.<sup>23</sup> According to Emma Haddad, the Chief Executive of St Mungo’s, some people are choosing to “deliberately sleep in their cars closer to work because they cannot afford to commute.” We spoke to one single parent who explained that, because of the time it took her to travel across London to her son’s school, she wasn’t able to start work until after 9am. As a result, she was under-employed,

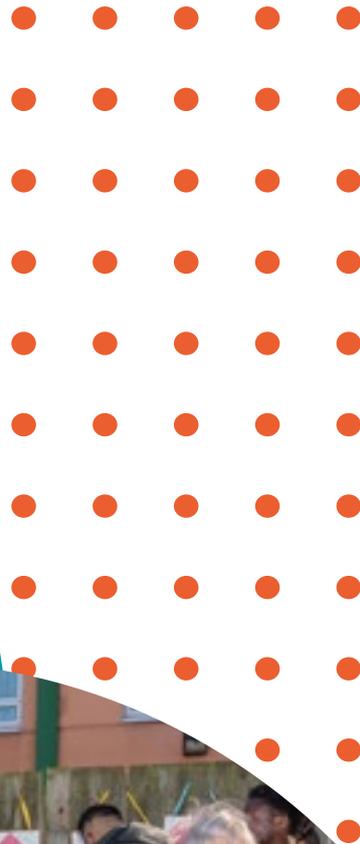
with a job that started at 11am and was part-time. More support for households in TA, especially those in work, is consistent with the Government’s Opportunity Mission.

If this isn’t problematic enough, placing households in another local authority makes it more difficult for them to access public services. Under Section 208 of the Housing Act 1996, an authority that places a household out of its administrative boundaries (known as a ‘sending’ authority) is required to inform a host authority (known as a ‘receiving’ authority). It must provide notice within 14 days and in writing. However, authorities do not consistently have due regard for their statutory responsibilities, given the demand on their services. For example, Harrow told us that in the first three months of 2021 it placed 25 households in TA outside of its boundaries, but only discharged its duty to notify receiving authorities within 14 days on nine occasions.

<sup>21</sup> Department for Work and Pensions, *Generic guidance for DWP Providers*, 2025. Department for Education, *Travel to school for children of compulsory school age*, 2024.

<sup>22</sup> Last year the London Assembly *called on the Mayor of London* to support asylum seekers with transport costs.

<sup>23</sup> *Presentation* to the Health, Wellbeing and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee.



Consistent with the SAFE Protocol Campaign by the All Party Parliamentary Group for Temporary Accommodation, we recommend that the Government should establish a formal notification system so that schools are alerted when a child moves into TA and GP surgeries are alerted when their patients become homeless. This should be enshrined in the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill.



The absence of clear protocols to manage the process of placing households out of their local area also forces authorities to compete with one another for finite accommodation, making it more expensive in the process. There are examples where authorities have begun to work together to solve the unintended consequences of placing households outside of their boundaries. The longest-standing is the Inter-Borough Temporary Accommodation Agreement (IBTAA) which has been in place in London since 2011. Though some authorities are privately concerned that their neighbours are not consistently complying with the IBTAA, it has prevented authorities from engaging in a free for all to outbid one another. The Greater Manchester Combined Authority's (GMCA) newly established Out of Borough Protocol is also a good example of cross-boundary collaboration.

London and the GMCA's method has enabled authorities to adopt a strategic approach to the geography of homelessness, by communicating with one another, and landlords, about the location of placements, and by preventing authorities from outbidding one another. It is clear, however, that a problem continues to arise when those authorities place households in accommodation beyond the geographies of their agreements.



## **THE ECONOMICS OF HOMELESSNESS**

Homelessness is costly—to the people living in TA, to the local authorities responsible for covering at least some of the cost of accommodation, to the UK Government—and ultimately taxpayers (some of whom are in TA)—through housing benefit and subsidies to local authorities. There is, however, a more complex set of incentives and disincentives underpinning the system.

In one respect, authorities in London (and to a lesser degree Manchester and Birmingham) are responding to those incentives created in Whitehall, with some forms of TA attracting higher subsidies for cash-strapped authorities. Differences in the Local Housing Allowance across each Broad Rental Market Area (each BRMA covers a small number of authorities) shapes the location of TA. And as the Resolution Foundation has shown, since 2016-17 LHA has for the most part been frozen – only to be punctuated by two large increases of 13 per cent in 2020-21 and 16 per cent in 2024-25.<sup>24</sup> The case of Bed and Breakfasts—which are classified according to whether they have a shared toilet, washing or cooking facilities—is also a case in point.<sup>25</sup> Though B&Bs can attract more subsidies from the Government, that does not outweigh the additional costs placed on authorities, not to mention the detrimental effect on the households living in them.

It is clear that market forces limit the agency authorities have to respond to the scale of the challenge, with capacity and capability constraints further exacerbating the issue. In our workshops, participants told stories of dedicated staff in authorities working in a system that is harming the individuals it is designed to serve. Even so, the consequences of their decisions are real even if they are symptomatic of crises outside of their control. Households placed in areas that are alien to them can be socially isolated, distant from support services and familial networks, which might require them to take their children out of their schools or be a cause of unemployment since the costs of travelling to work may prove cost prohibitive, as previously indicated. 47 per cent of parents said it was simply unsustainable for their school-aged children to remain in their current educational settings.<sup>26</sup>

There is an opportunity for authorities to become 'market shapers' rather than 'market takers'. Authorities have been purchasing more stock, largely with support from grant funding from the Government. For example, Islington has purchased 363 former Right to Buy properties in the borough since 2021, which have been earmarked for TA. In doing so, Islington has greater control over how it manages demand. Hackney has also secured 1,450 properties for

<sup>24</sup> Resolution Foundation, *A temporary thaw: an analysis of Local Housing Allowance uprating over time*, 2023.

<sup>25</sup> Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) Order 2003.

<sup>26</sup> Shelter, *Living in limbo*, 2023.

TA. But that investment is capital intensive and it follows the flight of the private rented sector from the TA market in search of more lucrative opportunities, meaning that acquisitions by authorities are in some cases only offsetting changes in the private rented market. As research by the London School of Economics and Savills has shown, there is a 41 per cent reduction in the number of private rental listings in London between 2017 and 2023.<sup>27</sup> The reduction in supply from private landlords has made it even more difficult in one respect to enforce standards, since demand for accommodation is high while authorities have limited leverage.

Other authorities have demonstrated their ability to shape the market through procurement and re-thinking how they use their assets. This enabled Manchester to extricate itself from one of the most expensive and poorest-quality forms of TA: B&Bs. In 2023, Manchester City Council was spending £63,000 per night on B&Bs, with 581 single-person households and another 227 families. 15 months later only 16 households were using B&Bs, with just three of them families; the remaining were single-person households. That's the equivalent to an annual reduction in B&B

spending of £22.6 million, though the authority will likely spend at least some of those savings on placing households into other forms of TA.<sup>28</sup> Given the average unit cost is between £15,000 and £30,000, preventing households from becoming homeless or placing even a small number of households outside of B&Bs could save authorities millions.

But authorities do not—on their own—operate at the spatial or financial scale necessary to take a strategic approach to homelessness. Working together, they can do more to leverage their 'purchasing power'. Between them, through the procurement of billions in public services, the quality of accommodation, particularly in the private sector, can be negotiated. In what may be a sign of authorities flexing their market power, the average unit cost for TA in London is similar to the East Midlands and North West, despite property prices and rents in London being significantly higher. The Centre for Homelessness Impact puts it down to London authorities having developed more mature and efficient strategies for managing cost, including via Capital Letters—a procurement vehicle owned by London authorities and established in 2018.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> London Councils, [Private rented sector supply in London](#), 2023.

<sup>28</sup> Centre for Homelessness Impact, [Temporary accommodation in England: is it value for money?](#), 2024.

<sup>29</sup> CHI, [TA in England: is it value for money?](#), 2024.



There is a role for strategic authorities too. And they should explore how they can, working alongside local authorities, do more to improve the quality of TA in the £400 million annual market of B&Bs. Strategic and local authorities should use their significant soft power to agree a Memorandum of Understanding with national hoteliers—principally Travelodge, Holiday Inn and Premier Inn, where the lions’ share of authorities’ spending on B&Bs is being diverted. Given TA is most acute in London, Manchester and Birmingham, this should be led by mayors Sadiq Khan, Andy Burnham and Richard Parker, with support from the Local Government Association and London Councils. As part of an MoU, the principles that might be negotiated with hoteliers could include, for example:

1. Removing the surcharge for Wi-Fi access and instead providing free Wi-Fi for households in TA.
2. Giving local authorities access to private spaces (e.g. commercial or function rooms) that exist in many hotels but are routinely empty. Authorities could use those spaces to support the households living in situ with a range of service needs.
3. A sub-market rate for each room—given the scale of local authority spending and given households may be in hotels ‘off peak’ and be there for a longer period of time, which increases hoteliers occupancy rates and therefore profit margins.
4. Establishing new arrangements to enable households in TA to access cooking facilities. Authorities and hotels should adopt a partnership approach, recognising that legitimate health and safety reasons prevent households in TA from using commercial kitchens in hotels.

## **THE DEMOGRAPHY OF HOMELESSNESS**

TA supports some of the most vulnerable, marginalised communities. According to the Government’s data, 38 per cent—more than one in every three households—are classified as vulnerable.<sup>30</sup> Counterintuitively, households that include pregnant mothers are not classified as vulnerable. Across England, the households that are vulnerable under the Government’s definition include: 12 per cent of households with physical ill-health, 10 per cent with mental health issues, 7 per cent victims of domestic abuse. Many of these households are likely to have more than one vulnerability. This is well documented elsewhere. In this report we have focused on the age of people in TA, given it is comparatively under-researched.

There are now 164,000 children in TA.<sup>31</sup> Our research reveals that some children are spending their entire childhood in TA. In Croydon, we find that one family with children has been in TA since 1998. They have spent over 9,500 days in TA. In Westminster another family has been in TA since 2001 and in Brent it’s 2003. Even in relatively affluent parts of London, such as Hillingdon, households have been in TA for up to 12 years.

<sup>30</sup> MHCLG, [Homelessness live tables](#), July-September 2024.

<sup>31</sup> MHCLG, [Homelessness live tables](#), July-September 2024.



**FIGURE VI:** What's the longest households have been in temporary accommodation?**LONGEST PEOPLE BEEN IN TA**

<b>AUTHORITY</b>	<b>THE EARLIEST DATE THAT SINGLE-PERSON HOUSEHOLDS HAVE BEEN IN TA</b>	<b>THE EARLIEST DATE THAT HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN HAVE BEEN IN TA</b>
Barking and Dagenham	26/01/2012	03/09/2011
Bexley	13/01/2014	23/10/2012
Brent	23/05/2000	23/05/2000
Bromley	16/12/2013	28/01/2013
Croydon	04/08/1987	11/05/1998
Ealing	05/02/2015	22/08/2011
Enfield	24/01/2014	31/01/2014
Greenwich	29/08/2016	25/07/2017
Hackney	06/04/2011	06/01/2011
Hammersmith and Fulham	20/10/2008	19/01/2009
Haringey	22/02/1983	15/12/2003
Havering	01/07/2023	08/11/2022
Hounslow	22/10/2018	14/12/2015
Islington	06/08/2016	02/05/2018
Kensington and Chelsea	19/07/2006	16/01/2006
Kingston Upon Thames	27/05/2019	20/01/2014
Lambeth	12/08/2005	29/03/2003
Lewisham	01/12/2012	01/12/2012
Merton	18/07/2019	06/12/2013
Newham	01/07/1989	13/10/2003
Redbridge	23/06/2003	12/04/2004
Richmond upon Thames	23/04/2020	10/05/2022
Southwark	18/09/2017	04/10/2016
Sutton	12/08/2013	04/04/2013
Tower Hamlets	01/11/2014	01/07/2011
Waltham Forest	01/12/2012	01/12/2012
Wandsworth	15/10/2015	18/02/2013
Westminster	19/05/2002	13/10/2003
Birmingham	29/12/2011	28/12/2007
Manchester	14/03/2017	09/10/2015

**SOURCE:** Freedom of Information requests, available on request.  
Hillingdon, Camden and Barnet did not respond to our request for information.

The median household in TA is a parent in their twenties, thirties or forties with one or two children. Anecdotally, parents in TA are female. Another common household in TA is a single male person, similarly in their twenties to forties. Behind these medians are young children at one end of the spectrum and vulnerable elderly people in their 90s at the other. In all cases of TA, but particularly in those cases, they are denied their dignity.

The rise of people in retirement being moved into TA is still an emergent issue, and the support needs of elderly residents are particularly acute. According to new Freedom of Information requests, we identified a 97-year-old from Brent that has been in TA for over three years—that's 1,269 days. In Kingston upon Thames, a 95-year-old is in TA, in Enfield a 91-year-old, and in Lambeth, Lewisham and Haringey, people in their 80s are in insecure accommodation. This Parliament is at risk of becoming the first in history to witness the first 100 year old in

TA—though we can't rule out that isn't already happening. Owing to how the Government published datasets, it's not possible to identify the eldest individuals in TA with consistency. As it stands, the Government records the 'main applicant' in TA—in other words only the age of the head of the household is counted. As a result, it is likely that the 2,000 households led by someone over the age of 75 in TA is an under-representation of the number of individuals of that age in TA.

Given that a fifth of people aged 65-plus rent their properties from authorities or housing associations, it is likely that an increase in older residents in TA will continue.<sup>32</sup> While this report is critical of shared facilities, that picture is more nuanced for elderly households, which will have different needs. For example, the HAPPI Framework suggests that shared facilities are good sites of socialisation for elderly residents in particular.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Campbell Tickell, *Housing an aging society*, 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Housing and Communities Agency, *HAPPI: Housing our Aging Population: Panel for Innovation*, 2009. The HCA was replaced by Homes England in 2018.







## SHARED CHALLENGES, DIFFERENT APPROACHES

There are no England-wide standards in statute on the quality of TA. This is problematic, especially since 68 per cent of people in TA report that they have inadequate access to basic facilities.<sup>34</sup> While social housing is overseen by the Regulator for Social Housing, TA is not regulated according to the same rules. In part because of the imprecision of legislation to protect households in TA, and in part because there aren't sufficient safeguards—there is a postcode lottery across England.

Not all places face the same challenges and authorities take 'place-specific' actions—in theory they can tailor their approaches to meet the needs of their residents. The London Borough of Islington, for example, has witnessed a 103 per cent increase in households seeking housing support because of domestic abuse in 12 months, Manchester serves some of the most disadvantaged communities according to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation, while Birmingham serves a high proportion of ethnic minorities.<sup>35</sup> The different contexts in which authorities operate mean that different approaches exist within and across these cities and beyond. In practice, too often it leads to radically different outcomes, with significant evidence of poor practices. As a result, there

are widespread concerns not only about the quality and suitability of TA, but how local authorities respond to these issues too.

Under the Homelessness Act (2002) England's local authorities are required to conduct a review of homelessness and publish a Homelessness Prevention Strategy every five years. Prior to adopting (or modifying) a homelessness strategy, authorities are required to “consult such public or local authorities, voluntary organisations or other persons as they consider appropriate”<sup>36</sup> These strategies are intended to underpin authorities' approaches to homelessness prevention. However—as the Shared Health Foundation told the Public Accounts Committee in their recent submission—many prevention strategies amount to little more than declaration to build more homes. And in some cases, owing to the lack of preventative measures, households are encouraged by authorities to wait until their eviction date before being provided with emergency support.<sup>37</sup> The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government acknowledges these weaknesses and also told the Public Accounts Committee that it will do more to consider and share best practice for preventing homelessness.

<sup>34</sup> Shelter, *Living in limbo*, 2023.

<sup>35</sup> London Borough of Islington, *Scrutiny Review: Scrutiny Review of Adult Social Care Accommodation – Witness Evidence*, 2024.

<sup>36</sup> Section 3 (8) Homelessness Act 2002.

<sup>37</sup> Public Accounts Committee, *Tackling Homelessness*, 2025.

While legislation requires authorities to put some measures in place to safeguard households in TA from immediate safety hazards, authorities and practitioners on the frontline are similarly concerned about quality as they struggle to respond to rising demand for accommodation.<sup>38</sup> The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman goes further still: it acknowledges that the shortage of accommodation is preventing authorities from fulfilling their statutory duty to provide suitable accommodation. It remains concerned that in some cases, authorities cannot evidence the steps they have taken to mitigate this.<sup>39</sup>

Taking the Standards and Five Basics campaign as a starting point, some authorities provide Wi-Fi in their TA and others do not. Most washing machines are provided free of charge in TA with shared facilities but some are leased by authorities and provided at a cost. Health practitioners report that this is having a detrimental impact on the development of children.<sup>40</sup> Many authorities also charge for storing the belongings of households in TA where they have a statutory duty, but the amount charged and the practices they employ differ—and in some cases households are getting into debt because of storage costs. Most concerning, authorities are denying households their dignity and unilaterally determining what items hold value by banning some items from being placed in storage. In one case an authority encouraged households to sell-off items beforehand.<sup>41</sup>

Underpinning these approaches is, in many cases, a lack of transparency. Most authorities do not have codified policies. Instead, they have processes. Where policies exist, their publication is ad hoc. Where processes are in place, they are operational and therefore have not been subjected to the same democratic scrutiny that policies receive as they go through policy-making processes. From semi-structured interviews with councillors responsible for strategic oversight over homelessness services, it is clear that they do not always have the capacity to scrutinise their services at the depth required. And while many of these standards are not statutory requirements, they are the basic necessities for protecting the dignity of people, with an outsized and negative impact.

There are some signs of collaboration, especially in London. Setting the Standard, a pan-London inspections service that inspects nightly-let TA in the private rental sector, is used by participating local authorities to ensure they meet the required standards. This is more codified than most authorities' approach to standards, with a formal route to escalate cases of poor-quality accommodation. But there is more work to be done to ensure that Setting the Standard is extended to other forms of TA and its remit is increased to set a higher bar for standards and to monitor those new standards.<sup>42</sup> In this chapter, we turn to a number of concerns shared by households and how authorities are—or are not—responding to them.

<sup>38</sup> CHI, *TA in England: is it value for money?*, 2024.

<sup>39</sup> Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, *unsuitable temporary accommodation: guide for practitioners*, 2023.

<sup>40</sup> For more information visit the CHAMPIONS Project by Professor Monica Lakhanpaul et al. Their website can be found here: [www.championsproject.co.uk](http://www.championsproject.co.uk)

<sup>41</sup> Unpublished documents shared with Citizens UK.

<sup>42</sup> Extending Setting the Standard has been endorsed by the London Assembly's Housing Committee and the London Housing Panel. For more information visit London Assembly, *London's temporary accommodation emergency*, 2024; London Housing Panel, *statement on temporary accommodation*, 2025.



## **BROADBAND CONNECTIVITY**

Most authorities do not have a position on—or policy for—ensuring that households in TA have access to Wi-Fi. Despite significant evidence about the detrimental impact lack of Wi-Fi access has, particularly on schoolchildren and their education, there is no statutory requirement to do so.<sup>43</sup> While the Government introduced a Universal Service Obligation in March 2020 to provide households with a statutory right to request decent broadband, households in TA have no legal right to access the internet.<sup>44</sup> Few authorities have taken action to ensure that the accommodation they procure has access to Wi-Fi.

There is a widespread perception that where authorities place households in hotels, hoteliers are responsible for providing Wi-Fi free of charge. And while anecdotally Wi-Fi is provided in most hotels, few authorities either enquire or encourage hoteliers to provide Wi-Fi where it does not exist. It has been reported that thousands of households in TA are living in hotel chains such as Travelodge, Premier Inn and Holiday Inn, with the London Borough of Greenwich placing more than 700 households in the ‘Big Three’ in 2023-24 at a cost of £8.8 million. Over the same period, the London Borough of Ealing placed 407 households in Travelodge hotels and Barnet placed another 300.<sup>45</sup> Travelodge does not provide Wi-Fi, and at least two London authorities—Camden and Kensington and Chelsea—pay an additional cost so that households in TA can access it.<sup>46</sup> It is not entirely clear if every Travelodge charges for Wi-Fi, given it operates principally on a franchise model, meaning individual franchises operate under the Travelodge brand with varying levels of discretion. For smaller hotels in which authorities across London, Manchester and

Birmingham are placing households, it is less certain that Wi-Fi is provided, is free of charge or is of a quality expected under the UK-wide Universal Service Obligation.

When authorities place households in the private rented sector, the default assumption is that households are responsible for procuring their own internet provision. Stock-holding authorities have more agency to supply Wi-Fi in their own properties, but even then it rarely happens. The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham and Kingston upon Thames both provide Wi-Fi free of charge in their own stock. The London Borough of Islington is also working with the private sector to install fibre broadband in the 36,000 properties it owns. It has currently done so at 26,000 properties—equivalent to 72 per cent of its stock. Approximately half of the households Islington placed in TA are placed in its own stock. Islington is also exploring how it can install Wi-Fi in households in TA in the private rented sector. Manchester City Council has gone one step further, providing Wi-Fi in some of its sites as well as sites where it has a long-term lease but doesn’t own them. It also signposts households to libraries with free Wi-Fi and IT equipment. Westminster City Council are trialing a pilot called Connected London Wi-Fi to enable residents and visitors to access Wi-Fi from public spaces and private businesses where they already offer it, which households in TA will be able to sign-up to.<sup>47</sup>

Irrespective of the taxonomy of accommodation—B&B, hostel, private rented sector—Greenwich has joined a Good Things Foundation scheme which enables them to support low-income households with free pre-paid mobile sim cards. Households can collect sim cards from libraries across Greenwich seven days a week,

<sup>43</sup> See footnote 18 and 23.

<sup>44</sup> A Universal Service Obligation allows eligible addresses to request a ‘decent’ broadband connection. Ofcom defines this as a connection that can deliver a download speed of at least 10Mb.

<sup>45</sup> Prospect Magazine, [Temporary accommodation nation](#), 2024.

<sup>46</sup> Data supplied under the Freedom of Information Act. Available on request.

<sup>47</sup> BBC, [Free Wi-Fi trial aims to make connections easier](#), 2025.



though eligibility criteria apply (individuals need to be minimum 18-years-old and have proof of their income status). Creating Ground, a not-for-profit that works with women from migrant backgrounds across Greenwich and campaigns for free Wi-Fi, has welcomed the change but is concerned that it does not go far enough. In particular, Creating Ground reports that the individuals it supports have had to change their phone numbers in order to access the Wi-Fi and it has questioned whether there is scope for further integration with Greenwich's services, so that households can collect sim cards when, for example, they collect the keys to their properties.

COVID-19 placed a spotlight on the importance of good-quality, accessible Wi-Fi, especially for school-aged children who suddenly found themselves expected to study at home. Not all home environments double-up as suitable study spaces and the Doorstep Homeless Families Project

ran a high-profile campaign in 2020 with schoolchildren in Camden calling for Wi-Fi. Despite Camden's Growing up in Camden survey in 2021 finding that only 55 per cent of young people in TA had internet access at home, Camden has made insufficient progress.<sup>48</sup> With funding from BBC's Children in Need, Doorstep stepped in during COVID-19 and provided some families with free Wi-Fi for six months, but that was only a short-term fix. The impact of 'disconnectivity' affects the social life and educational attainment of school-aged children. One young person, Babi, lived in TA during COVID-19 and had to repeat a year of college, which she puts down to the lack of internet. She now works full-time and lets her younger sister use her mobile phone to access the internet, but her shifts usually finish once her sister has gone to sleep.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> London Borough of Camden, [Full Council](#), 17 July 2023.

<sup>49</sup> BBC, [Camden students in hostels successfully ask council for Wi-Fi](#), 21 July 2023.





## SHARED FACILITIES

Local authorities routinely place households in TA where some facilities are shared, including showers, toilets, washing machines, refrigerators and cookers. It is not lawful for authorities to place households in privately-owned B&Bs for more than six weeks, but as Citizens UK has previously reported, the number of children living in hotels longer than the six-week legal limit has skyrocketed by 663 per cent over a three-year period.<sup>50</sup> B&Bs owned by the public sector are not required to meet the six-week limit. And there is anecdotal evidence that authorities are moving people prematurely, prior to the six-week limit, to similar forms of accommodation of the same quality but in public ownership – which means the six week limit does not apply. This has been described as a “legal loophole”<sup>51</sup>

Shared facilities exist across multiple settings. There are over 17,620 households living in hotels in England—with 35 per cent of them in London—and another 6,740 households are living in hostels.<sup>52</sup> Many of the hotels are privately-owned, while some hostels, which provide additional support, are owned, leased or run by authorities. In a hotel a household will have a private toilet and, if they are fortunate, access to a microwave. They will not however have access to laundry facilities and will be required to

use a laundrette privately. In a hostel a household may share a toilet with five to seven people, have access to a communal kitchen and use on-site laundry facilities free of charge or at a cost. Some authorities also enforce prescriptive measures, such as by placing restrictions on when visitors can visit. This has reportedly made it difficult for separated parents to see their children. Authorities recognise that these arrangements are not suitable long-term living arrangements, though they have not always moved households into more suitable accommodation as early as they should have. And as more people are being pushed into shorter-term forms of accommodation, shared facilities are likely to be more common.

Similar challenges are not as pronounced when households are placed in self-contained accommodation, such as in the private rental sector. Though self-contained properties may be unfurnished, authorities are able to provide discretionary support, including brand new or second-hand white goods. Greenwich has a partnership with Emmaus to provide goods, for example. In council-owned housing stock, authorities have more agency to improve the living conditions of households, which is why acquiring new stock through property acquisitions is a priority for some authorities, such as Islington.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Citizens UK, [600 per cent increase in children stuck in hotels beyond legal limit, new analysis reveals ahead of Parliament Square housing action](#), 2024.

<sup>51</sup> Local Government Lawyer, [Councils using legal loophole to house families in B&B accommodation beyond legal limit](#): charity, 2019.

<sup>52</sup> MHCLG, [Homelessness live tables](#), July-September 2024.

<sup>53</sup> For more information visit [Islington's webpage](#).

## STORING AND COOKING FOODSTUFFS

For reasons that will be clear to readers, such as safeguarding, fire safety or hygiene, hotels are not able to place cookers or refrigerators in visitors’ rooms. Even when hotels have mini-fridges in their rooms, they are not large enough if they require continued use. When we spoke to one household from Waltham Forest that was placed in a hotel in Newham, as part of their Housing Needs Assessment, the London Borough of Waltham Forest determined that the household required cooking facilities because of their health needs. But the authority still placed them in accommodation and did not provide access to cooking facilities.<sup>54</sup> When they wrote to the hotel outlining as much, the hotelier was unable to find a solution.

If hotels do not provide access to facilities to cook, they are also unlikely to offer access to facilities such as appropriately sized refrigerators. In hostels there are shared kitchens but in some cases those kitchens are shunned altogether, with residents instead preferring to place mini-fridges in their rooms or purchase fast food at a higher cost and often less healthy. Shared refrigerators are a cause for concern for households with severe allergies who fear food contamination, have strict dietary requirements, or need to keep medicines refrigerated. The need for privacy is especially the case where the identification of medicines might lead to stigmatisation or discrimination, as is the concern for people living with HIV in TA.<sup>55</sup>

Some authorities provide households with cash payments, vouchers or regular meals, which mitigates some of those concerns shared by people with lived experience. However, it’s a postcode lottery, making it extraordinarily difficult for households to navigate their entitlements. When Barking and Dagenham make a hotel booking, they pay for breakfast too. Havering, Newham and Kensington and Chelsea also provide breakfast. In Bexley, no such support is provided. In Enfield, referrals are made but the authority doesn’t support households directly. Greenwich used the Household Support Fund to provide £10 per person per week, but that came to an end in March 2025. Payment was made by a voucher code sent to an applicant’s smartphone, which could then be redeemed at the Post Office, raising a further question about digital inclusion. In Islington, households are provided with breakfast and dinner. If that isn’t possible, Islington provides £105 per adult and £50 per child per week, which is generous when compared across London. Westminster provides up to four meals per day. Manchester City Council provides vouchers that households can use to collect food parcels from a food bank. It’s not entirely clear what households will do if that food requires cooking, but Manchester told us that “some hotels will heat up food for residents upon request”, which isn’t reassuring. Other authorities, such as Enfield, ‘gift’ kitchen appliances such as cookers to the applicants if they do not have their own in storage.

**FIGURE VIII:** Selected examples of support authorities provide to households with limited access to cooking facilities



Barking and Dagenham	Breakfast – which is included in booking.
Bexley	Food is ‘usually not provided’.
Greenwich	£10 per person, per week. This is provided as a voucher code which can be redeemed at the Post Office.
Islington	Breakfast and dinner is provided. If that’s not possible, then £105 per adult per week and £50 per child per week is provided.
Kensington and Chelsea	Breakfast only.
Waltham Forest	Provides information on the support available to households beyond the authority.
Westminster	In some cases, up to four meals per day. In other cases, vouchers toward food costs.

**SOURCE** Source: Freedom of Information requests, available on request.

<sup>54</sup> Citizens UK, [600 per cent increase in children stuck in hotels beyond legal limit, new analysis reveals ahead of Parliament Square housing action](#), 2024.

<sup>55</sup> Local Government Lawyer, [Councils using legal loophole to house families in B&B accommodation beyond legal limit: charity](#), 2019.



## **CLEANING AND DRYING CLOTHING**

Washing and drying machines are another example where authorities' approaches diverge. In many authorities households are able to use washing machines and they are either free of charge or are covered by service charges. In other cases, such as Barking and Dagenham, which leases their washing machines, there is a charge. Newham also leases their washing machines, as does Manchester.

The charge is often nominal and, in the case of Barking and Dagenham, intended to ensure that washing facilities are cost neutral to the authority, with the fee covering leasing, maintenance and insurance costs. Given the number of households a washing machine will service in a hostel, washing machines are usually industrial in scale and therefore more expensive than household appliances. Barking and Dagenham uses a token-based machine, charging £1 per wash and £1 per dry. In Manchester some accommodation levies a £1 charge for using washing machines. Newham charges the highest rate, at £2.40 per wash and £1.90 per dry. Croydon charges households to use communal washing machines, but did not tell us how much they charged. And in Ealing residents can purchase credits or pay at the machine directly, but the authority cannot be definitive about which sites and how much.<sup>56</sup>

While authorities are entitled to levy a reasonable charge to recoup the cost of the service provided, the return is nominal and the implications of doing so are problematic, with reports of poorer hygiene as a result, and a higher cost burden on public services in the longer-term. According to polling commissioned by detergent manufacturer Ariel, the average household washes their clothing four times per week, equivalent to 208 washes annually. And on that basis, households in TA in Newham—where the cost is the highest—could spend up to £900 per year washing and drying their clothing.<sup>57</sup> Professor Monica Lakhanpaul of the Institute of Child Health at the University College London told us that she'd interviewed families that were discouraging their children from certain forms of play or messy foods because they couldn't afford the cost of washing their clothing. She also heard of instances where families were told they were only allowed to use washing machines a certain number of days. Since a small number of authorities forbid households from placing clothing in storage—as we will expand on shortly—it is not implausible that some households are throwing out clothing before they move into TA and therefore have fewer items of clothing, meaning that washing more regularly might be necessary.

<sup>56</sup> Data supplied under the Freedom of Information Act. Available on request.

<sup>57</sup> Independent, *How much washing does the average UK adult do?*, 2021.

The vast majority of authorities, however, do not charge separately for washing or drying clothing. This further suggests that charging is not a financial necessity for authorities. What is more concerning is that authorities do not see this as their responsibility—a recurring theme. As a result, many households visit the laundrette. One woman in TA told us that visiting the laundrette costs her on average £10 per visit.

In interviews with families in TA shared with Citizens UK, one participant recounted how they weren't allowed to put clothes on the radiators because it would make them rusty.<sup>58</sup> They instead put their damp clothing on an airer in the bedroom. Another raised concerns about upsetting their neighbours because the washing machine wasn't available until the evening. Washing clothing was “complicated at times because you don't want to get a complaint and get kicked out”. Another participant said they were allocated 8pm until midnight once a week to use their laundry facilities, which wasn't enough for households with school-aged children, who wanted to wash their uniforms more regularly. Being allocated slots on certain days to do laundry was seen as a recipe for interpersonal conflict, with reports of queuing to use the washing machines and one participant reporting that they were confronted by someone else in their hostel for using the washing machine when it was available but not their slot. For one person, the solution was getting up to do the washing at five in the morning before other households woke up.

Some gave up altogether, taking their clothing to friends or family. Others recounted the misery of washing clothing in a bucket and of “constantly having wet clothes somewhere”. Washing machines in constant use also failed to clean clothing properly: “you were giving them a nice smell and you weren't stinking”, but clothes weren't coming out clean. One participant was concerned by the prospect of having to hang their clothing in their small room, citing breathing issues and coughing as symptoms which they put down to mould.<sup>59</sup>

It is worth recounting these cases in full because a simple task, taken for granted by millions of Brits, is problematic for thousands of households living in accommodation with shared facilities. And what is clear is that the barriers—often small, but cumulative in effect—the cost of washing clothing, the number of washing machines available, the uncoded nature governing their use and the culture in TA all preclude households from practically washing their clothing when they need to do so.

The Government should enshrine a Right to Wash in the Homelessness Code of Guidance for local authorities, to protect the dignity of the residents they serve. And it should ban outright the practice of charging households to use laundry facilities. It is true that these costs are lower than for-profit laundrettes on high streets, but the charges imposed by authorities are nominal and therefore can be absorbed within their existing General Fund.

<sup>58</sup> We are extremely grateful to Professor Lakhanpaul et al for sharing snippets of their transcripts with families in temporary accommodation. For more information visit the CHAMPIONS Project. Their website can be found here: [www.championsproject.co.uk](http://www.championsproject.co.uk)

<sup>59</sup> Lakhanpaul et al, the CHAMPIONS Project. Their website can be found here: [www.championsproject.co.uk](http://www.championsproject.co.uk)

## **STORAGE WARS**

Under the Housing Act authorities are also required to store applicants' belongings providing there is a danger that personal property will be damaged or lost because the applicant is unable to protect it or no other suitable arrangements have been, or are being, made.<sup>60</sup> Yet there is a variation in how legislation is interpreted by authorities.

The London Borough of Greenwich, for example, is prescriptive. It does not allow applicants to store clothes, linen, garden furniture, gym equipment or "unusual items" in storage. Applicants in Islington must similarly make alternative arrangements for clothes, kitchen equipment, toys and bedding. Staff at Islington are required to explore options with applicants including "selling or disposing of their furniture". It is difficult to identify a plausible reason why those authorities take a view on which items households are entitled to protect. They are outliers in that respect, as others are less prescriptive.

Authorities are entitled to levy reasonable charges for storage to minimise the cost of the service provided. Many authorities charge or provide subsidies, but other authorities do not charge and others use third-party providers. In practice, the cost of storage can make it more difficult for households to move onto more secure accommodation. In the most egregious cases there are examples of authorities inadvertently pushing households living in TA into significant and unsustainable debt. It is not straightforward to determine how much homeless households are paying to keep their belongings safe, but in Barnet one household currently in TA has accrued £8,647 in debt owing to storage costs. That particular household has a payment plan in place to pay off the debt. In Bexley, another household has been required to pay £7,758, in Wandsworth that figure is £5,782 and in Redbridge the figure is £5,656.<sup>61</sup> Even the household



<sup>60</sup> Part VII, Housing Act 1996.

<sup>61</sup> Data supplied under the Freedom of Information Act. Available on request.

that owes Enfield £624 in storage fees—a comparatively smaller figure—poses serious questions about whether storage policies adopted by authorities make it more difficult for households in TA to stabilise their finances. That’s why in some cases every household in receipt of support to protect their belongings is on a payment plan. Wandsworth told us that “usually clients who require assistance with storage do not have means to source this for themselves, being able to set up a repayment plan is effective for clients on a low income or in receipt of benefits. In effect, everyone is placed on a payment plan.” What is revealing about that is two-fold: first, Wandsworth charges in the knowledge that its residents cannot afford the cost. And second, despite that acknowledgement, Wandsworth charges the highest amount for storage in London. Council tax in Wandsworth for a Band D property was £961 for the year until March 2025, equivalent to £80 per month. Meanwhile, storage costs are up to £240 per month.<sup>62</sup> What is most concerning about this is that, as Professor Brickell at King’s College London reported, authorities are deprioritising households on their social housing waiting lists because of debt that they have accrued.<sup>63</sup>

Most authorities take a similar approach. Islington charges households £130 before belongings can be taken into storage. Thereafter a £40 charge is required if households wish to access their belongings. For residents of Waltham Forest, it’s free on their first visit, but they incur a charge after that. Sutton charges a total of £224 for storing items, including a £104 non-refundable deposit. The remaining £120 can be paid in 10 weekly instalments of £10. In Barnet, households are charged £50 toward the cost of removing their belongings and £15 per storage container per month. Households will need to pay £25 plus VAT to access their belongings. Brent provides up to £300 off the cost of storage—though given the rate is uprated according to the number of bedrooms in a household, overcrowded households are inadvertently shortchanged. In Enfield, households are subject to a £30 charge each time they wish to access their belongings and their final balance needs to be paid within two weeks of leaving TA. Kensington & Chelsea, didn’t charge until February 2025 but now charges a flat £15 per week.

Given the legislation is open to interpretation, some authorities are quite explicit about their intention to support households with their belongings for the shortest possible period to discharge their duty. Other authorities allow households to retain their items in storage throughout their time in TA, which can be a significant period of time. 41 households placed in TA by Enfield currently have their items in storage and the longest items have been in storage since 2002. Camden and Barnet have been storing items since the 2000s, while Hackney has been storing items for 14 years, Lewisham for ten years and Waltham Forest for eight years.<sup>64</sup>

Local authorities are in an unenviable position, but the number of households that they are supporting with their belongings is comparatively small, and authorities can absorb the costs in their budget. There are, of course, examples of good practice, but it is not consistent. Where Kingston upon Thames has a statutory duty, it will dispose of bulky items for free if households do not wish to put it in storage. Following a needs assessment, Kingston will subsidise the cost of storing belongings or act as a guarantor. And even when it determines that it owes no duty, the authority will cover transport or disposal costs on a case-by-case basis. Sutton will similarly transport items to storage or back to an owner of the belongings for free, which is a service it estimates may exceed £1,000.

Determining which items households can place in storage, and charging them for it, are not the only concerns. Authorities have agreed contractual arrangements with storage facilities that are outside of their authority and even outside of London. Camden stores items with Crown Promotions and Removals in Rainham, bordering Essex, in the London Borough of Havering. Curiously, Camden is not the only London authority to use Crown, despite it charging £40 each time someone wants to access their belongings. Other storage providers charge lower rates. Hackney uses storage facilities 45 miles away in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire. Lewisham uses facilities in its own borough, but also in Havering and Harlow. Kingston uses a site in Havering, which is over one hour on public transport. Richmond and Wandsworth (which share services) both use East London. Greenwich has a council-run site in-borough,

<sup>62</sup> London Borough of Wandsworth, ‘Council tax bands and charges for 2025-26’.

<sup>63</sup> Spratt, Vicky, ‘4,000 homeless families barred from social housing... because they’re in debt’, 2024.

<sup>64</sup> Data supplied under the Freedom of Information Act. Available on request.

London Borough of Lewisham, [Temporary accommodation protection of belongings policy](#), 2024.

in Thamesmead, but also uses an external provider in Essex. Lambeth uses storage facilities in Newham, while Croydon leases its council-owned garages in-borough for storage.

While authorities may charge for services, which are often set at a level intended to recoup their costs, a practice that is supported by the Government's Homelessness Code of Guidance, in many cases the process is contracted out and it is a private employer that is making profit from the belongings of homeless families. And worse still, authorities that do not arrange storage simply do not consider it part of their toolkit to support households in distress, which is concerning. The cost of storage providers is worth further consideration, but authorities should also be asking the question how accessible their residents' items are in storage once they are there.

In one sense distance is immaterial, since some providers collect and return belongings at the beginning and end of a period in TA. In other cases, households are allowed to visit and are supplied with a key or required to book an appointment, but on top of the cost owed to the provider there are transport costs associated with that. And in many cases households are not entitled to put more belongings into storage once an inventory has been agreed. Storage providers often don't allow items to be removed (or added) because of their contents insurance.



I spoke with two children and what I found was incredibly shocking: they were only 10 and 12 years old but they had been moved around at least six different accommodations in their lives.

**BRENDA, FROM A CITIZENS UK  
MEMBER INSTITUTION IN BIRMINGHAM**



## TRANSPARENCY

There is an overwhelming consensus that households in TA are being failed. The reasons for that are manifold, as set out in this report, but time and again transparency is a cause of common concern. On the one hand, we spoke to those who cited individual cases of staff by name and in glowing terms, going above and beyond to support them. Households in TA often describe a 'broken system' being propped up by individual feats of heroism. On the other hand, people experiencing TA we interviewed for this project were critical of what they perceive to be a lack of transparency in authorities. Some recalled David versus Goliath scenarios, where they were alone trying to navigate byzantine processes while authorities 'hid' behind complexity and technical language rather than worked constructively to find a solution.

In cases where households felt they had been failed, there is limited recourse to hold authorities to account. Concerns of a culture of indifference to their needs and the difficulty of getting a response to an e-mail or a phone call were common. And these are likely to be more pronounced among minoritised communities, given emerging evidence of institutional racism according to Heriot-Watt University.<sup>65</sup> This is compounded further by the fact that households can be expected to move by authorities with almost no notice. That said, public satisfaction and trust in public services at near-record lows suggests that while negative experiences of homelessness services are common, those experiences are also not specific to homelessness services and instead reflect public services more widely.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Fitzpatrick, S. Watts, B. and McIntyre, J., *Taking a race and ethnicity lens to conceptualisations of homelessness in England*. Heriot-Watt University, 2024.

<sup>66</sup> Ipsos, *Understanding society: putting the place in public services*, 2024.

What is remarkable is how uncodified authorities' approaches are to TA. There is significant heterogeneity. As such the absence of a set standard means that applicants are unclear about their rights. Many authorities we spoke to did not have policies in place but processes. This is an important distinction. Policies established by authorities are often developed in partnership with internal and external stakeholders, from elected councillors to the community and voluntary sectors. They have democratic legitimacy. And they are transparent, scrutinised and consultative. When they are brought to Full Council to be ratified, the public are entitled to be present, ask comments or challenge the decision of councillors. Processes are, by design, less transparent. They are internal-facing, operational approaches to service delivery. They are designed by officials with expertise and with good intentions, but often not in consultation with the public and on the basis of incomplete information. The opaqueness of how authorities treat TA is not cost-free. 'Bureaucratic logics' create additional costs of being homeless. The worst forms of practice by authorities were processes. And this is keenly felt. In polling by Shelter, 43 percent felt ignored and found it difficult to get in touch with their provider.<sup>67</sup> The experiences of minoritised communities in TA was not an explicit focus of this research, but existing research has demonstrated that the complexity of the system disadvantages those with English as an additional language or those unfamiliar with public services in the UK.<sup>68</sup>

There are some examples of transparency. Westminster City Council, for example, now publishes on its website estimates of how long families should expect to wait for a 4-bedroom house. The answer? 29 years.<sup>69</sup> The response will not be one households are happy to receive, but it at least enables them to plan and, in some cases, make different decisions. Islington is another good case study. It has appointed tenants and leaseholders to its Housing and Communities Scrutiny Committee. It has commissioned researchers to conduct focus groups to better understand their services and it is recruiting people to work in its

housing department with lived experience of homelessness. More often than not, introducing the voices of people with experience of TA means involving the voluntary and community sectors. For example, Justlife has designed Temporary Accommodation Action Groups which exist in a number of London authorities and are designed to provide a structured forum for dialogue between authorities and service users. The root cause is two-fold: culture and data.

There are failures in information-sharing and transparency at every level. One London authority told us that young people with special educational needs and in receipt of a Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) are entitled to priority support for TA. However, the employees responsible for determining each EHCP do not inform their colleagues responsible for allocating accommodation. Local authorities need to design systems which facilitate institutional data-sharing (not to mention procuring systems with interoperability, since data systems in social care are not always able to 'speak' to systems in TA).

Improving transparency also requires publishing data in an accessible and public format, enabling the public to hold authorities to account for their performance. Specifically, the Local Authority Data Explorer (LADE) should be updated to include measures on performance on TA, not least because it's one of the most expensive services authorities provide.

<sup>67</sup> Shelter, *Living in limbo*, 2023.

<sup>68</sup> Fitzpatrick, S. et al. *Taking a race and ethnicity lens*, 2024.

<sup>69</sup> Westminster City Council, *How to apply for social housing*

## **CONCLUSION**

The evidence presented in this report provides granular insight into both homeless people's and local authority officers' experience of TA and identifies the actions authorities can take forward. There are pockets of good practice across authorities, but there are also egregious examples where authorities put their residents in even more difficulties, including indebtedness. This prevents households in TA from moving into more secure, permanent accommodation.

Central government has understandably placed high importance on improving the quality of social housing—through the creation of the Building Safety Regulator and the introduction of Awaab's Law, for example—but households in TA are being left behind. Thousands are being denied dignity in substandard accommodation, compounded by substandard services.

The Government needs to work in collaboration with strategic and local authorities as well as the residents they serve to ensure that the standards in TA provide households with a dignity that they are hitherto denied. For their part, authorities have agency. They do not need to wait for the Government to legislate or update the Homelessness Code of Guidance before undertaking a forensic review of their services. Above all, to improve TA every layer of government must take action.

# **RECOMMENDATIONS**

## **STANDARDS:**

### **RECOMMENDATION**

### **IMPACT**

### **MECHANISM**

**1.**

The Government should strengthen the standards regime for households in temporary accommodation. It should:

- Establish a Right to Wash, encouraging local authorities to take all steps practicable to support households to wash and dry their clothing.
- Discourage authorities from working with third-party storage providers that are outside of their boundaries, or the boundaries of their neighbours.
- Discourage authorities from working with third-party storage providers that charge to access items in storage.

Discourage authorities from determining what items are eligible for storage, which is not supported by legislation.

Gives households in temporary accommodation more dignity over their lives, as well as reducing the costs of washing and giving individuals more access to their belongings and more ownership over what they do with them.

This should be enshrined via the Code of Homelessness Guidance.

**2.**

Local authorities should stop charging households in temporary accommodation to use laundry facilities.

Removes the disincentives for households—particularly with young children—to avoid washing clothing. It will have a nominal impact on authorities' finances.

Update the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2003. Given the egregious consequences of charging for washing clothing, it would be insufficient to include this in the Code of Homelessness Guidance.

**RECOMMENDATION****3.**

The Local Government Association, in partnership with local authorities and the third sector, should publish new guidance on how authorities should support households that are homeless to protect their belongings.

**IMPACT**

While households will still be expected to cover some storage costs with a provider, they will likely secure better value for money if authorities are more proactive, thereby reducing the financial strain on them.

**MECHANISM**

Guidance outlining how authorities should interpret their statutory duty to protect property under Part 7, Section 211 of the Housing Act 1996.

**4.**

Strategic and local authorities should use their purchasing power to secure better terms and conditions for the residents they place in for-profit hotel temporary accommodation.

As part of a Memorandum of Understanding, the principles that might be negotiated could include access to free Wi-Fi, providing authorities with access to private room telephones, households' access to microwave and cooking facilities, discounted rates, and how authorities and hotels can work in partnership to support households' access to cooking facilities.

This should be done through a Memorandum of Understanding with large-scale hoteliers and strategic authorities. It should begin in London, Greater Manchester and the West Midlands. Local authorities do not operate at the scale required to strike these deals.

**DATA COLLECTION AND SHARING:**

**RECOMMENDATION**

**IMPACT**

**MECHANISM**

**5.** The Government should collect and publish more information, including the age of each individual in temporary accommodation and where out-of-area placements are sent by authority.

Better informed local authorities will have a complete picture of who is being sent where. A better understanding of that will enable them to take more evidence-based action.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should collect and publish this information as part of their homelessness live tables series.

**6.** GP surgeries and schools should be alerted by local authorities when their patients and pupils are placed in temporary accommodation.

Fosters increased collaboration between local authorities and their support services and makes sure those in TA don't become forgotten, and instead continue to receive the support they are entitled.

A formal national notification system should be enshrined in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

**7.** The NHS should record when it engages with people in temporary accommodation.

Recording this information will better help practitioners and policy-makers to understand the health implications of living in temporary accommodation, and to respond to them.

The Department for Health and Social Care should request that the NHS 'code' when a household in temporary accommodation is engaging with health services, with guidance on how to collect this information sensitively.



**PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM:****RECOMMENDATION****8.**

A new nationwide protocol should be established to govern when households are placed in accommodation outside of their area.

**IMPACT**

A national protocol will help prevent price inflation, enable authorities to ensure particular neighbourhoods are not particularly impacted, enhance collaboration between authorities and improve consistency.

**MECHANISM**

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should co-design a National Out Of Area Protocol.

**9.**

Guidance should be introduced for schools and NHS primary care so that they can tailor their services to suit the needs of households in temporary accommodation.

In circumstances where schools and GP surgeries are notified, it is not clear how they should respond. Guidance will encourage schools and GP surgeries to provide a more consistent package of support to households in temporary accommodation, including through referrals, data, and information-sharing.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care should, in collaboration with these organisations, publish non-statutory guidance.

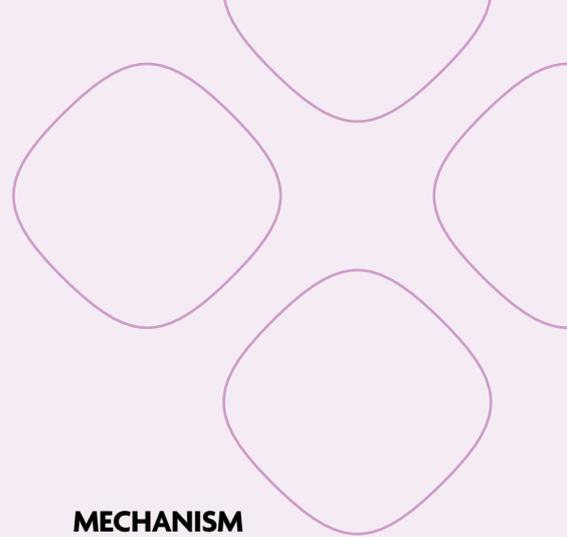
**10.**

Transport for London should pilot discounted travel for adults in temporary accommodation outside of their area.

It will help people in employment and in temporary accommodation stay in their jobs. It will enable parents to continue to take their children to school, and reduce the financial distress on them.

Subject to a viability and impact assessment, the Greater London Authority and Transport for London should design and pilot a new discounted travel scheme for adults placed in temporary accommodation outside of their local area. The Government should consider how this can be rolled out nationally.

**ACCOUNTABILITY:**



**RECOMMENDATION**

**IMPACT**

**MECHANISM**

**11.** The Government should publish new metrics of local authority performance on temporary accommodation.

It will enable the Government and the public to hold authorities to account, and better equip policy-makers to identify outliers.

This should be done through the Local Authority Data Explorer. And it should include: the number of placements by authorities, the length of placements, the distance and location households are placed, the age of individuals in those households and the unit cost per household per week.

**12.** The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should set a target to reduce the number of children in temporary accommodation and the length of placements.

It provides a mission-driven focus for the Government, making sure housebuilding meets housing need.

This should be included in the Government's forthcoming homelessness strategy.

**13.** Local authorities should participate in a review of their temporary accommodation services.

This inward accountability provides a more supportive environment to share knowledge and learn from best practice.

The Local Government Association holds Corporate Peer Challenges on a range of areas, but this does not include temporary accommodation, despite it being one of the largest financial challenges facing the sector. A new Corporate Peer Challenge for TA should be introduced and absorbed within the LGA's existing peer-review programme.

**14.** The Government should explore what tools are at its disposal to hold local authorities to account where they fail to meet their statutory responsibility to accommodate households with children in hotels for no longer than six weeks.

The sanctions for authorities that breach their statutory duties are weak. Strengthening those sanctions will incentivise authorities to identify more suitable arrangements for households.

The Government should review what mechanisms are available. This should include giving the Housing Ombudsman and Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman more power to take action against authorities, including issuing higher financial penalties.

## **ANNEX I: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

We adopted a mixed-methods approach to this report, drawing on quantitative and qualitative methodologies. These included:

- Four Freedom of Information requests to London's 32 authorities, as well as Manchester and Birmingham, comprising 19 questions for each authority. We did not include the City of London.
- Content analysis of 11 local authorities' policies and processes - primarily in relation to storage management.
- Data analysis of homelessness live tables held by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.
- A dozen semi-structured interviews with academics, homeless charities, local authorities and people with experience of TA.
- Three roundtables, bringing together over 30 politicians, policy professionals, people with lived experience of TA, and health, school and religious leaders. We also participated in two workshops with Trust for London's 'Better TA' initiative.



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