

Written evidence submitted by The Shared Health Foundation (TH0002)

Inquiry: Tackling homelessness

This evidence is put forward by the Shared Health Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation from Greater Manchester that focuses on alleviating the impacts of Temporary Accommodation on children and families. As an organisation that is grounded in the experiences of families in TA as well as working with local and national politicians on the issue, Shared Health has a well-evidence perspective to offer the Committee.

A. Executive summary

This evidence highlights the extent of family homelessness and the scale of children living in Temporary Accommodation (TA) in England. While national strategies are clear regarding rough sleeping for single adults, there has been little focus on children and families in TA and the effects this has on them.

A.1. The number of households living in temporary accommodation in England has accelerated from 77,000 in 2017 to 117,500 in 2024¹. This poses an unsustainable challenge for councils and the families placed into this accommodation.

A.2. The causes of homelessness for families extend beyond poverty and are, in some cases, not predictable.

A.3. The costs to councils and families are untenable. Both are exposed to fiscal exploitation from rogue landlords.

A.4. There are gaps in national data regarding temporary accommodation, resulting in difficulties for the Department to respond.

A.5. National strategies must include all forms of homelessness, including the reliance on temporary accommodation.

A.6. National approaches to homelessness are not preventative measures. Rather they constitute crisis management.

A.7. Most protections for homeless households are within the Homelessness Code of Guidance, yet the enforceability of these provisions is difficult because of the nature of the framework as guidance.

¹GOV.UK (2024) 'Statutory homelessness in England: January to March 2024' Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statutory-homelessness-in-england-january-to-march-2024>.

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B. The Government's understanding of the extent, causes and costs of homelessness

B.1. Extent of Family Homelessness

Between 2017 and 2024, the number of children living in TA nationally has increased by over 30,000. The extensive need for TA has caused a considerable overlap between Emergency Accommodation (EA), such as B&Bs and hotels, and TA. As a result of a deficiency in stocks of TA, the six-week limit on stays in EA for families under the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2003 are often overlooked. This has a detrimental effect on the wellbeing of these families. The North-West of England saw a 384% increase in the number of families with children placed in EA between 2014–2019². In Greater Manchester alone, there has been a 79% increase in the number of children in TA in the last 4 years³.

B.2. Causes of Family Homelessness

A family can become homeless for many reasons. The most common are as a result of fleeing domestic violence, family breakdowns, and receiving a Section 21 eviction. The Right to Buy scheme has contributed to the lack of social housing available for families, combined with soaring rents in the private rented sector and a reduction in access to the state welfare system, lead to increasing levels of homelessness. Furthermore, these effects have been exacerbated since the COVID-19 pandemic and the impacts of the Cost-of-Living Crisis that are still pertinent. Debt can be a contributing factor towards a family becoming homeless and is also a significant reason as to why families remain trapped in the system. Until debt is cleared, families remain unable to rent privately, combined with the lack of social housing, results in extended stays in TA.

² Brickell, K. and Nowicki, M. (2023) *The debt trap: Women's stories of navigating family homelessness and temporary accommodation in Greater Manchester*. Available at: <https://sharedhealthfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/The-Debt-Trap.pdf>.

³ Greater Manchester Combined Authority (2024) *Temporary Accommodation: Value for Money in Greater Manchester*. Available at: <https://democracy.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=33808#:~:text=Current%20Temporary%20Accommodation%20Landscape%20in%20GM&text=Over%20the%20past%20four%20years,the%20same%20period%20was%2026%25>.

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B.3. Costs to Councils

Councils across Greater Manchester are spending at least £75 million per year on TA yet have only been able to recover 42% of this leading to an annual net loss of £43 million⁴. Local Housing Allowance rates have not increased with inflation, and the cost of nightly paid accommodation and contracts with private landlords are becoming an increasing financial burden for councils. Furthermore, some landlords are terminating regular contracts within the private rented sector and letting out their properties to councils to be used as TA for a much higher rate. Despite these high costs, the quality and standards of TA are not value for money. They do not provide an adequate living space for families, particularly as a large proportion of families in TA have someone with complex needs⁵. The human cost of TA is significant, with risks to the mental and physical health of parents and children, as well as safeguarding problems. The sexual harassment and assault of children in TA that mix single vulnerable adults and families is a serious consequence of this.

B.4. Costs to Families

Additionally, the cost of living in TA for families is extensive. Often being placed far away from support networks or their school, parents are spending huge amounts of money on travel. With this, is the cost of food. TA such as B&Bs and hotels do not have cooking facilities and some of those that do, do not have adequate facilities. This leads to a reliance for parents on takeaways and nutrient-lacking foods. Families placed in hotels may experience being moved to “food deserts”, in which there is a lack of supermarkets in the local area⁶. This contributes towards the reliance on expensive and unhealthy alternatives. Families have also reported spending significant amounts of money on

⁴ Greater Manchester Combined Authority (2024) ‘Greater Manchester launches pioneering Housing First Unit as data shows cost of not tackling the housing crisis.’ Available at: <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/news/greater-manchester-launches-pioneering-housing-first-unit-as-new-data-shows-true-cost-of-not-tackling-the-housing-crisis#:~:text=Each%20year%2C%20an%20estimated%20%2A3,temporary%20accommodation%20across%20Greater%20Manchester>.

⁵ Wilkins, M., Gray, T. (2024) ‘Temporary accommodation in England: is it value for money?’ *Centre for Homelessness Impact*. Available at: https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/646dd81ef095aa13072c44e0/66eae69bc7a7224736d2b811_CHI-Temporary-Accommodation-Value-for-Money-England_FINAL.pdf.

⁶ Brickell and Nowicki (2023), p. 25.

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cleaning supplies to improve the unsanitary conditions of TA for their children⁷. Particularly in accommodation with shared facilities, the cleanliness is lacking, and parents have to take on the financial burden of cleaning to ensure the health of their children is not affected.

***Recommendations:** Rogue landlords should be targeted in relation to letting their properties out to councils for temporary accommodation at a much higher rate. Furthermore, the six-week limit for homeless families in emergency accommodation must be fully enforced.*

C. Delivery of system leadership on homelessness by the Department

C.1. Lack of data collection

The Centre for Homelessness Impact (CHI) highlights deficiencies in data collection to evidence the problems with the reliance on TA for the homeless⁸. This provides a barrier for the Department to effectively mitigate the situation for households in TA, as well as for local authorities. Also notable, is that the Department does not collect data that shows where children are placed in TA when they are moved out of area with their family. This minimises the Department's ability to create a strategy that could better support these children.

C.2. Crisis management

Aside from plans to build more houses, national prevention strategies for all forms of homelessness remain limited. While the introduction of the Renters' Rights Bill will end Section 21 evictions, the reliance on TA will continue while houses are being built. The emphasis on house building is also not explicit as to how much of this will be social housing. Such a reliance on TA is a result of the need for crisis management caused by a lack of previous governance to generate preventative measures for the households affected by homelessness as a temporary solution. This is unsustainable as the numbers of homeless households are increasing extensively. As raised in a meeting with the All Party Parliamentary Group for Households in Temporary Accommodation (APPG for TA),

⁷ Brickell and Nowicki (2023).

⁸ Wilkins and Gray (2024).

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families facing homelessness are told by local authorities to wait until their eviction date before being provided with emergency support because of a lack of viable preventative measures to be taken.

C.3. Lack of a national strategy for TA

Also identified by the CHI is the lack of a national strategy for specifically tackling issues with TA⁹. It is important that all forms of homelessness are addressed by the Government, however there must be more focus on national approaches for mitigating the TA crisis. As an organisation that works to alleviate the impacts that living in TA has on families, we are waiting for the Department's strategy to be confirmed under the leadership of the Homelessness Minister, Rushanara Ali MP. She has taken evidence from the Shared Health Foundation, however we are yet to see what the taskforce and strategy will include.

C.4. The Homelessness Code of Guidance and enforcement

The Homelessness Code of Guidance, as drafted by the Department, provides a framework that authorities should follow, however the nature of this as guidance limits the enforcement of its provisions. An example of this is the recent amendment that the APPG for TA campaigned for regarding the provision of cots in hotels and B&Bs for children under the age of 2. Despite it being advised in order to prevent further deaths to infants in EA and TA, it is not fully enforceable as it is not a legal requirement for local authorities. The provisions in the Code provide a significant level of protection for homeless families, yet the advisory nature of it means that the binding protections for them are restricted. This ensures that vulnerable families in TA are left without legal protections that affect their safety and wellbeing.

Recommendation: *Make sure that national strategies provide legal protections for households in temporary accommodation. Furthermore, these strategies should include preventative measures, as well as reactions to crises.*

⁹ Wilkins and Gray (2024).

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