



# Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee

## Oral evidence: Children in Temporary Accommodation, HC 338

Tuesday 5 November 2024

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### [Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Florence Eshalomi (Chair); Lewis Cocking; Chris Curtis; Mr Lee Dillon; Naushabah Khan; Mr Gagan Mohindra; Joe Powell; Sarah Smith.

Questions 1 - 47

### Witnesses

[I](#): Francesca Albanese, Executive Director of Policy and Social Change, Crisis; Emma Haddad, Chief Executive Officer, St Mungo's; Dr Laura Neilson, Chief Executive Officer, Shared Health Foundation; and Rebecca Walker, Director, CARIS Families.

[II](#): Councillor Hannah Dalton, Housing Spokesperson, District Councils Network; Councillor Grace Williams, Housing Spokesperson, London Councils; Hannah Courtney-Adamson, Head of Strategic Housing (People), Rochdale Borough Council; and Chris Hancock, Head of Housing, Hastings Borough Council.

### Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Francesca Albanese, Emma Haddad, Dr Laura Neilson and Rebecca Walker.

Q1 **Chair:** Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the first public evidence session of the new Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee. I am Florence Eshalomi. I am the Chair of this Committee. We are discussing a very important issue this morning, looking at children in temporary accommodation and trying to get a better understanding of the impact this is having on children and families and what pressures our local authorities are facing.

We have two excellent panels before us. We have the first panel now and we will have the second panel at 10.45. I will start by asking our guests



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to introduce themselves, please.

**Emma Haddad:** Good morning, everybody, and thank you very much for inviting me. Emma Haddad. I am the Chief Executive of St Mungo's.

**Dr Neilson:** I am Laura Neilson. I am a doctor and I lead the Shared Health Foundation.

**Francesca Albanese:** I am Francesca Albanese. I am the Director of Policy and Social Change at Crisis.

**Rebecca Walker:** I am Rebecca Walker. I am the Director of CARIS Families, which works with families in hostels in London boroughs.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you very much. I am sure you have all seen some of the figures on this. It is estimated that over 150,000 children are currently living in temporary accommodation in England. What do you think has caused this massive increase?

**Emma Haddad:** A caveat before I start that we do not support children and families in our service in St Mungo's, but I can talk more broadly because our clients are impacted by temporary accommodation just as much.

We are seeing several things. There has been quite a stark difference in the last couple of years in the number of clients approaching us who are still in employment, yet with the cost of living and the increases in rent they have not been able to keep a roof over their heads. They have lost their tenancy, lost their house and approached the council or found other temporary accommodation solutions. They have sometimes given up their homes deliberately to sleep in their cars closer to work because they cannot afford to commute.

At the same time, we have the usual homelessness with people either rough sleeping or in temporary accommodation as the endpoint. Pretty much every client we see has been through some kind of pathway, usually interacting with the public services system. They have been through the criminal justice system or experienced domestic abuse or have been in the care system as a care leaver, the immigration system, the benefit system. They have always interacted with one or more or all of those and all of that has impacted to get them to the endpoint of losing their homes, hence a massive increase in people finding themselves homeless and in temporary accommodation.

My third point is that we are seeing a system that is completely silted up. More and more people are becoming homeless, either rough sleeping at the very sharp end of that or homeless more broadly. It is harder and harder to help them into something temporary away from the streets and danger or find some kind of roof over their heads for them because the temporary accommodation is so full. The temporary accommodation is so full because it is harder and harder to help people to move on and find them something more settled.



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In every one of my services, the first thing the teams say to me is that the biggest challenge at the moment is finding places to help people to move on. That is predominantly because of the drastic shortage of social housing. There is a severe shortage in supported housing and a lot of people need supported housing before independent living. The private rented sector is absolutely unaffordable and inappropriate in many cases, particularly for clients with complex needs but more generally as well, and particularly for clients and families on low incomes where the LHA housing benefit has not kept up with rents.

**Francesca Albanese:** Building on Emma's points, I think that fundamentally what is driving this is the housing crisis. We have seen over decades a lack of supply of social housing but also particularly in the last five years private rents have gone up. We are finding, particularly at the low end of the market, that the local housing allowance is not meeting the cost of rents and there has not been a review of the benefit cap. There has been a temporary uplift on the local housing allowance since April but that will end in April 2025 and cause more issues in the space.

As well as the overall numbers that you have cited, we know that households with children are spending longer in temporary accommodation. In London at the moment, over 60% of households with children have been in temporary accommodation for two years or more. There is a layering of issues, pushing people into homelessness in the first place because of the cost of living crisis and housing affordability issues, but fundamentally councils have no other option than to place people in temporary accommodation.

We do a series called Homelessness Monitor where we have tracked this over 14 years and it is getting worse. Local authorities have cited this in surveys. We know that for many people there are no other options and that is why we are seeing more expensive temporary accommodation being used.

My final point is that £2.3 billion was spent on temporary accommodation last year and over 50% of that expenditure is on bed and breakfasts and nightly-paid accommodation because that is fundamentally pushing people into short-term accommodation now. We know that temporary accommodation is wide-ranging but we are seeing more and more expensive forms of short-term temporary accommodation and that is also exacerbating the issues.

**Dr Neilson:** I will give a picture locally. Often families with children do not come through a different system. Most of our mums who are living in temporary accommodation with children have not come through the criminal justice system. Homelessness comes out of the blue and it is coming for an increasingly wide range of demographics of families with children in temporary accommodation.



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Everything that everyone else has said about the housing market is true. We are also seeing a couple of interesting trends locally. Local landlords are switching accommodation from social private rent into temporary accommodation because they can get higher payments from councils. They will evict a family from their property, change it into temporary accommodation and move another family into that property for a higher rent. We see that reasonably often. To manage temporary accommodation locally, we need to have it as a joined-up city region or regional thing because we see families being shunted from local authority to local authority increasingly more commonly.

It is never the children's decision to go into temporary accommodation. I think it is important that as we are talking about children today, we have the children's voice at the heart of this. A lot of children end up in temporary accommodation because of family breakdown, out-of-the-blue rent evictions and parents losing jobs because of the economy suddenly shifting locally or because they are on zero-hours contracts. Sometimes it is because of other circumstances such as illness. We are seeing families who were doing okay and then one parent gets a significant diagnosis and they end up in temporary accommodation. That means you have children in temporary accommodation who are often coping with moving multiple times, moving schools but also with significant issues with their parents.

It is important for the panel to understand that most parents are trying to do their best. Most parents are working incredibly hard to try to sort out the situation and most do not have significant eviction issues or criminal justice issues when they enter temporary accommodation. We see a massive deterioration in parental mental health in temporary accommodation, which is understandable, and that impacts the children as well.

**Q3 Chair:** All of you have touched on such big issues. The Government have set up the taskforce on ending homelessness led by the Deputy Prime Minister. Have any of your organisations or organisations you know of had any engagement from the Deputy Prime Minister's office on this? Do you feel that the Government are treating this as a real priority?

**Rebecca Walker:** We have had not any engagement on that.

**Emma Haddad:** I can comment. I had the pleasure of chatting with the Deputy Prime Minister yesterday. She came to visit one of our services, which was really good, and we talked to her about this. I believe she is meant to chair the first meeting of the interministerial taskforce this week. Some of us have been invited to join an expert group that will report to that taskforce and is due to meet for the first time next week—the ministerial taskforce this week, the expert group next week. She is deliberately taking a cross-government approach because it feels like, as we have been talking about, she understands that this has to be cross-government because so many people's routes cross different areas of Government policy or public policy. I believe that the expert group will be



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relatively small but will want to task us with going off and looking into different topics further and pulling in other people with lived experience and expertise.

**Q4 Chair:** Rebecca, from your work, what do you want this cross-government group to look like, having meat on the bone?

**Rebecca Walker:** I would reiterate everything the other panellists have said, but particularly Laura's point that this is happening to ordinary families. When I say "ordinary", that means families that are earning less than £80,000 a year. That is the average income estimated to be required in order to rent a two-bedroom flat privately in Camden and Hackney, the two boroughs we work in. You cannot even call it low-income families; it is just the vast majority of families who are particularly hit, as Laura said, if there is a relationship breakdown and a single salary coming in.

For us, a cross-government taskforce should be looking at raising the LHA rates so that they are realistically in line with rents. Rates have been frozen since 2013 and people cannot find flats that are rentable at that rate. There should also be some scrutiny around the fact that there is nothing to stop landlords discriminating against families claiming DSS. If you find a flat in an area that is within the LHA rate, most of the time there will be a stipulation of no DSS. That is locking the majority of families out of the rental market. I think that those are the two issues in the private rented sector that should be looked at.

**Q5 Mr Dillon:** On the "no DSS", it is a guaranteed income source, more than if someone was employed and could lose their job tomorrow and not get a paycheque at the end of the month. What do you think the stigma with DSS is for landlords? Do you think it is a concern about the condition of property that stops them having DSS?

**Rebecca Walker:** That is a good question and I think it is one that should go to landlord groups. My feeling is that it is just a very old stigma and it seems nonsensical to me because, as you say, it is a far more guaranteed form of income than being in employment. I do not know if the rest of the panel have any—

**Emma Haddad:** You see both. You see "no DSS", and then you see landlords who will take you only if you are on housing benefit and so we have to try to encourage our clients not to work at some point to just get the flat.

**Q6 Lewis Cocking:** You have to encourage people not to work to be able to get a property?

**Emma Haddad:** That we are actively encouraging them is probably an exaggeration, but they know that to get a property they are better off to stay on housing benefit because a landlord will not take them otherwise in some cases. They know it is a guaranteed income.



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**Dr Neilson:** I think that is more of a London issue.

**Chair:** Thank you. We will move on to the quality of temporary accommodation.

Q7 **Chris Curtis:** Would you say that temporary accommodation is always a safe environment for families with children?

**Dr Neilson:** We know that temporary accommodation is a lot of things, first of all. You can have bed and breakfast overnight, you could be staying at a Premier Inn or some form of flat. We know from the research we have done with the all-party parliamentary group on temporary accommodation that a lot of temporary accommodation is deeply unsuitable for children. If you are living in a Premier Inn room or other hotel and you have a couple of children, first of all there is no access to cooking or laundry facilities and there is nowhere to play. We see children who are living in very small spaces struggling with milestones—basic things like learning to crawl or walk—because there is no physical space for them. A lot of overnight accommodation says you have to leave in the morning, and then what do you do with your children? You are waiting to be allocated another place that night by the local authority and, effectively, you are left to roam around and work out what to do.

I work one day a week in A&E and from my experience, which is a very small amount of clinical time, in the last year I have had a child with a femur fracture, a child with a skull fracture, a child with significant burns and lots of children admitted with respiratory conditions, all caused by the social conditions they are living in. We see temporary accommodation that does not have the basics of cots and stairgates and radiator covers, so we have the physical safety to be concerned about.

We also have concerns about psychological safety in these places. I have been asking for a long time for Government guidance that we do not mix family accommodation and single men in homelessness accommodation. They are two hyper-vulnerable groups that need our support in society but they should not mix. Particularly at the moment when we are doing early release from prisons, I have a concern that we are releasing a lot of people from prison with no pathway for accommodation and they are ending up in the same accommodation as families. Most of our families are relatively young women and children who often come from domestic violence backgrounds and are often very vulnerable. When we asked for evidence at the APPG, we saw a lot of stories from across country—it was not regional at all—about women ending up in temporary accommodation where there was drug dealing, criminality, women being propositioned and asked to enter into sex contracts. That is not a safe place for bringing up children.

This is solvable and it is not a cost issue. It is a logistical issue about how things are allocated, but it is not a particular cost issue and it is one that I would like to see the Government look at properly and address. We think it can be done quite quickly.



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When we talk about safety, we talk about physical and psychological safety and we also talk about life-chances safety. We know that children miss out on education, health and lots of other interactions with public services when they enter temporary accommodation. We need to consider that when we talk about whether children are safe in temporary accommodation.

**Q8** **Chris Curtis:** When you say it is an allocation issue rather than a cost issue, what do you see as the barriers to accommodation not being allocated effectively as things currently are if it is not cost?

**Dr Neilson:** My sympathy is for the local authority housing officers. I work very closely with them and across the country they are extremely stressed, very tired and feel like they are in a thankless job often where they cannot solve the problem because of all the things we have already talked about. They are faced with having to find somewhere for a family at short notice but because the system is not allocated from the beginning in the way that we do with lots of other services that we offer, families just end up being placed where there happens to be a space. Risk assessments and safeguarding considerations are not done. That is not standard practice. It is literally if there is a space, the family can go there, rather than thinking about, "Is this appropriate?"

I encourage local authorities to visit the places they are putting families in for temporary accommodation. If you go and visit you get a very different impression than if you just talk to the landlord. Once you visit you can sense how things are—it is a form of safety check. It is a different way of allocating accommodation and it would take a bit of a change for local authorities. I know that possibly they feel it is another step but when you look at the impact on children particularly and women, we should be considering it and driving it through.

**Rebecca Walker:** I work in two London boroughs: one mixes singles and families and the other one does not and keeps them separate. The atmosphere in the family-only hostels is night-and-day different in the impact on the families. Families feel much safer and it has other knock-on effects. For example, we find that the mixed hostels have introduced no-visitor policies because there are so many chaotic goings-on, mainly as a result of the single adults. The no-visitor policies impact on the families and it means that parents cannot draw on the support network they have. It further isolates them. We have mothers who have just given birth who are not allowed people in to look after their older child while they recover. We also have separated parents who are unable to get proper contact with their child who is non-resident because of these rules. It makes it feel incredibly carceral in the hostels and further isolates people. I think that is very much a knock-on effect of the mixed tenure hostels but also there is evidence from councils that manage to separate them successfully.

**Q9** **Lewis Cocking:** What representations have you made to the council that does not separate families and singles to ask it to do it? If you have, why



has a council said it cannot do that?

**Rebecca Walker:** I think the council that does not do it has much more demand and sees many more homeless singles and families come to their doors every day. I think, as Dr Neilson touched on, they are under such pressure that they feel they have to have as many units as possible available on a given day to slot anybody into. It should be a numbers question—that the number of units they have across however many hostels is the same, whether some are just allocated to singles and some are just allocated to families, but it probably makes them feel that they have more flexibility because they do not have empty rooms in a particular hostel because they have not had families that day or empty rooms in another hostel because they have not had singles that day.

Q10 **Chris Curtis:** At the moment, do you think that most local authorities are meeting their statutory guidance to ensure that temporary accommodation is suitable for families?

**Francesca Albanese:** Local authorities are in a really difficult situation, as we have heard, because there is just not enough stock. There are definitely issues where families are staying in bed and breakfasts for longer than the six weeks. We have definitely heard that, and that is because there is not enough accommodation for stock. We are seeing—you will hear this in the next session in far more detail—a really mixed picture.

To bring it back to one of the earlier questions that you asked about what the Government are doing about this and what the opportunities are, this is an urgent issue, which is why you brought it to the Committee. We need to fix the issues in temporary accommodation and we have heard from Laura and Rebecca about the real impacts that has on families day to day and how horrible and awful that is, but ultimately, we have to look at the whole system. If we look at only temporary accommodation, yes, local authorities in some areas will be breaching regulations and in other areas they will not be, but we have to look at what is driving that.

There is a real opportunity for an interministerial group, a cross-government strategy sharing outcomes and what we want the homelessness system to look like over the medium to long term. There are definitely things we can do now to fix that, to make sure that families are not placed in dangerous situations, but it is also about a long-term vision and making sure that we have a focus across all the different areas that are driving homelessness and ultimately we also have a commitment for a housing plan. That is really positive. Let's join the two together so that we are designing a system that is what local authorities want and how they want to design it and place households in, not something where we are firefighting all the time.

**Dr Neilson:** I would like to see a floor, the lowest standard acceptable for temporary accommodation, and that is not very clear at the moment. I would like the Government to consider what is reasonable. Is it





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reasonable to bring up your children in a caravan in the middle of January? Is a converted office block reasonable? Is it reasonable to move from one B&B to another B&B to another B&B, so that you move every four or five weeks? One of the families I saw last week had moved seven times in three weeks to different hotels across the city region and then the mum had been fined for school attendance: is that reasonable? How long do you live without cooking facilities? How long do you live without laundry facilities? How long do you live without being able to have a visitor?

I think that there needs to be a floor of what is the minimum standard for temporary accommodation that we will accept as a society. The standard does not have to be the same as our decent home standards, because I know that that is tricky in the political realm, but I would appreciate some kind of floor in this area.

**Chair:** Thank you. We will move on to the issue of B&B temporary accommodation, which you have all touched on.

Q11 **Sarah Smith:** What additional challenges do families face when they are placed in hotels and bed and breakfast temporary accommodation for the extended periods that you have described?

**Dr Neilson:** A lot of it is to do with logistics. Often, people are travelling quite a long way. Simple things like getting to school are tricky. The children are entitled to free bus passes but it is very difficult to get them, and the adults are not, so often the adults cannot afford to get the kids to school. Then there is just the time if you are travelling an hour and a half, two hours to get to school. There is definitely something about cooking and food. There is definitely something about being moved repeatedly.

One of the biggest psychological factors that families talk about is that they remain packed all the time because they could get told that day that they are moving somewhere else. That happens for quite long periods, so it is really unsettling for families. Children have talked to us about going to school and coming home to a different home and then going to school and being moved again. At school they are very worried about what will happen, where are they going that night, and they talk about that.

When we ask children who live in temporary accommodation what they want, they all say a home. If you say something like, "What do you want for Christmas?" they don't say Xbox or trainers or anything else that maybe your kids are asking for—and mine are—they say, "I want a home." The other thing they talk about quite a lot, which is interesting, is just normal things that other children do: friends over, pets, hamsters, cats. They want very normal children's things and none of that is possible in temporary accommodation. We have families, and I am sure you have families too, who have been in TA for two or three years, moving repeatedly.



**Francesca Albanese:** All I will add is that there is a lack of access to support primarily when you are in bed and breakfast accommodation compared to other forms of temporary accommodation like private sector leased homes or homes from housing associations or other social tenancies. That has an impact on what people can access and also thinking about can they move out of that situation. We have already mentioned the impact on children, but there is a stark impact on having nowhere to do homework. I did some research a while ago but things have got worse. I saw a child doing their homework on a cardboard box and we know from research that others have done, including Shelter, that that has not changed. There are some quite stark impacts on educational outcomes and what that means for the family and the children. We know that quite a stark indicator of experiencing homelessness later on in life is if you have experienced it as a child.

**Dr Neilson:** We also know that these children are very hidden from other public sector services. The APPG is trying to produce a notification system. The healthcare system does not count children living in temporary accommodation. The NHS does not code in any way. If you go to A&E or a GP, you are not asked, so we do not have any accident or admission data locally or nationally because we have not asked for it. Similarly in education, we are missing this cohort and we do not know how many of those children are missing because they are in temporary accommodation. It is not asked locally or nationally. Not having that information is a hole. It is not helping us shape our policy and our response.

Q12 **Chris Curtis:** Schools have come up a couple of times in B&Bs but also in temporary accommodation across the board. Apart from the free bus passes for children that you mentioned, is there any other support that local authorities or the schools tend to give to support children getting to school?

**Dr Neilson:** It is dependent on schools and there is some evidence of good practice. One of the reasons for trying to do a national notification system is because schools have said that if they know, they can help. We have schools in Greater Manchester—the Manchester Communication Academy has been absolutely brilliant at pioneering how to support children in temporary accommodation. Once you tell them, they have a wraparound system to support a child. The school adopts a more reasonable approach for things like behaviour codes and being late and being sanctioned for not having your PE kit or not quite managing to do your science homework on time. We know that children and families don't tell schools themselves. They feel so ashamed that they just hide it.

Some schools do not offer that wraparound at all. We would like to do a piece of work with the Education Department about what does best practice look like in supporting children in temporary accommodation, particularly if it is crossing exam times. We know that the GCSE cohort particularly falls out of the system if the children go into temporary



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accommodation. They miss exams and also tend to do reasonably badly compared to what they could do.

Also when children move out of an area, if the school is told they have moved they quite often come off the school register and they are not in another school and they are literally missing, but nobody really tracks them. We have cases, and I know other organisations have cases, of children falling out of school for months, a whole school year at a time, and then popping up somewhere and going back into school. We could definitely do something about tracking children through the education system better, so there is a link with—

Q13 **Chris Curtis:** Nobody has responsibility at that point?

**Dr Neilson:** I don't think so, from what I know. I am not an education expert, I hold my hands up to that—I am a clinician who has ended up in this world—but from what I can see nobody seems to have responsibility for them. There is something about what happens if in the worst situations they are out of sight out of mind, which is terrible for our children.

Q14 **Sarah Smith:** Are there regulations that are intended to limit B&B placements for families to six weeks, and are they fit for purpose?

**Francesca Albanese:** There are, yes. We do have regulations for families not being placed in B&Bs for longer than six weeks. We are seeing the levels going up. We see an increase in the statistics on temporary accommodation. I mentioned this before but this is often because there are no other options for local authorities to place households. It is not acceptable but it is a symptom of the overall crisis that we are seeing and the urgency around temporary accommodation. It is much better and more cost-effective not to use B&Bs, particularly for families with children, but we are in a situation now where we have to.

We have welcomed a provision in the Renters' Rights Bill that you could look at regulation of temporary accommodation. However, I think that regulation on its own is not going to fix this. As I have said, we are breaching regulation already, so this is not out of choice. Until we look at the whole system—we need better quality temporary accommodation in the short term if that is the only option people have but we need to look at all the different housing solutions within that system and some investment in the short term. There are things such as let's look at LHA again to make sure the private rented sector is affordable; can we look at the benefit cap and review that; are there other short-term fixes in the housing market, such as looking at provisions for empty homes and some flexible funding that could bring homes into use very quickly, as well as the longer-term investment in social housing. Yes, breaches of regulations are happening but it has to be looked at in the wider piece.

**Dr Neilson:** At the moment, there are no sanctions for breaching for anybody apart from the family. We do not have league tables. We do not



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compare local authorities. Local authorities have a difficult job but there is some good practice and there is definitely less good practice. Some local authorities are looking at their temporary accommodation problem in a much more strategic manner than others. I do not see that we are learning particularly across the board, but at the moment I am a little bit nervous that it becomes a problem that is unfixable. It is not unfixable and we should be holding to six weeks as the longest term. That is a summer holiday. If you have children, that always feels very long. That is long enough to be living in a hotel room.

**Chair:** Thank you. Let us move on swiftly—I am mindful of time—and look at out-of-borough placements.

Q15 **Naushabah Khan:** I declare an interest: I used to work for Saint Mungo's, which is on the panel today.

My question is about out-of-area placements. How far outside of the area are some local authorities placing families in temporary accommodation?

**Dr Neilson:** We do not totally know because we do not report it. That is one thing the Government could do. When local authorities send in their returns, they could also say where they are placing people out of the area.

I have seen families arriving in North Manchester from Camden. They just sent up five kids. I have seen families arrive up north from all over the country. I know that as an area we have also sent families. We had one family who were homeless in Oldham and got sent to Hastings, for some bizarre reason. The distances are huge, but we do not have a national picture because we do not collect the data.

Q16 **Naushabah Khan:** What are the impacts of those out-of-area placements on outcomes, particularly educational outcomes for children? Is enough happening within local authorities to minimise this disruption?

**Dr Neilson:** The local authorities have a hierarchy of money. Central London generally has a bit more money than outer London. Outer London has a bit more money than the shires. Then it goes up north, basically. We see people move from central London out to Watford and then from Watford out a bit further. It is a domino effect. We move lots of families along. That is to do with economics. That feels much more solvable. We see the same thing even within a city region. In Manchester and Liverpool, we see the same thing happening across areas that are more expensive and less expensive. We should aim to reduce out-of-area placements and try to see the graph come down and see the distances come down.

The impact is massive for a family. They lose their social connection. They lose all their natural pathways of after-school clubs and anything like that. They lose their mates to come and help them look after the baby and hold it. A lot of kids will make a Herculean effort in the first couple of weeks to go to school and then it drifts off. They lose their



place in other public sector services. They lose their place in the NHS. They lose their place in a SEND assessment. They fall out of lots of things. Then they end up back at the beginning of the queue again. If they are moved multiple times, which we see, across local authority areas and that happens to them repeatedly, it is definitely disruptive. I don't think we are fully aware of the cost of that.

**Q17 Naushabah Khan:** If you, for example, see that level of movement, is there enough communication in local authorities to support and protect children and those being moved out? For example, are there enough disincentives in place for an authority not to place out of area and make it an exceptional circumstance rather than a standard practice?

**Francesca Albanese:** I am happy to go first and bring others in. Local authorities operate very differently. There is clearly a difference between high-pressured areas versus areas where we may have smaller proportions of out-of-area placements compared with the numbers in temporary accommodation. There can always be better communication. Laura has explained the impact that has on educational needs. Also, when people move between placements, sometimes we cannot keep track of what is happening to the family.

We work more with single households, but we have increasingly had people with dependent children come to our services. That is a direct impact of how much pressure local authorities are under at the moment and also the scale of homelessness. I have testimony from somebody whom we are working with at the moment, who says that there are no direct transport links to their son's school. They are having to travel an hour and 30 minutes to get to that school. They are fortunate: they are in work, and their employer has allowed them to work from home more because they cannot afford to do both. This is illustrative of a wider problem. When you are talking about whether we can limit out-of-area placements, yes, that would be helpful because not only does it mean that the responsibility stays within the local authority boundary but it means that better communication happens. It also means that there is not a discharge of duty out of that boundary.

There is definitely some positive practice, though. If you have groups of local authorities working together—and we do see that both in London and in other parts of the country—there can be joint protocols and an understanding of where you are placing people and why. Is it to do with looking at what property sizes you have? Is it also about needs? Is it making sure that you have those reciprocal arrangements in place? There is some good practice that works, but it is not consistent. Until we see consistency, we end up with examples of where communication has broken down and people have slipped under the radar of lots of different services. That is where you get safeguarding issues and also that has a detrimental impact on the household ultimately and what happens to it over the long term.

**Q18 Joe Powell:** It is encouraging to hear that there might be some best



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practice around the communications, but could you explain a bit more what that looks like from the family's perspective? Could something be built out to be more of a standard or something that could be applied more widely?

**Dr Neilson:** We know that local authorities should tell each other when a child is arriving, but they often do not. It is basic stuff. Can we be proactive about getting a child into school? Can we be proactive about getting a child into a GP practice?

From a family's perspective, they are often dumped with few possessions somewhere they have never been before. Our organisation supports families local to us who arrive in homelessness. We find that some basic stuff is helpful to them. Where do they live? How do they get to school? We do some basic advocacy for them. Do they have the basic equipment that they need? Is somebody working with them—because the housing system is complicated—and helping them understand what they do next and what happens next?

Another conversation to have is about what is likely to happen with families. We often say "temporary" but, when you are honest with them and you say, "You could be here for months," people will make different decisions than if they think they are moving the next day. Have an honest conversation with families. "If you are going to be here for months or a year, do you want to move your kids' school?" That is a decision that parents can then take rather than it always being fobbed off because it might not happen tomorrow. Some basic support can be given.

Q19 **Lewis Cocking:** Do all local authorities have a choice about out-of-area placements? If the centre of London chooses to move out to the outskirts of London, that pushes up the prices there, which then prices the outer London boroughs out. They then move out to the shires and so the people in the shires do not have a choice because they cannot get it locally because when they compete for temporary accommodation, the London borough is paying more and so they have to go out of borough because the centre of London has chosen to do that. Do all local authorities have a choice about out-of-area or are some forced to do it because other councils are pushing up the prices in their areas?

**Dr Neilson:** The system's incentives are going the wrong way. If you are running a local authority in an area like Luton, I can see that you are under massive pressure from London.

That does not mean we precipitate the behaviour up the country. We need to think systematically about what is driving that. Is there really no choice or have we not looked at other options? I challenge that, but I desperately do not want this to become an unfixable thing where inevitably everyone gets moved up the country. That is not how we want society to work. I do not want it to be like that.



**Francesca Albanese:** There is something about having shared outcomes. What do we want? Ultimately, what do we want the outcome to be for households that are at risk of homelessness? It is not going into temporary accommodation. You have described accurately what happens at the moment. How do we incentivise a housing and homelessness system that stops the rot from happening? That is about joint outcomes across Government Departments, which will mean that there is not this competitive tendering, essentially, that happens for temporary accommodation at the moment, where whoever pays the highest price wins. We can definitely disincentivise that and look at how to design purposely a housing system for low-income households that improves outcomes.

Q20 **Lewis Cocking:** I am pleased you have mentioned prevention because we are 40 minutes in and no one has spoken about prevention in response to any of our questions yet, which is the biggest part. If we prevent people being homeless, that is the best thing we can do. No one has touched on that.

**Francesca Albanese:** Yes. When we talk about what the Government can do, it is positive to see this interministerial group. It is about tackling prevention first and then looking at what a housing system should look like and how we move people quickly out of homelessness into settled housing and then we look at the support. Prevention has to be key. To stop temporary accommodation going up, focus on prevention, look at the LHA and look at the wider prevention interventions we can make, including affordable housing. That forces temporary accommodation to come down over the medium to longer term.

Q21 **Mr Dillon:** You have touched on this topic throughout various questions, but can you go into a bit more detail around the impacts and potential impacts on children's health of living in TA accommodation?

**Dr Neilson:** I will be brief. At the stark end, we know that we had 55 children die unexpectedly as a result of living in temporary accommodation. That information came from our research work with the national child mortality database. The next set of data will be released probably early in the new year and it is likely that the figure will go up for two reasons. First, we have more children living in temporary accommodation. Secondly, since we did that original research they have changed the way child deaths in temporary accommodation are reported, so the coding will be better.

At the harsh end, we get mortality that we do not necessarily need. When you look at child mortality rates, we know that they are massively linked with poverty, insecurity and uncertainty. If we look at child mortality rates in some of the most affluent parts of the country, they parallel Norway and the Scandinavian countries. If you look at child mortality in the poorest areas of our country, they parallel edge-of-warzone countries. Children in temporary accommodation have really high mortality rates.



If you come back from mortality, you come back to reduced educational attainment. We think that there are increased admission rates from lots of anecdotal evidence we see, but as I said we do not have the dataset for that. We know that children living in temporary accommodation probably have more accidents and injuries. We know that they have this deep sense of insecurity, which affects their attachment and the way they perceive the wider world. Particularly, all the early years research about the first 1,000 days is amazing. Humans are amazing and brilliant things, but the foundations we lay down in those early years shape our adult lives. When we are talking about economic future, life chances and creative chances, it is massively important that we get these early years right.

It is similar for teenagers. We see teenagers who are completely discombobulated by their whole world being turned upside down by entering temporary accommodation. Then we see lots of knock-on effects of that with their behaviour, with their mental health and with their educational achievement. They are likely to end up as NEET. They are likely to end up having fewer life chances. We also know that being in temporary accommodation as a child is a precursor for homelessness as an adult.

It is worth us as a society thinking about this properly—how do we prevent not just the harm that is happening now, but also the harm that will happen in the future?

Q22 **Chair:** On that, Emma, you mentioned the taskforce earlier. How should the Department for Health and Social Care be included in the taskforce?

**Emma Haddad:** Health is intrinsic to this whole context and the whole prevention agenda. We saw some really interesting stuff during the pandemic, when we brought everybody off the streets because it was a health emergency and we solved rough sleeping, because we brought people inside where we could work with them as well and help to solve their homelessness.

I was going to mention the adult point. Almost all my clients will have had some childhood trauma. As I said at the beginning, homelessness is the end point and so you have to prevent it happening in the first place. Childhood trauma is often one factor that leads people down all different pathways.

We are in danger of seeing here a whole generation of children who are being brought up without a stable home, with everything precarious, no sense of what it is to live in a stable home, going to the same school the whole time and living healthily. And guess what? We will see it come out in adulthood; we absolutely will.

**Rebecca Walker:** We see a lot of frontline evidence of this in our work every day. In hostels, families live in single rooms and so they have everybody—mum and dad and siblings—in one room.





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Children cannot develop their gross motor skills. They do not have the space to learn to crawl, learn to walk. Also, there is nowhere to store toys and so they cannot play. We all know play is foundational to childhood development and also to wellbeing. They do not get those opportunities in an overcrowded room that has every possession that that family owns in it. Inevitably, parents rely a lot on screen time to keep the children occupied and so they are very sedentary and that can cause health problems as well. We have mentioned lack of proper cooking facilities and also space to store food and to refrigerate food. So people are very reliant on takeaways and they do not have healthy diets. All that affects their physical wellbeing.

In terms of children's mental wellbeing, again, they have a lack of ability to play. They do not get to develop cognitively. They do not get that opportunity to make sense of the world and to let off steam and make sense of their experiences. It causes huge social isolation. They do not get to develop their social skills with peers. Also, a hostel room is like a pressure cooker. You are subject to your parental stress 24/7. Parents cannot get away from each other or from their children. The impact on the mental health of people all living in one room like that is quite severe.

**Q23 Sarah Smith:** I am interested in the panel's awareness of the economic impact. Has research been undertaken to demonstrate the wider economic impact of failing to act on this issue on that whole family, on the children's future and so on?

**Dr Neilson:** There are pockets of study. We know that as a society, we spend a lot of money on these families for—excuse my language—crap outcomes. They are very expensive families. We are pouring resources in in an inappropriate way.

We know the link between homelessness as a child and homelessness as an adult. We know about the link between homeless as a child and educational attainment. We know about the link between homeless as a child and mental health problems because of, as Rebecca has explained, that pressure cooker environment. We do know some of the economic impacts.

We are also starting to understand the economic impact on families themselves. A piece of research published a couple of weeks ago showed that just being in temporary accommodation increases your debt because you have to pay for takeaways and have to pay for extra charges you did not expect and have to commute more. Everything is more expensive if you are living precariously in one room. We also know that that debt is then stopping people moving on in their housing journey. Sometimes really small amounts of debt such as £500 in arrears somewhere in your history can stop you being able to bid for your next bit of housing. The research is showing that we could look at that as a policy angle as well.

**Q24 Mr Dillon:** I think the answer is already no because of what Dr Neilson was saying about coding, for example, but how do the Government



effectively monitor the health impacts of temporary accommodation through the data they collect from local authorities? Does anyone have a view on that?

**Dr Neilson:** I would like to see the NHS choose to see homeless children as a health issue and I would like to see it come to the table. The NHS was invited to the APPG several times and we have not seen senior NHS colleagues come. At least let us make homeless children visible in the NHS system because, if they are visible, we can count them and we can track them and we will be able to put better healthcare around them.

**Mr Dillon:** Okay. I declare that I am on the APPG for temporary accommodation.

**Chair:** Thank you very much. This has been a really insightful session from our guests this morning, and a lot to think about. The key thing is around the number of children who will spend the next few weeks in temporary accommodation. Thank you very much to our guests. We will now hand over to our next set of witnesses.

## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Councillor Hannah Dalton, Councillor Grace Williams, Hannah Courtney-Adamson and Chris Hancock.

Q25 **Chair:** If our guests could introduce themselves, we will then start off with questions.

**Chris Hancock:** Thank you, Chair. Hello, everybody. My name is Chris Hancock. I am the head of housing at Hastings Borough Council.

**Hannah Courtney-Adamson:** Good morning, everybody. I am Hannah Courtney-Adamson. I am the head of strategic housing services at Rochdale Borough Council.

**Councillor Dalton:** Good morning. I am Hannah Dalton. I am the District Councils Network's spokesperson on housing and homelessness.

**Councillor Williams:** Good morning. I am Councillor Grace Williams. I am leader of Waltham Forest and deputy chair for London Councils with responsibility for housing.

**Chair:** Thank you very much. Over to you, Lewis.

Q26 **Lewis Cocking:** Thank you. I have been previously a board member on the DCN and I am a Hertfordshire county councillor but I do not have responsibility for homelessness and housing.

I will come to you first, Chris. In Hastings, you spend 50% of your budget on temporary accommodation. How sustainable is that and what are you



doing as an authority to try to get that down?

**Chris Hancock:** The short answer in response to the first part of your question is that it is not sustainable. We cannot continue to spend that proportion of a small borough council's budget.

Q27 **Lewis Cocking:** What is your annual budget, just to give us a flavour?

**Chris Hancock:** Net, we are talking around £18 million and we are forecast to spend this year about £6.8 million on temporary accommodation, which is, yes, completely unsustainable and means that we cannot do lots of things as a borough outside of housing that we would want to do for residents.

What are we doing around that? We have benefited a lot from external capital funding that we have received from the Government and we are buying properties—acquiring properties in the market to use as temporary accommodation. It is so much more cost-effective for us to own the temporary accommodation. Also, there is a benefit. We can try to rectify all the things that we heard from the previous panel around adverse experiences in temporary accommodation if we own the accommodation. We can allow pets. People can have their own front door. People can decorate. They can have visitors and do all these things that are difficult in privately procured temporary accommodation.

However, the issue is exacerbated. The subsidy that we receive to help us pay for that private temporary accommodation is still pegged to 2011 local housing allowance figures. The rental market in Hastings has transformed beyond description between 2011 and 2024. If the subsidy amount was pegged to the 2024 figures, we would have an additional £1.4 million in income, which would be transformative given what I have said about the size of our budget.

We are moving in the right direction with these acquisitions probably, but people are still in need of the service and still in need of temporary accommodation. The challenge very much remains.

Q28 **Lewis Cocking:** Grace, lots of London councils decide to move people in temporary accommodation outside of London, which puts pressure on the home counties. Why do London boroughs choose to do that?

**Councillor Williams:** First, thank you for the question. Probably the word “decide” is not strictly accurate here. London is at the centre of a housing crisis. London faces the brunt of temporary accommodation pressures at the moment. No borough wants to place people outside its own borough. We know that outcomes for people, particularly children, are better if they are in borough.

This is happening—and the previous panel demonstrated this—because we have this national crisis where, as you said before, what happens in London has a knock-on effect in other places. Essentially, London councils are at a point where temporary accommodation makes up 75% of their



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spend on housing. We are in a situation now where we simply cannot sustain housing within our boroughs. This is happening because we do not have enough affordable housing. That is the main thing.

Also, Chris has already referred to the resources point. If we do not have enough money for families to afford to stay, either through the local housing allowance that we referred to or because the cap is pegged to 2011 levels, we do not have enough resources to help our families stay in the capital.

Regardless of that, about 90% of placements still are in London. London boroughs are not trying to force people out. They want people to stay in the capital. But we do recognise now that we are in emergency times, and that we do need to work together to find some solutions.

We are pushing for us to talk about it nationally and to recognise that this opportunity for a homelessness strategy should be our chance to have a national system that is fair, where we do have decent data, where we do have national standards and where we do recognise the relationship between London and the rest of the country.

**Q29 Lewis Cocking:** This is an open question to you all. We have had the Budget. The Government have said that the local housing rates will not increase. How will that impact on local government budgets? How many councils are getting to the point, a bit like Hastings, where it is beginning to place too much pressure on their budgets and tipping over into not having enough money for day-to-day expenditure?

**Councillor Dalton:** Speaking from the District Councils Network, at the moment the housing benefit subsidy covers just 38% of the costs, which means that councils have an average shortfall of around £1.1 million. That is fundamentally unsustainable and means that councils have to absorb these costs. To support temporary accommodation, they are having to divert money that they should be putting into the preventative measures that they want to put in place.

The LHA creates a double financial pressure because we have to fund expensive TA. I am also a Leader of Epsom and Ewell Borough Council where, for example, in the last six months, temporary accommodation has gone up from £90 a night to over £130 a night and we have to cover the gap between LHA and the actual cost. It is unsustainable for us to continue to fund that ever-increasing cost. As was mentioned in the previous panel, we all want to do preventative work. Nobody wants to see their residents in a situation where they are homeless. However, we are not able to do that because of the spiralling costs.

**Hannah Courtney-Adamson:** A lot of the capital investment that has come from the Government over the last four to six years, which is welcome, as Chris has said, has been focused on our single homeless households. It is fair to say that our families, which are proportionally the bigger percentage of homelessness, have been neglected, which has



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meant that local authorities have been in a response and react position when those families are hitting the front door, as opposed to taking a more strategic upstream approach.

The housing benefit legislation certainly could be looked at. The Government have the power to review it. It is a statutory responsibility for authorities to provide temporary accommodation. We fund a big proportion of that by recovering that back through housing benefit, but the subsidy rules are punitive towards local authorities. One part of the system legally has to deliver this while the other part of the system penalises local authorities financially. That area definitely could be looked at when temporary accommodation and how that is delivered is reviewed.

**Q30 Lewis Cocking:** Lastly, when councils get capital money, how agile are they? I have been a councillor. Councils are given money to deliver capital projects. We have loads of meetings about stuff and spades go in the ground a couple of years later. If councils became more agile when they get that capital money, particularly around homelessness, to either build accommodation or what-have-you, people would have better life outcomes. Could councils do a lot more to be a bit more agile rather than taking the capital money, coming up with a meeting, having a plan about it and not delivering for a couple of years?

**Councillor Williams:** London councils have a good track record of building affordable homes—

**Lewis Cocking:** Do you?

**Councillor Williams:** —and we have started to get to grips with building social homes. However, we have seen—you are right—that there is still a gap in the number of homes that we can afford to build because of costs. It is not so much about our flexibility or our willingness to build. It is the fact that we do not have the resources to meet the viability gap, and that viability gap has come from the increasing costs of construction and planning, which makes it very difficult. You can add to that, the costs that residents face in their mortgage rates or their rents. For us, it is a viability challenge, which is why we are pleased to see the Government put a lot more extra money into the affordable homes programme. We do not know what that means yet for each local authority, but it is about the ability to fund social and affordable homes that will make the biggest difference. Planning reform will not do it alone.

**Q31 Chris Curtis:** To Hannah Dalton, on the point about LHA going up, I see the pernicious impact that that has caused, increasing TA and your costs for TA. What response have you had when you have had conversations with people in the Government Departments?

Following on from that, I suppose you would argue that it would be beneficial to have long-term knowledge of the direction of travel of LHA, not the one-year, next year settlement. Can you talk about how that might allow councils to do future planning, which could then have a



positive impact?

**Councillor Dalton:** Certainly. For district councils, having a better understanding of what our funding is over a longer term enables us to better plan and to better understand how we can spend our money.

However to the same point, even with that knowledge, because the increase in the number of people who are facing this situation is so sharp, more systemic things need to be done to address this as a whole-systems issue. As mentioned before, there is planning, the benefits regime and the subsidy cap, the LHA and then there is everything else.

We welcome the fact that the Deputy Prime Minister has set up the taskforce, but we need to look at all of homelessness and TA in the round. I am happy to share after this meeting the asks of the District Councils Network because it is a multifaceted ask to enable us to start to address these issues.

**Councillor Williams:** To add to that briefly, Ministers and the Deputy Prime Minister have a good understanding of the problems that we are facing in terms of the LHA and the short-term rent settlements that we have had. We have seen that movement in this Budget and we have seen a real appetite from Government to continue working with us. The consultation on the five-year rent settlement is really important. So there is some understanding. However, we as councils also understand that we are dealing with an extremely difficult set of decisions and that is why we are really keen to work together to find solutions and to do so nationally.

**Chair:** Moving on now to the quality of temporary recommendation.

Q32 **Joe Powell:** All of us will have constituents who are concerned about the quality of temporary accommodation. I have an open question initially for the panel. How effective are local authorities currently at monitoring the quality of the temporary accommodation that you use?

**Chris Hancock:** We could always be better with that. We do not use bed-and-breakfast accommodation for families and we do not make many out-of-area placements—only small numbers and only in emergency situations—but that comes at the cost that I mentioned earlier. Keeping families within the borough and keeping that accommodation at quality does cost. We also pay an additional amount for the management of those properties when they are within the private sector. That is where we get accountability on the quality, because we are commissioning it and so we follow up on how our money is being spent and what is the standard of the accommodation.

Direct feedback from the residents in the accommodation is key. Families can go to a number of services within Hastings for laundry facilities, communal dinners and so on. We can be part of those conversations, not pushing our way in but being part of those conversations and hearing directly from residents about their concerns.



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**Councillor Williams:** We cannot overestimate the impact that the question of quality has on residents. It can be really detrimental. The question of quality is important and we do not have the perfect answer to it.

In London, most boroughs work together on something called setting standards, sharing information about where we have concerns about particular properties. That helps us to set standards. So there is some good practice, but it is not ideal because we are starting from the point of what our duties are. We need to make sure that we find suitable accommodation but as you heard clearly from the earlier panel, if you are looking for physical and psychological safety, that suitable accommodation does not exist. Work could be done to strengthen that.

Q33 **Joe Powell:** How would your housing officers respond if a family rejected a TA placement because they saw mould or rats or evidence of all the stuff that we see in our inboxes? How would your housing officers deal with that situation?

**Hannah Courtney-Adamson:** If a family complained about the standard of their temporary accommodation, it would be reviewed. They could also ask for a review under housing legislation.

For Rochdale, I am glad to say that we have a good standard of accommodation. We mostly use dispersed, self-contained properties, although I caveat that because we do use bed and breakfasts currently due to the overspill with the demand.

For me, the solution is around creating a framework because there are inconsistencies. Some local authorities do that. You could use the article 4 with your housing standards. I think what is lacking is that there has been no national framework or standards set for temporary accommodation. Local authorities are really seeking out that guidance and direction from the Government to ensure that we have that good standard of accommodation nationally.

Q34 **Mr Dillon:** Chris Hancock, you mentioned how Hastings operates. Is that you, as the head of service, giving that direction, or is that an approved council policy or process for placements in TA that has gone before councillors and had that buy-in?

**Chris Hancock:** Yes, the political steer is that we need to keep people in the borough and we need to, yes, maintain the quality of temporary accommodation. As I said, that comes at a cost and there comes a point when pressures rise, those other options start to be explored and that makes for difficult decisions.

**Mr Dillon:** To declare an interest, I am a unitary councillor.

Q35 **Naushabah Khan:** Hannah has already answered the question that I had, which was to do with having some standards and guidance because I see from my inbox, often not from placements from within the borough,



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that standards are inconsistent. I wanted to understand whether you feel that standards are applied across the board across local authorities or if there is inconsistency, but you have picked that question up.

**Hannah Courtney-Adamson:** I will come in on that as well with what we do. Rochdale Council and the 10 local authorities of Greater Manchester that make up the combined authority have a procurement strategy. We have a temporary accommodation procurement strategy and a temporary accommodation allocation strategy that outline exactly what we are referring to here, what we should be offering for families and single homeless households and the standards. We have a section on standards of accommodation, picking up on some of the health-detriment impact elements as well.

Also, after hearing about housing families and single homeless together earlier, I can reassure you that we keep them separate. Again I must caveat that, because occasionally some bed and breakfasts will accept single homeless households from elsewhere and we cannot necessarily control that environment. However, our commissioned formal temporary accommodation is separate.

Q36 **Joe Powell:** Digging further into the sanctions and accountability for poor standards, Grace, you mentioned the setting standards scheme. It might be useful to understand a bit more whether that is working. Have rogue landlords actually been identified and then blacklisted across councils? Does anyone else want to come in on that question, particularly about the rogue landlords?

**Councillor Williams:** Yes, setting standards enables us to identify rogue landlords and to make sure that we are commissioning better property.

I start from the point of remembering that all councils, no matter what political shade they are, want to do their best for their residents. They want them to be in borough. They want them to have high quality accommodation. You are hearing the caveats because while we all work hard to try to maintain standards, we are at the point where it is not sustainable.

To offer a few solutions, though, we have talked about resources and that is important. It is good to see the Government's work on the Renters Reform Bill because that may offer protections for tenants. It will mean that local authorities will be able to better enforce for private landlords because quite a lot of the sector we are talking about is not just B&Bs and hotels but is private landlords. That is important.

Another thing is discretionary licensing schemes and making them easier. So there are some things we can do to make those standards better.

Q37 **Chair:** Something that came up from the last panel was around inspections. As MPs, we all receive various emails, videos and pictures—and a lot of them will be online—where tenants and families have lost all faith and so they despair. They are having to resort to publicly naming





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and shaming. It should not have to get like that.

Do you feel that councils should be inspecting their properties? Millions in taxpayers' money has been spent on this, yet these properties are not inspected. Do any of your councils carry out regular inspections of where you are placing families?

**Hannah Courtney-Adamson:** Yes, Rochdale Council does that. Our housing standards team does that as standard practice for any new accommodation and it is reviewed every 12 months.

Another thing that we do—again, it is not consistent—is inspect all our bed and breakfasts. Our commercial hotels, if they are fully booked with homeless households, should be registered as an HMO and should be licensed. Local authorities have the enforcement powers to enforce that. Rochdale Council does that. Our bed and breakfasts, albeit they still look like commercial bed and breakfasts, are registered HMOs and are licensed, which comes with conditions. If they breach the conditions, we can prosecute. However, it is not consistent. We have done that because it is a political stay and a corporate stay and it is the right thing to do. However, it is not consistent and that is why you see a high volume of complaints.

**Councillor Dalton:** We also carry out inspections and will choose not to use certain accommodation, which we know that other councils then may be forced to use.

One challenge that we probably all recognise is that with the rapid number of placements we have to make, along with the reduced environmental health capacity that many councils have, it is a real struggle at times. We are also in a situation where we have the least powers to address the worst temporary accommodation situations. Again, a national TA quality framework would really help us to address some of the issues that the Chair has mentioned.

None of us wants to place residents or children in poor accommodation, but sometimes the choice genuinely could be between their being on the street or having a roof over their head. It may not be the best roof and it is not a roof we are happy with, but it is a difficult choice. Our teams have to make this choice every day. It is incredibly difficult for the people working in housing support. They have to make tough choices every day to be able to provide some accommodation.

**Hannah Courtney-Adamson:** Another issue is to do with the Home Office. The accommodation providers for asylum dispersal accommodation are exempt from some of these rules. Again, rogue landlords say, "Sorry, we do not want you because the accommodation provider will offer 20% more." So, we are in direct competition. I appreciate that is another area, but that is a lack of joined-up national policy—the Home Office and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government not being joined up with the policy in how they deliver



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accommodation. Standards around that need to be looked at. If we are going to create a temporary accommodation framework, it needs to be done alongside asylum dispersal.

**Chair:** We will have to pick up pace a bit. Maybe you can hold on to that while we go on to B&B accommodation.

Q38 **Sarah Smith:** What can local authorities do to minimise the number of families being placed in B&B accommodation and particularly the number that are placed for extended periods?

**Chris Hancock:** We talked in the earlier panel about prevention. The earlier that we know that somebody is threatened with homelessness, the more time we have to try to come up with another option to try to avoid that happening and that move into bed and breakfast. We would only ever need that emergency accommodation if we did not have that foresight of somebody coming in and it was just that approach on the day. So, prevention and also having the means to provide an alternative form of accommodation, being able to find something at local housing allowance rate in the private rental sector or, as I mentioned earlier, the properties that we are buying up that we can offer as temporary accommodation directly—that will be the main way that we are avoiding the need for any emergency accommodation.

**Councillor Williams:** I will add to that. Remember that figure. At the moment, London boroughs spend 75% of their budget on temporary accommodation. That squeeze on resources is really important. How do we address that? Seeing that extra money in the Budget for the prevention of homelessness is important, but we have to put that alongside the solution to the ultimate problem, which is building more affordable homes. We need to do both those things.

Also—there was a focus on this in the first session—we need to work with families that we see going into debt and being evicted. Recently, we have seen a high number of private landlords leaving the market for a combination of reasons, which we have touched on. We need to work with those families when there is an eviction. The current system means that local authorities can only help a family on the day that they become homeless. That is the statutory duty. Reforming that and increasing resources for prevention are important.

Q39 **Lewis Cocking:** May I clarify something? You said that 75% of your budget is spent on temporary accommodation. Is that 75% of the whole council budget? That cannot be true.

**Councillor Williams:** Not my budget, but London councils' budgets. Some 75% of all local authority spending on homelessness is spent on TA.

**Lewis Cocking:** What about adult and children's social care—



**Councillor Williams:** Sorry, 75% of our housing budget. I underline that at the moment we are in a situation where temporary accommodation has become the No. 1 pressure for London councils, over and above adult and children's social care. We are at the stage now where a number of boroughs are facing bankruptcy on this one issue.

Q40 **Sarah Smith:** I could see some different views potentially at the other end of the panel on the previous question, but I am glad that you mentioned that issue because I have certainly experienced it myself in casework where, yes, basically families do not get the support until they are evicted. I am getting the perspective that maybe that is not how all councils operate. I would be interested to bring other panel members in on that.

**Hannah Courtney-Adamson:** The legal duty is to prevent within 56 days of homelessness. We should be working with somebody up to 56 days before they are homeless and then it is the relief. However, because of the sheer volume and because local authorities are inundated and have high, unsafe caseloads, they are probably saying, "Sit tight. We will work with you when you are at the acute crisis," when what we should be doing is going upstream.

We are piloting working with our early help services for teens and children. We have what you probably know as Sure Start centres—our family hubs. We are upskilling all our family workers with housing knowledge so that, if people are coming in and starting to talk about housing or getting into debt or rent arrears, we can work with them at an earlier stage as opposed to when they are hitting a crisis.

Through a housing lens, the housing needs assessment through the homelessness system does not account for the health and educational needs of a child or the family as a whole. Again, that could probably be reviewed through the housing legislation—when you are assessed, that prevention element, how do we take the whole household into account through an integrated model as opposed to having those siloes? I guess that is the way funding works as well.

Lastly, picking up on the deficit, we have a £2 million deficit due to the loss of the bed and breakfast subsidy. We have to find that out of corporate funding, but fundamentally funds are coming out of children's and adult care budgets to offset that deficit. That is the impact. Equally, homelessness is a symptom of the wider system failing, isn't it?

Q41 **Sarah Smith:** We have slightly covered this question, but are the current financial penalties for exceeding the six-week rule an effective sanction to improve temporary accommodation provision or are there other levers that could be implemented to try and tackle that?

**Councillor Dalton:** I think the financial penalties are counterproductive for district councils, which are already facing, on average, shortfalls of £1 million a year. It simply diverts money away from the prevention and



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support services that the panel has already mentioned. There is no lack of motivation to move families on. The problem is genuinely a lack of suitable available accommodation, coupled with the rising demand.

A more constructive approach that the District Councils Network suggests is that we provide resources that develop alternative accommodation options—we have mentioned capital funding—which would then help councils to build their own temporary accommodation stock that meets the needs in the longer term and also provides the children who are in this situation with a settled place to be, somewhere that they can call home.

**Chair:** Moving on now to out-of-borough and out-of-area placements.

Q42 **Naushabah Khan:** This question has already been raised and some conversation about why the pressures exist across London and the south-east has already happened. Thank you for that.

I want to do a bit of a follow up because I have seen some freedom of information data that suggests that some boroughs are sending close to about 3,000 households out of borough. It would be helpful to understand if you feel that the communication between boroughs is sufficient and whether you feel that particularly vulnerable families that have been placed outside of their home borough are getting support and that enough is work done to ensure—and receive assurance about it—that there are services in place to support them in the area they are moved to, particularly for the children. It would be helpful to understand that.

**Hannah Courtney-Adamson:** Legally, a local authority should notify the host authority through a section 208. However, it is fair to say local authorities do not do that consistently and it is not regulated. Compliance not measured. We do not submit that information to central Government with our data and so the Government are not measuring us on that. To answer your question, in short, no. More needs to be done on that.

Section 208 does not inform on education, children or health; it does not inform the wider system. If there are safeguarding, child protection or unmet support needs, the host authority will not know until that family or individual hits the front door of, for example, a hospital, GP or school. A lot more can come through an out-of-borough protocol framework. You could regulate with legislation.

The 10 local authorities of Greater Manchester are signed up to an out-of-borough protocol, which we have just reviewed as the 10 collectively, to ensure that although we do place out of borough but within the Greater Manchester region, we do not go further. However, in the north we receive a lot of placements from the southern local authorities because we are a cheaper stock area and so it is far cheaper and more cost-effective to send people to us. However, I am not sure that is value for money given the impact on the wider system in the long term.



**Councillor Dalton:** Certain things would help. A mandatory notification system would help us to ensure that councils are alerted when families are placed in their areas by other authorities. That does not currently happen. Standardised protocols for cross-boundary placements would also help us to manage moves. Better data sharing between councils around available accommodation and support services would really help. Being able to provide more wraparound support by having better and earlier notification and information would make a massive difference.

**Chair:** Moving on swiftly now to look at wraparound support.

Q43 **Chris Curtis:** What wider support services should local authorities provide for residents while they are living in temporary accommodation?

**Councillor Williams:** That is a good question. Speaking for London councils, while a wide variety of practice is going on, we have seen some really good practice. For example, in our borough we have just commissioned some new accommodation that will be refitted to have standalone kitchens for every room, which will make a big difference for us. Using the accommodation we have but making sure that it is suitable is really important.

As for support services, we need to recognise that we have responsibility for helping with things like education, welfare and providing cooking facilities and laundry facilities. Some good practice is going on in some boroughs. How we make it standard and how we make sure that there is resource for the wraparound support would make a big difference.

Q44 **Chris Curtis:** Does anybody have any thoughts to add on schools and best practice? What are the limitations to ensuring best practice, ensuring that children have the support they need in schools and ensuring that children can get to schools? What challenges are faced there? What works? Why is everyone not doing what works?

**Hannah Courtney-Adamson:** Two things: the first is financial pressure. Local authorities do not have the resources to invest in the necessary services. Teachers are not trained in the wider area of homelessness and housing. Success ranges according to the demographics of a school and socio-economic pockets. In a deprived area, perhaps a school—if it has pastoral teams—may be more equipped to deal with families that are experiencing homelessness. That is inconsistent.

For me, this probably goes back to the early health assessments around how we ensure that we have integrated assessments looking at the whole family and the child. People are just a number and we have dehumanised the system. We need to bring back a person-centred approach, something that we are piloting in Rochdale, but it is not standardised. We need to get to that granular detail around what we need to do to be able to make that best practice across the board.

Q45 **Chris Curtis:** Most of the schools I seem to be dealing with, particularly secondary schools, are academies. As someone who works in a local



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council, how do you find working with them? Is it a mixed bag? Do you find that some are supportive? Do you find some groups do not want to engage on this?

**Hannah Courtney-Adamson:** Again, it is inconsistent around the academies and that has definitely contributed to the situation. They have their own budgets. However, locally, we have better engagement with our academy schools than with our public schools. That again goes down to different resources and the pressures. Quite often, it depends on an officer having professional curiosity as opposed to saying, "This is the framework that we follow," in that integrated approach. I do not know if that answers your question.

**Councillor Williams:** Can I add one thing? I think it is about leadership, not about structure. In London and in our borough, school leaders, regardless of whether they are academies or maintained schools, should see this as their business, as should the NHS. There it is about local authority leadership saying, "This is a safeguarding issue that we need to work on together."

Take Wandsworth in particular—I want to highlight their best practice. Wandsworth has a housing multi-agency safeguarding health officer who works with schools. He talks to schools about housing issues and helps signpost to support. So there are real models out there and they are about partnership and making sure that we all take responsibility together.

Q46 **Joe Powell:** I know a lot of families are desperate to maintain local links. Then they have these long commutes to school, then absenteeism and so on. I was linking it to a previous discussion we had about being honest about the time people might be spending. Are you encouraging your housing officers to have those frank conversations so that people can make better decisions?

**Chris Hancock:** The figures are there and we are able to show people how long the wait will be for certain sizes of properties, right down to certain streets and locations. If people say, "I need to be living in this area," we can show, "The last time a property came up here, this was the amount of time that somebody who was successful waited for it."

They are challenging conversations because you are not giving good news because the wait times will be considerable, but the information is available. It also then prompts other wider conversations. "If that wait is not palatable or not acceptable, can we help you to look at the private rented sector? Can we look at something different as an option?" Yes, we do have those very frank conversations. They do help in the prevention context as well. Awareness of the reality of how the system works and how long waits are, means that people then consider other options.

Q47 **Sarah Smith:** I have a slightly broader question. We have heard a lot about some best-practice examples this morning. You made the point



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that this problem is equally shared across councils of all different political colours and so on, but clearly some do this better than others. I am interested in what we think the drivers are within the councils and the local authorities that are not performing well and where higher numbers are going out of area, probably having a worse impact on these children and families. What are the potential drivers within those local authorities that are not working at the level that maybe some of the panel councillors represent?

**Councillor Williams:** I will start with resources. If you look at the boroughs where we see higher numbers of people having to leave the capital and higher numbers in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, which are two really important indicators, you will see that it is about the level of temporary accommodation demand in those areas. However, it is not only about that. It is about leadership. It is about having a joined-up approach, which is why I think we are all heartened to see the homelessness strategy and taskforce address that. Those are the three big things for me.

**Councillor Dalton:** I also would add that historically, homelessness has been seen very much as a London or a metropolitan issue. Given the rapid increase in the number of people presenting as homeless, a lot of councils have not been able to pivot fast enough. A lot of councils have presumed that at some point numbers will go back down, but they have not. Numbers are increasing year on year on year, and the complexity with it. You have families, but then you have people with single complex needs. The amount of accommodation available, finding it and having a strategy around it—for some councils it is a tsunami that they are now having to get to grips with.

It is not only that. I was talking to our housing support manager the other day. They have spent 30 years doing this; they have never seen it like this. Only recently, an expectant mother lost her child and now blames the council for the temporary accommodation and her miscarriage. That puts a huge amount of pressure on employees—on individuals—to come to work and do that job every day, when they have always wanted only to do the best for people.

The impact on the families involved is actually unquantifiable. We can quantify it for councils in terms of cost and spend, but I think we will also have to start to quantify the impact on our teams of delivering services to support these families.

**Chair:** We have had a meaningful and insightful conversation. The reality is that nothing we have discussed this morning is new. We can look back at the 2019 report from the Children's Commissioner, in which she plainly said that children were having to grow up in simply inappropriate places. My worry is that the situation continues to get worse, if not better, and it is a case of how we work with local authorities on the level of accommodation and the state of accommodation. Sometimes it is not just about funding but about that wraparound support for families. We are



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actively placing young people in accommodation that is not suitable, so standards and the regulations need to be looked at. These are all issues that we will continue to discuss, especially with the Secretary of State and her Ministers, to make sure we get this right, so that we do not fail a generation of young people.

Thank you very much for coming to give evidence to us this morning.