

REPORT

NOWHERE FAST

THE JOURNEY IN AND OUT OF UNSUPPORTED TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

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CONTENTS

Summary	3
Key recommendations	3
Other recommendations	4
Introduction	5
The unsupported temporary accommodation cycle.....	6
1. Finding a bed.....	8
2. Moving in and the first few weeks.....	12
Helping people get settled	13
3. Living in unsupported temporary accommodation	15
The condition of the accommodation	15
Issues with the landlord or management	18
Issues with other tenants	20
Poverty	22
4. Moving out or eviction.....	24
The process of leaving	25
5. Conclusion.....	28
References	29

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SUMMARY

Too many single homeless households do not get full state support to find a permanent place to live. The absence of housing options during times of personal crisis means that many single homeless adults are driven towards the most dreadful corners of the English housing market, forced to live in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, private hostels and short-stay houses in multiple occupation (hereafter collectively 'unsupported temporary accommodation'). The physical and social conditions in these dwellings are often appalling. There is limited statutory control over who is placed or directed to the accommodation, and enforcement activity on the conditions of dwellings and quality of the management is often found wanting.

Part of the problem is that this is a group of hidden homeless households, and their plight and housing largely go unseen and undocumented. As a result there are no accurate estimates of the number of single homeless households living in B&Bs or good records of the number of bedspaces this sector provides. Previous estimates have suggested the problem is considerable: for instance, research by Shelter suggests that single homeless use of private B&Bs and hostels is 5–10 times greater than is reported in quarterly government data (see Credland 2004, Crisis 2006).

The practical and policy interventions in this report are structured around the four stages of a typical stay, with a view to providing support at each stage and breaking the cycle many people face as they move into, out of and back into unsupported temporary accommodation. We seek to repair the 'control deficit' that many tenants feel when they move into unsupported temporary accommodation, and also to build their experiences into a positive 'feedback loop' between tenants and local actors.

Rather than wait for the Westminster government to turn their attention to this problem, we propose local but system-wide changes designed to empower tenants to have more control over their own journey, and to have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of the people who live in unsupported temporary accommodation.

Key recommendations

- 1. New formal, local bodies – temporary accommodation boards – should be established to bring together the activities of neighbouring housing authorities, public services and the homelessness sector.** Partners should be mobilised to gather, maintain and monitor information about local bedspaces and the individuals living in them, to inform referrals and signposting towards appropriate accommodation.
- 2. Temporary accommodation boards should create and maintain live 'greenlists' of acceptable local bedspaces and 'exclusion lists' of unacceptable bedspaces using the data they gather and aggregate.** Tenants should be offered detailed information about their options, while exclusion lists would be used primarily to stop tenants flowing into the worst-quality properties, and to incentivise landlords to make improvements.
- 3. A clear set of standards should be developed for the unsupported temporary accommodation submarket,** and local authority housing teams should make full use of the new powers provided by the Housing and Planning Bill to aggressively target the temporary accommodation sector and improve or close down the poorest properties. **Temporary accommodation boards should be charged with developing a single tenancy agreement for local**

bedspaces, setting out the rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords, details of services and service charges, and a named point of contact for tenants in the event that issues arise at the property. And **tenants should be supported to make complaints**, including by allowing them to reclaim, via rent repayment orders, a proportion of the housing benefit previously paid to their landlord.

4. **Arrangements should be put in place to ensure that proper placement and in-tenancy support exists to help individuals manage their stay and to prevent their cycling in and out of unsupported temporary accommodation.** This should include ‘warm handovers’, where the person referring the individual goes with the tenant to check the condition of their new home and provide support with paperwork and settling in.

Other recommendations

In the long term, **each tenant should be supported by a designated key worker, to develop a plan for moving on to a secure tenancy rental or supported accommodation.** These efforts must be underpinned by local mechanisms, such as a local authority PRS access scheme.

Coordinating the actions of different groups at a local level will impose limited costs on services that are already fulfilling their existing functions and responsibilities. However, **in order to finance ongoing enforcement activity, local authorities should be given access to the funds generated from new provisions in the Housing and Planning Bill to allow authorities to demand rent repayment orders and fixed penalty notices from landlords who fail to meet the standards required.**

INTRODUCTION

This is the second phase of a three-year project on the lives of homeless people living in what we describe as unsupported temporary accommodation – homeless households with limited access to local authority support, living in private short-stay accommodation such as private hostels, guest houses, B&Bs and houses in multiple occupation (HMOs). These tenants will typically have neither a permanent tenancy status nor any structured support plan to move them into settled accommodation.

Government data reports that there were 5,910 households placed in B&B accommodation by local authorities in Q3 2015 (DCLG 2015c). There is, however, reason to believe that the number living in these circumstances is far higher. A report published in 1997 by Shelter estimated that there were 72,550 private tenants (self-referred or referred by another agency/authority) living in B&B accommodation, which is nearly 10 times the government’s count of local authority placements, which stood at 7,660 (Carter 1997). Similarly, in 2008, New Philanthropy Capital published a report stating that approximately 260,000 people in England were living on the streets or in temporary accommodation, far above official estimates (Blake et al 2008).

Very little research has been done on the lives of these ‘hidden homeless’ and their paths into and out of these types of accommodation. The first stage of our research culminated in an IPPR report on life in unsupported temporary accommodation, *Not home* (Rose and Davies 2014). This report set out the context for the project, provided detail about the people who are participating in our research and about the complexities of the system, and set out why it is so vital to address the problems and impacts of unsupported temporary accommodation.¹

The *Not home* report highlighted a number of important findings:

- Unsupported temporary accommodation is housing a significant and unaccounted-for proportion of the national homeless population. Many tenants were found to be extremely vulnerable and living in conditions deemed unfit for anyone else.
- These tenants are receiving only the weakest protection – or no protection at all – from the existing homelessness ‘safety net’. They are frequently offered no statutory temporary or other accommodation,² and no further support from statutory homeless services. There is no plan to support these people during their move into unsupported temporary accommodation, during their stay, or when they come to move out.
- Monitoring of where these tenants end up living, with whom and for how long is often very limited. This important data is fragmented, with the few statistics that

1 To provide new and vivid qualitative evidence on life in unsupported temporary accommodation, this project is monitoring the lives of a number of people living in these conditions. Participants have been engaged via Justlife, an organisation offering services to support single homeless people living in unsupported temporary accommodation. Through one-to-one interviews, focus groups and encouraging participants to write daily journals, the project is recording their experiences and the impact that their living situations have on their health and wellbeing.

To date, 45 tenants of unsupported temporary accommodation have participated in the research, including taking part in in-depth interviews. Further tenants have been consulted through focus groups. They live in two separate locations in England, one in the north west and one in the south east.

2 Statutory temporary accommodation includes local authority or housing association-run units. Increasingly, however, local authorities are placing households in other accommodation: private rented sector accommodation and private B&Bs.

currently aid in identifying the scale of the problem dispersed across a range of government and non-governmental databases.

- Tenants' health, wellbeing, relationships and finances are seen to significantly deteriorate during their stay in unsupported temporary accommodation, frequently because of dire living conditions, stresses related to unsecure tenure, and chaotic social environments.

Building on this first phase, research in our second year has sought to identify what can be done in practical terms to improve the situation for these households at the local level. In this report, therefore, we provide an illustration of the typical experience of those who have participated in our research, and provide examples of how shifts to local authority policy, and local agency and service action, might help to increase the number and effectiveness of interventions into the lives of unsupported temporary accommodation residents. It is structured around a tenant's typical journey – or cycle – through unsupported temporary accommodation.

The unsupported temporary accommodation cycle

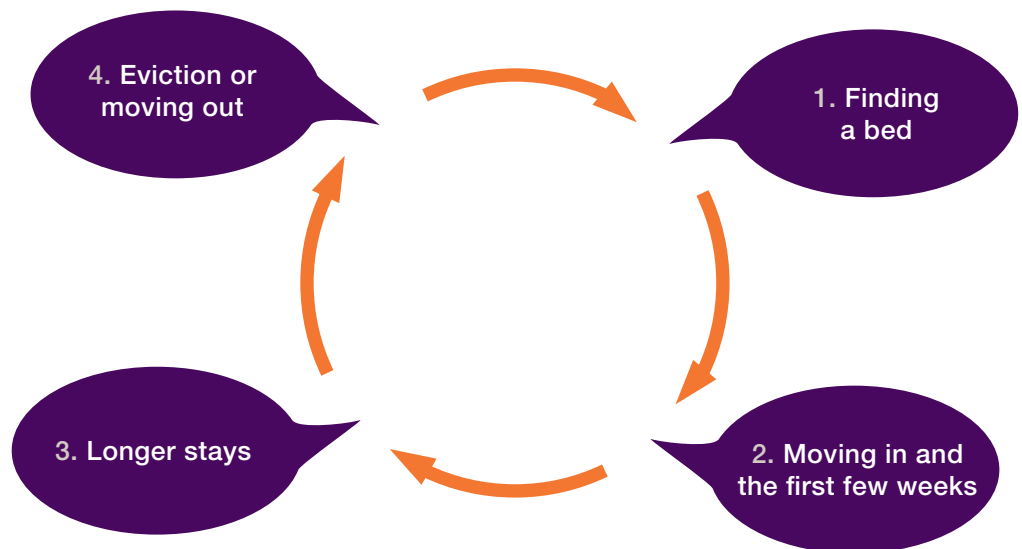
This report traces the 'common journey' of a single homeless adult entering and moving through unsupported temporary accommodation. Of course, every individual will have a unique path into and experience of unsupported temporary accommodation, so this format is merely a useful way of presenting the shared issues and experiences of our research participants.

The stages are as follows:

1. Finding a bed
2. Moving in and the first few weeks
3. Living in unsupported temporary accommodation
4. Moving out or eviction

Figure 1

A typical journey: the unsupported temporary accommodation cycle



The tenant journey is important because it highlights how little control residents have over their own living conditions and housing outcomes at critical moments. Participants in our research regularly raise concerns about a lack of control over their circumstances – 36 out of 45 people report that they feel ‘out of control’. This loss of agency has an effect in many areas of tenants’ lives: in the housing market, in the homelessness and social security systems, in the accommodation itself, and individually, in terms of psychological wellbeing and self-control.

This problem and its impacts have been identified in previous research too. In 2004, Shelter released a report which looked at some of the specific detrimental effects of living in council-sanctioned temporary accommodation (Credland 2004). They found that it contributed to the:

‘development of mental health problems, such as depression, and physical health problems resulting from housing conditions ... existing physical and mental health problems had worsened, often as a result of them having no control over their circumstances and no knowledge of what was going to happen to them, or when.’

Credland 2004

The policy and practice recommendations of this report, therefore, focus on giving tenants more control over this often chaotic process. Overall, the aim is to enable tenants and potential tenants to have more influence, wherever possible, over their own journey in and out of this type of accommodation.

1.

FINDING A BED

Low-income households face considerable barriers in the mainstream housing market. Limits to local housing allowance mean low-income groups are restricted to the cheapest 30 per cent of rental properties. And even within this narrow set of options, the pool of accommodation is further constrained by landlords who discriminate against housing benefit claimants. One recent survey conducted for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that only 42 per cent of private landlords would be willing to let to housing benefit tenants, 28 per cent to unemployed housing benefit claimants, and just 23 per cent to local authority housing benefit referrals (Clarke et al 2015).

Single homeless households find it especially difficult to find somewhere to stay after becoming homeless, not least because most will have been turned away from local authority support for not having overcome the criteria – the ‘homeless hurdles’ – that would qualify them for rehousing through the homelessness system. The Crisis report *Turned Away* illustrated the difficulties single homeless households face by sending ‘mystery shoppers’ with experience of homelessness to present at local authorities with typical homeless situations.

‘In a significant number of visits (29) mystery shoppers did not receive an assessment and were not given the opportunity to make a homelessness application ... On a number of occasions, mystery shoppers – some of whom played very vulnerable characters – were denied any type of help until they could prove that they were homeless and eligible for assistance, whilst the local authorities in question made no effort to make inquiries themselves or provide temporary accommodation in the interim.’

Dobie et al 2014

Single homeless people’s housing options are limited. Social rented housing may be an option but is not usually available quickly, and this sector raises many other barriers to single people experiencing homelessness, including previous rent arrears, perhaps a history of unacceptable behaviour in previous tenancies, and a shortage of one-bedroom accommodation (and the ‘bedroom tax’ – or ‘the removal of the spare room subsidy’ – means that single adults cannot afford to underoccupy larger social rented accommodation where it is available).

In theory, the private rented sector (PRS) provides another option, but many people who experience homelessness do not have the funds to pay a deposit or rent in advance, and may find it difficult to compete with other would-be tenants for the limited number of more affordable PRS properties.

This predicament is also complicated by the fact that many among this group experience severe and multiple disadvantage, including drug and alcohol misuse, mental health issues and offending behaviour (see Fisher 2015).

This severely constrained set of housing options means that, in many cases, all that is available at the crucial moment of need is insecure, low-quality accommodation. The participants in our study followed different paths into this type of housing. Prior to becoming homeless:

- seven had been living in settled accommodation and were evicted from their properties due to rent arrears

- 13 were homeless ‘on the street’
- four were living in homeless support hostels
- eight were discharged from hospital into unsupported temporary accommodation
- four were placed directly from prison
- nine had been sofa-surfing.

How they found their way into unsupported temporary accommodation also differed. Of the 45 tenants interviewed:

- 20 were referred or signposted by the local authority
- 16 self-referred³
- four were signposted or referred by a voluntary or community organisation
- three were placed directly from prison
- two were placed by the police.

Our research has also involved discussions with stakeholders, providers and referring organisations working with this group. These discussions have highlighted how councils are often limited in their ability to divert tenants away from the worst temporary accommodation properties. For instance, one local authority had a policy of not directing households to a particular group of properties only to find that the neighbouring authority was sending people across the boundary to fill them. At present, there is no way of knowing or controlling which agencies or organisations are directing people to unsupported temporary accommodation.

‘I already knew about the place and I told my probation officer, “whatever you do, do not get me that B&B”. And what did she do? She got me that B&B.’

This highlights how the problem of referrals is not one for local authorities alone, but for police, prisons, and advice and housing charities too.

As a further complication, different local authorities take different approaches to placing or signposting individuals into unsupported temporary accommodation. This is compounded by the so-called ‘worker lottery’: the information or guidance that an individual receives can vary even within the same local authority or service depending on who they speak to, which can lead to distrust.

‘They gate-keep massively in the council. They never volunteer information; you have to drag it out of them. It is not like they are there to empower you.’

Many participants felt the local authority should have provided more information about how long they were likely to stay in this accommodation, or about the time it might take to navigate the housing system, such as how long referrals might take to process or their position in the queue for rehousing.

‘I think I would have liked the council to be honest with me about roughly how long I would spend in temporary accommodation. I just find they have been really dishonest and paid lip service to my questions until I went into the council and actually said, “can you just cut the BS – how long am I going to be there?” And he said, “well, 14–15 months” – and that was just so far removed from the three months that I was led to believe I would be there.’

‘Had I known what it was like, I would have preferred to sleep on the street ... but as soon as you do that you have made yourself intentionally homeless, so you have to choose to stay there.’

³ Except where individuals were placed by an organisation, most felt they had limited or no options other than to seek a bed in unsupported temporary accommodation.

There are a number of changes that should be made by local authorities and other agencies to inform, standardise and coordinate local signposting of tenants, which stop short of wholesale reform to bring single homeless households into the statutory homelessness safety net.

Recommendation 1: Establish temporary accommodation boards

Local authority homelessness teams should lead in establishing temporary accommodation boards: formal joint-working arrangements with police, fire, health, environmental health, probation and prison services, local homeless charities, registered social landlords and neighboring local authorities. First and foremost, boards should drive a process of gathering and sharing detailed information about local bedspaces and their residents.

Temporary accommodation boards

Temporary accommodation boards are **formal joint-working arrangements across a combined authority area, coordinated by a lead local authority officer responsible for homelessness, and bringing together police, fire, health, environmental health, probation and prison services, local homeless charities, registered social landlords and neighboring local authorities.** Current tenants of unsupported temporary accommodation should also have a rotating representative on these boards.

Many of these organisations already work together successfully across a range of policy areas, but not typically on single-person homelessness specifically. Bringing these separate actors together into temporary accommodation boards would aggregate many of the functions they currently perform separately into a single body focussed on tackling issues in unsupported temporary accommodation in the local area.

The main objectives of these boards should be to gather up-to-date information on known local bedspaces and tenants, to improve information sharing and dissemination, and to drive improvements in support and conditions in local accommodation. We recommend that they should meet quarterly and work towards annual objectives.

Much of a temporary accommodation board's actual work would be to coordinate the tasks that are already being undertaken by the individual organisations that are its constituent parts.

Additional funding would be required to achieve basic ongoing data-gathering and coordination objectives. Therefore, temporary accommodation boards should be financed using the new instruments in the Housing and Planning Bill that allow local authority housing enforcement teams to demand rent repayment orders and fixed penalty notices from landlords who fail to meet statutory housing and management standards. These fines should be used to cover the costs of enforcement activity and data collection in the temporary accommodation segment of the local housing market, of which unsupported temporary accommodation is a part.

Recommendation 2: Improve information gathering and sharing

Information gathered and held by temporary accommodation boards should be regularly updated and made accessible to all board member organisations.

This should include at least:

- the landlord's and/or managing agent's name from housing benefit data
- the type of accommodation (HMO, B&B, hostel etc)
- its suitability for different types of tenants: families, individuals with drug and alcohol problems, parolees
- current weekly rents and additional service charges, and what is included in the service charge
- the standard of the accommodation based on inspections by fire services and environmental health officers and support worker visits
- notes of feedback from tenants.

Recommendation 3: Compile accommodation greenlists

The information held by temporary accommodation boards should be used to compile 'greenlists' of accommodation that meets required standards, which should be shared among signposting agencies.

At the same time, 'exclusion lists' of unsuitable bedspaces should also be created, maintained and shared, in order to discourage agencies from using these properties as destinations for single homeless households. Any property on an exclusion list should be prioritised for regular property inspections by local authority environmental health or PRS teams.

This 'index' of local bedspaces and their conditions would provide the necessary intelligence for those involved in the signposting process to make an informed and accountable choice about where homeless households are being directed to. Temporary accommodation boards should also be developing locally consistent and standardised arrangements for how people are referred (the next section looks in more detail at this issue).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, gathering more information on the types, cost and quality of property would also support the objective of giving tenants a more informed choice about where they live. At present, simple lists of addresses and landlord contact details are not sufficient to inform prospective tenants' (albeit limited) choice between accommodation options. In the future, detailed information about individual dwellings, including their quality, residents, rents and service charges, as well as previous tenant feedback, should be made available to prospective tenants to inform their decision about the options available to them.

2. MOVING IN AND THE FIRST FEW WEEKS

The first few weeks of a stay in unsupported temporary accommodation is a critical but often chaotic time. Looking back at this time, the unsupported temporary accommodation tenants who took part in our research reported many issues, including bullying, violence and exploitation by other tenants and even landlords and management.

Individuals frequently arrive at their new accommodation unescorted, unaware of what to expect and often unsure of their rights and entitlements. Often the only information that people have is the address.

Most participants report that their rooms were uninhabitable when they arrived. Complaints include that there was no bed, windows were broken, there was evidence of human and animal excrement, carpets were soiled, there were blood or other stains on walls, mattresses and other furnishings, and doorframes or doors were broken.

'When I first moved in, I had no running water for over a week. I kept complaining about it. So I couldn't shower, I couldn't even use the loo, and literally no one would do anything. They kept saying that someone would do something, and every day I'd come back and it would still not work. It was just so frustrating. And also I think I'd want to know that there's no cooking facilities at all.'

'And we had to tidy [the room] up – it was full of needles and full of rubbish. No one had even tidied it up.'

'I think my support worker would be embarrassed if he came with me. I couldn't even clean up because I had broken my feet. I wish he had come up because I would have had a lot to say to him.'

Safety concerns are another common problem. Among our group, for instance, 23 said they had no lock on their door or the lock was broken. There are also instances of serious breaches of HMO regulations and health and safety standards, including breaches of fire safety regulations.

'He's got fire extinguishers that are no good, they're empty.'

'Where I am situated in the building there is a fire door just outside my door, and it is nailed up. It is the fire exit and it is nailed up.'

Security extends not just to personal safety but also to security of tenure. Within hours of arriving, tenants – many of whom were vulnerable – often find themselves signing rudimentary licence agreements with no reference to rights, terms or quality standards, being asked for service charges upfront, and signing housing benefit forms that have been completed by the landlord or manager.

'They said that if I don't split my claim [and my partner's housing benefit claim], if I don't do fraud for him ... he was gonna throw me out.'

'They asked me to pay the top-up money. They could be right to ask us for this money. But I don't know, they could be playing with us, because

we are vulnerable people. I don't know my rights to be honest. I don't know if I should pay them or not without the receipt.'

'The landlord doesn't tell you about the housing benefit forms. He just says, "sign there". He doesn't say much how much rent is it.'

'You sign one form and it's basically what you shouldn't do, and another form which is like an info sheet. And again, it's like all the things that you're not allowed to do and that you could be evicted or moved at a moment's notice for. There is not anything about who to contact if you suffer abuse and antisocial behaviour, if you feel threatened by a member of staff, or if there's a problem with the structure of the building. There is nothing there. There's no number, no person you can contact.'

Very few among our group were escorted to the premises by a service professional or their referring agent, who at the least would have been able to report back on the conditions.

'[My partner's] support worker phoned the landlord and the landlord said, "yeah there's a room". Once we got there his support worker said, "right, I'll see you" and that was it. And we've not seen him since.'

Unsurprisingly, those who we speak to within the first few weeks of a new stay often report a sharp decline in their wellbeing.

Helping people get settled

Given the very poor experience of individuals moving into unsupported temporary accommodation, a number of practical steps should be taken to improve the information and support available to tenants at this time.

Recommendation 4: Build arrangements for placement and in-tenancy support

1. Temporary accommodation boards should be responsible for collectively designing a **clear, standardised licence agreement for all local unsupported temporary accommodation**. This standard agreement should be the only acceptable form for receipt of housing benefit, and should outline a clear set of rules and responsibilities for landlords and tenants, including rental costs, tenancy management, service charges and eviction notices. The agreement must include a clear complaints procedure, including a named contact person and telephone, email and address information.
2. Wherever possible, **those placing or signposting individuals to unsupported temporary accommodation should accompany the tenant to ensure that the property is in an acceptable condition, using a set checklist, and that proper licence agreements and paperwork are being used**. This 'warm handover' would ensure that tenants feel supported when moving in and provide a clear line of accountability in cases where the property is not up to scratch. **Where any specific issues with the accommodation are identified, these should be fed back into the database maintained by the temporary accommodation board, to relevant enforcement agencies and departments, and to the landlord.**
3. **Each tenant should have a designated point of contact or support worker, depending on their needs**. If the referring agency is unable to provide ongoing support, a face-to-face handover should be done, with the tenant, to an agency or voluntary organisation able to provide an appropriate level of support and planning for onward journeys. The allocation and delivery method for this should be determined locally, but in all cases the arrangement should include regular visits to the tenant in the early stages of their stay.

4. **If the property is not fit for human habitation, the person responsible for the warm handover should notify the local benefits team and housing benefit for that bedspace should immediately stopped** until the issues are addressed. In such cases, the referral agency should be responsible for finding alternative acceptable accommodation for the tenant.
5. Where the property is in a reasonable condition but essential items, such as a bed or a lock on the door, are not provided at the point of arrival, tenants and support workers should have access to a local authority fund to acquire these items immediately. Landlords should then be billed for these items through deductions to weekly service charges.

The role of voluntary organisations

The voluntary sector frequently interacts with and supports unsupported temporary accommodation tenants. Most examples of good practice with unsupported temporary accommodation tenants in the UK are voluntary sector-led, and it is vital that these organisations are included in temporary accommodation boards, involved in the development of in-tenancy support, and are given fair access to funding to enable them to do this.

Furthermore, the tenants of unsupported temporary accommodation themselves often choose to engage with the voluntary sector rather than statutory services. This is for varying reasons, including because they fail to meet the criteria for statutory assistance, the lack of capacity in the statutory services, waiting lists, or previous poor experience of statutory services and a resulting fear or lack of trust. While statutory services can offer some necessary and good services, the voluntary sector often offers support with fewer 'strings attached', can be more flexible in approach and can tailor services more easily.

For this reason, partnership working across sectors is essential and it may be that temporary accommodation boards identify and commission good voluntary organisations as key intermediaries for the kind of placement and ongoing tenancy support outlined in this chapter.

3.

LIVING IN UNSUPPORTED TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

On the whole, a tenant's life in unsupported temporary is poor. Shelter's 2004 survey of 431 households who had experienced temporary accommodation revealed that tenants believed their health was deteriorating as a result of being in temporary accommodation, and that this assessment tended to worsen the longer they stayed (Credland 2004).

In our research, only four out of 45 research participants reported that they wanted to remain in the accommodation and had no intention of moving on. Poor living conditions, malpractice by managers and landlords and a set of social and environmental issues together create a toxic environment – one which, by normal standards, would be considered intolerable.

These issues might be more tolerable if people tended to stay in this kind of accommodation for only a few weeks – but unfortunately, this is rarely the case. Our research participants have stayed in unsupported temporary accommodation for periods ranging from three months to 39 years; the majority have stayed for more than 12 months. Therefore, beyond addressing the particular challenges of the first few weeks (as discussed in the previous chapter), a number of key problem areas are likely to reoccur throughout a person's stay:

1. the condition of the accommodation
2. issues with the landlord or management
3. issues with other tenants
4. poverty.

The condition of the accommodation

The conditions in unsupported temporary accommodation are typically very poor, and reflect the fact that the highest proportion of poor-quality accommodation is in the private rented sector. The English Housing Survey, for example, estimates that 29 per cent of properties in the private rented sector do not meet the Decent Homes standard, compared to only 15 per cent of social housing properties (DCLG 2015a). Moreover, of the 1.2 million PRS homes that currently fail the Decent Homes test, 778,000 also fail to meet class 1 Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) standards – essentially, three-quarters of a million homes are unsafe to live in (DCLG 2015).

Unsurprisingly, those on low incomes are more prone to living in poor-quality properties. Just under 22 per cent of all English homes do not meet the Decent Homes standards, and it is estimated that 24 per cent of the poorest quintile of households inhabit non-decent homes (DCLG 2014). The properties that fail to meet these standards are typically old stock (built before 1919), bought cheaply when housing markets are weak, and are often suffering from problems such as damp, poor insulation and low-quality facilities. Typically it would be expensive to bring these properties and amenities up to acceptable modern standards.

As noted in the introduction, the tenants taking part in our study are generally likely to end up in poor-quality accommodation, given the barriers this group faces

in trying to access the mainstream housing market. The following examples are unpleasant but not uncommon:

'The flooring was up all over the place, and the beds were terrible. I mean literally, you couldn't sleep on them properly ... the mattress was black with dirt.'

'There is another hole where the rat can get in. It's got three different ways to get into the room ... it eats all my food.'

'The shower's got no light, it hasn't even got a door. So, you have a shower, and anyone can walk in.'

'I've had a leak in my room almost the entire time that I've been there because of people having showers upstairs ... I ride the buses to get Metros so that I can stick them on the floor under the hole in the ceiling so they can soak up the water – that's how ridiculous it's got.'

While some landlords make efforts to provide satisfactory accommodation and some issues are dealt with quickly and effectively, few participants in our study were happy with where they lived: 40 of 45 say they are dissatisfied with the condition of the property. Many also say that their accommodation is having a negative impact on their mental (38 of 45) and physical health (21 of 45). They attribute this to a range of causes, including damp, broken heating and lack of hot water, rodents and infestations, broken showers and toilets, smashed windows, improper beds and furnishings, leaks and cracks, human faeces in public areas and urine-soaked carpets, drug paraphernalia in hallways and bathrooms, and filthy kitchens.

These experiences are not unique to our group of participants. Spencer and Corkhill, for example, extensively documented poor conditions in similar accommodation in the North East of England, including basic building maintenance and repairs not being carried out, buildings being divided into multiple units with flimsy and poorly decorated dividing walls, and shower and toilet facilities being out of order for protracted periods (Spencer and Corkhill 2013).

Disincentives to improve

The market does not appear to be providing sufficient incentives to drive up property standards. When the housing market is strong, landlords are able to maintain high occupancy rates, and so maximise returns, without improving or maintaining the accommodation. But weak housing markets may be equally problematic, as the difficulty of improving the capital value of a property, coupled with what are often prohibitive improvement costs, may provide little incentive to landlords to invest.

This lack of incentives applies in the unsupported temporary accommodation sector too. For landlords in this sector, the main source of income – housing benefit – is not conditional on the quality of the property, and the local authority property inspection and enforcement regimes are often informal, reactive, under-resourced and generally inadequate (Battersby 2012). Where issues are raised, therefore, the landlord may face very limited pressure in address them:

'My ceiling collapsed and then a week later the maintenance man, who I thought was just a really nice guy, went crazy at me. I started the whole complaints procedure. I sent maybe 10–15 emails to the management staff and the owners ... But they didn't respond to me, but also they didn't respond to the housing support worker I had over a period of two to three weeks. He sent them photographs of my damage. Basically a hole in my ceiling, and all my stuff covered in this black gloop. And they didn't respond to him ... It wasn't until I made the complaint and then the senior

manager got back to me and said that he might be able to get in touch with the owners of the building ... Basically they're like slum landlords.'

In theory, poor conditions should be prevented by the range of legal conditions around housing standards, not least those included in the Housing Health and Safety Ratings System and rules governing HMOs (see Davies and Turley 2014). However, this legislation is only useful if it is fully enforced, and in reality the enforcement of what are fairly minimal standards is generally weak.

Prosecutions against landlords are rare. Shelter, for instance, has claimed that in 2012 only 487 prosecutions were made, from an estimated population of 1.2 million landlords (CLG Committee 2013). This led them to conclude that 'the problem is not a lack of powers, but the willingness and ability of local authorities to enforce their existing powers'.

The charity Crisis agrees that environmental health teams are often too understaffed and under-resourced to be able to address poor-quality housing (Crisis 2014). A survey of local housing authorities by the Local Government Information Unit found that a lack of resources was the biggest barrier they faced in trying to improve engagement with the private rented sector (Lucas et al 2013).

Given these constraints on resources, many local authorities base their enforcement action on complaints received rather than proactive stewardship of local housing stock (Battersby 2012). However, tenants are often reluctant to complain about property conditions for fear of retaliatory eviction or 'causing trouble for the landlord' (CAB 2007, Gousy 2014). Two participants in our study said:

'When I made a complaint they moved me on, they don't even have to give a reason why. The council have said that. The management said there has been a breakdown of communication between me and two of their members of staff and therefore they had to kick me out.'

'It doesn't matter, if you complain and they get to find out it's you, you're in trouble. The landlord will tell you to get your gear and f-off – so you can't win.'

Tenants may see little value in complaining about a property that they expect to leave shortly (even if the reality is different), and this, coupled with the fear of eviction from accommodation where tenants enjoy few protections, seems to be sufficient to discourage tenants from contacting the appropriate authorities. Thus the worst conditions in the housing market are allowed to go unreported and unaddressed.

Improving conditions

Addressing property standards requires a multi-faceted approach, including a tenant-focussed standards regime, a more empowering complaints system, and a more proactive approach for local authorities in their dealings with landlords.

We repeat here IPPR's previous recommendation to **use area-wide licensing schemes to underpin standards in dwelling conditions and management**, and to **establish not-for-profit letting agencies to provide landlords on a 'greenlist' of decent accommodation with a pool of potential tenants** (Davies and Turley 2014). A wider use of licensing, connected more closely with property conditions, would help to ensure that all dwellings and landlords in the market were meeting a basic standard, while ensuring that the poorest properties do not evade regulation or miss out on incentives for improvement.

However, tightening regulatory frameworks without a proportionate improvement in enforcement activity is unlikely to resolve the current imbalance between the power of tenants and landlords. One crucial problem is that fees from licensing

can currently only be used to finance the administration of the scheme, not to fund a stronger inspections regime. Given that many environmental health teams are struggling to cover their workload in respect to HMOs and the wider private rented sector, **the government should remove this barrier to resourcing enforcement and inspection activity.**

The current Housing and Planning Bill will make welcome changes to enforcement action to tackle some of the worst abuses in the system, including a shift towards civil penalty notices (like parking tickets) for cases where a landlord does not address an improvement notice served by their local authority (see DCLG 2015b). The government is currently proposing to allow local authorities to retain those fines. This should help to shift the incentives structure in favour of property improvements, by making it easier for local government to levy charges to tackle issues that cannot be the fault of the tenant, such as where a property is overcrowded, not fire-safe, has hazardous levels of damp, or is insecure.

In addition, the bill widens the scope for rent repayment orders (RROs), which allow a tenant to pursue a landlord for rent repayment where their property has not been licensed. However, the current proposals would not be particularly useful to those living in the poorest property conditions, especially in unsupported temporary accommodation, who invariably claim housing benefit and thus would not be reimbursed (ibid). To ensure that the shift towards RROs will encourage all tenants to come forward with complaints, regardless of their tenancy or accommodation type, **housing benefit tenants should be entitled to a proportion of the rent repaid through RROs and, where their accommodation provides additional services, such as a B&B, to a full repayment of service charges.**

We recommend that tenants in the private rented sector should **have access to a straightforward, anonymous complaints and reporting system, via existing local authority housing service helplines, ensuring that the allocated phone numbers are free of charge.** The proposed temporary accommodation boards should ensure that helpline numbers are included in tenancy agreements and 'welcome' documentation (as proposed in chapter 1), and displayed prominently in all unsupported temporary accommodation properties.

Issues with the landlord or management

In most cases, unsupported temporary accommodation is provided by private landlords, with the exception of some local authority provision. Within this group, there are individual landlords and management companies who make concerted efforts to keep properties up to an acceptable standard and to provide adequate services to their tenants.

However, poor management was a common feature of our research interviews. Among our 45 participants, 27 claimed that their landlord had done nothing when they had reported a problem, and 33 found the landlord or manager violent or intimidating, and felt nervous around them.

'I just didn't feel safe there at all and that's why I was out all the time. Especially after that scenario with the maintenance guy offering me legal highs when I was already intoxicated – that's just preying on the vulnerable.'

Landlords were observed to be flouting fire safety regulations, fraudulently claiming benefits and exploiting vulnerable tenants, opening post, taking bank cards, and altering their service charges depending on the level of a tenant's benefits income. Many of our participants had been evicted at very short notice, or knew people who had been, and several reported loan sharking – that they or others were regularly borrowing money from landlords, who demanded repayment at an unreasonably high rate of interest.

'There is a couple of old people who are in there, who have been living in there for a bit, and the landlord's taken their bank cards off them – cashing their money, it's a disgrace. Saying, "oh, I'll keep hold of your bank card", cashing their money and they are not seeing their money.'

'No hot water for five days now ... As long as he gets his rent, £20 a week service charge – pissing service, I tell ya, there's none ... There are just things that he needs to sort out, and he is not doing it.'

'If you have depression or self-doubt or you are not very confident in yourself, it is very difficult to challenge authority. I've been trying to do it but it's quite difficult. So [for instance] knowing your rights in that contract that you sign would be really helpful.'

Improving landlord practice

As recommended in chapter 1, the proposed temporary accommodation boards should develop a standard local tenancy agreement for use in all properties where board members are signposting or placing clients, to improve tenants' understanding of their rights as residents and to force landlords to stick to the terms of their contracts. Standard agreements should cover details including rent, service charges, tenant rights and responsibilities, and the contact details for the local environmental health and housing inspection teams.

Despite limited resources, some housing authorities are working with landlords to resolve issues in their accommodation, and some examples of good practice exist. In Sunderland, for example, a dedicated HMO officer is continuously engaged with local landlords housing vulnerable people. This helps the local authority to identify issues of poor management practice, and provides an effective way of working with landlords to improve conditions, address inadequacies in management arrangements, and support them in dealing with more challenging tenants.

However, there will inevitably remain landlords who are unfit to practise. As part of the changes to the private rented sector to be made by the current Housing and Planning Bill (see previous section), and given the limited meaningful differences between HMOs and smaller unsupported temporary accommodation dwellings, **the government should take this opportunity to widen the 'fit and proper' test beyond HMO properties to capture all landlords.**

For instance, landlords who have failed to disclose a property-related criminal conviction should be banned from future letting or subject to an RRO. **Temporary accommodation landlords should be expected to disclose any previous criminal offences, as part of a wider application of government 'fit and proper' tests for any dwellings housing vulnerable people.**

'One of the things that I mentioned in my complaint to the local authority is that none of the staff have to be DBS checked. Compare that to an old people's home! Everyone who lives there is more or less vulnerable, from the high-functioning people to people with more significant needs ... And there are young women with children there too, with babies under the age of three who cannot verbalise what happens.'

Given the poor management practices and unprofessionalism encountered as part of this research project, **landlords found to have failed a wider 'fit and proper' test should be required to transfer dwelling management responsibilities to a managing agent from an approved list of property managers to be agreed by the temporary accommodation board.**

Issues with other tenants

The environment within an unsupported temporary accommodation property is complex: many tenants experience severe and multiple disadvantage (see Duncan and Corner 2012, Fisher 2015) and most residents live in close proximity to one another. This reality leads to particularly challenging issues for everyone, including endemic use of drugs and alcohol, bullying and violence, noise and other antisocial behaviour.

Drug and alcohol use appears to be commonplace. Among our 45 research participants, nine admitted to being active drug users while 27 admitted to being alcohol dependent. Most participants say they find it very easy to access drugs and 13 admitted that either their intake of alcohol or drugs increased as a result of living in unsupported temporary accommodation.

It is also clear that this environment is not conducive to escaping substance abuse and addiction. Drug dealers are frequently present, tenants hound each other for money, and they are seen openly taking drugs and drinking in communal areas; many of our participants said they would often come across drug paraphernalia anywhere in the property. This is clearly a difficult environment for individuals struggling with and recovering from addiction.

Among our 45 participants, 38 say that other people's drug and alcohol addictions were a nuisance. The following example illustrates the problem:

'They knock on the door. If you're a drug addict and you're ill and someone's there, someone's got heroin, you're going to let them in aren't you, because you're ill. It's psychological. It's like giving a bottle of whisky to an alcoholic who's got the shakes and saying "here". He thinks that can solve all his problems, right? He's sick, and this can stop him being ill. [Same with] heroin. If you're ill and someone knocks on the door – "can I come in", "I can't let you in, I'm not allowed visitors", "looky here" [pretends to wave a bag of heroin in front of face], "okay, I'll let you in now". All of a sudden his thinking is redirected, because he knows he's getting drugs.'

One factor that contributes to the chaotic environment in unsupported temporary accommodation is the fact that tenants have no control over who is placed alongside them, over who their neighbours will be. Many of our participants felt nervous, with 39 saying that other people behaved in a way they did not like or approve of. Most had stories of their rooms being broken into, of coming back and finding someone in their room, of not knowing who else had a key to their room. This not only creates feelings of insecurity but also allows a culture of bullying and intimidation to take root: 26 of our participants feel that other tenants are dangerous or have the potential to be violent, and 28 have been a witness to or experienced violence in the accommodation, from tenants or visitors.

'There is a guy in here now ... Every week he has had his money taken off him by residents – £500 every week – but he won't say nowt.'

Insecurity compounds feelings of stress and anxiety. Our participants say that actions of other tenants have a direct impact on their own mental health: 38 say their mental health has deteriorated and 21 also report that their physical health has worsened.

'In my place people are crazy, these places make you crazy.'

Supporting better living arrangements

Tenants' experiences provide an essential guide to the day-to-day challenges of living in unsupported temporary accommodation, and our research suggests that an informal system of information-sharing and support already exists between tenants. As a means of harnessing this valuable shared experience and knowledge, **tenants should be encouraged to form resident groups as a forum to discuss issues, share experiences and feed information back to the proposed temporary accommodation boards.**

This was suggested and supported by tenants themselves:

'One of the things that I asked for in my first complaint is a regular forum for people in emergency accommodation. It should be anonymous, so what we say, no names are attributed to it, then whatever organisation does it puts that across.'

'I reckon if we had a meeting like this more often, then it would really work out good, because you'll get more points of view put across about what help would be provided.'

It is vital that both police and health services (particularly GP practices) are aware of the conditions in local bedspaces and the issues that face tenants there. **The police and health services should hold regular meetings with tenants and self-organised groups to build trust and relationships with unsupported temporary accommodation tenants.** Better relationships between tenants and the local police could help to challenge the stigma attached to the police and scepticism about their response after a crime or problem is reported. A better relationship with GP practices could ensure that those who are experiencing a deterioration in their mental or physical health are more able to access the support they need.

Collaboration between services invested in supporting these tenants must improve. Beyond their roles in information gathering, standardisation and enforcement, the proposed temporary accommodation boards should ensure that each tenant on their list of residents is allocated a single key point of contact to manage their case. In many instances this would simply involve ensuring that individuals are aware of other longer-term housing options and access schemes. However, in some of the more complex cases it will require the case worker to coordinate a number of services to support the individual, including social care, health (both community and specialist care), housing, police and generalist support services.

'We could get a community psychiatric nurse and mental health worker all working together – you know those meetings where you can have everyone working together – we'd have a whole discussion and you'd get the help you really need off everyone. I think that would be brilliant.'

This individual should work with the tenant to develop an agreed action plan and coordinate local services provided by the board and other services in accordance to this support plan. The name and contact details of this worker should be included on any tenancy agreement as a first point of contact for the landlord too, should any issues arise with the tenant.

Better collaboration around individual residents will reduce the chance that tenants are placed in unsupported temporary accommodation with no access to support whatsoever.

Poverty

In addition to charging rent – which is generally met via tenants' local housing allowance – landlords charge an additional service charge, on a per-person, per-week basis. These charges are intended to cover costs, such as utilities bills and rates (electricity, gas, water), breakfast and other meals, laundry services and cleaning.

Tenants experience a range of issues with these charges. They vary greatly: our research participants are charged between £10 and £35 per week on top of their housing benefit. They seem relatively arbitrary, and do not reflect the quality of services offered. Tenants are often not aware of the rate of service charge prior to moving into a new dwelling, and frequently asked whether landlords were even legally allowed to charge an additional top-up rate, often because this payment felt informal and was not properly receipted.

'The only time I got a knock on the door was when I had to pay my service charge, which used to be every day – because they never kept a record, so they would come every day. I used to keep the receipts and I would show them, but sometimes they disputed it.'

'You see you have to sign a register when you have paid [your £30 top-up] and if he doesn't come to you with the register then it is down that you have not paid, even when you have. So [the manager] wouldn't write it down, so when the actual owner might come and look, it didn't matter. He was able to spend the money on drugs you see.'

The effects of financial poverty are exacerbated by the poor quality of the meals served in many establishments, or by the unhygienic, poorly maintained or non-existent cooking facilities. Many tenants reported having little choice but to eat expensive takeaway food (a finding that is reiterated by tenants of formal temporary accommodation too), which further depletes the limited income tenants have left after paying service charges and rent.

'I just ate one big meal a day ... Then I pick up bus tickets, cos on the back of bus tickets you can get a McDonalds for £1.99 with chips. So I am always eating out. It gets that bad you can't cook there, there's nowhere to keep anything.'

'I have a microwave and it's like, the cost of your food absolutely soars – you can't make anything in batches, you can't make anything with any nutritional value.'

'Beans. Chips and beans, beans on toast. Just a plate of beans. That's all you get.'

Tenants also spend valuable funds staying connected: on transport to reach appointments, see family and friends or get to college or work, or on pay-as-you-go phones, to call the DWP for instance. Several of our participants said that their financial hardship had been exploited by loan sharks, further entrenching the problem.

In short, unsupported temporary accommodation is expensive for everyone involved. It is expensive for the tenant, in terms of charges and rent top-ups; for the local authority, through housing benefit payments and homelessness services; and for other public services, which often have to pick up the costs of addiction relapse, street homelessness and repeated use of housing, care and police services.

Improving financial resilience

The first and most pressing need is to address the vast discrepancy in service charges from one dwelling to the next. **The proposed temporary accommodation boards should define the minimum standard of service that is expected for**

different levels of service charge. To do this, they could take a carrot-and-stick approach, using their greenlists and exclusion lists of excellent and poor landlords and properties (as proposed in chapter 1). Where a landlord repeatedly fails to meet these standards, the board should prevent future referrals to that property until service levels improve.

Tenants should be made aware of the applicable service charge as part of the information they receive prior to moving in, and the services that it covers should be expressly outlined in all tenancy agreements as a condition of housing benefit payment. Landlords should be required to use a locally issued receipt book to collect and account for the service charge, to limit the scope for exploitation of tenants, and variations should occur only in relation to the supply of meals or cleaning, or services offered to and agreed with the tenant.

As well as bringing transparency and certainty to service charges, the temporary accommodation board should identify **a suitable local organisation, such as Shelter or the Citizens' Advice Bureau, to provide tenants with access to appropriate money management advice and support.** Information about and the contact details of this nominated organisation should be provided on printed leaflets and given to workers with any clients in unsupported temporary accommodation, and ideally also displayed inside dwellings.

4. MOVING OUT OR EVICTION

Insecurity of tenure is typical of temporary accommodation. Typically, the agreement given to a tenant is little more than a single side of A4 paper, sufficient to meet the conditions of the housing benefit criteria.

As a consequence, tenants are likely to have few rights. Participants in our research reported that evictions are common, sometimes at no notice and sometimes arbitrary, in the sense that there did not seem to be any real grounds. This unpredictability serves to underline the insecurity of their residence in this accommodation.

Many of our research participants themselves had been evicted, several on numerous occasions. In some cases this was a result of legitimate issues, such as substance abuse or behavioural issues, but for others it was immediate and for unclear reasons:

'Yes I was evicted – well, I mean I was ill – I was evicted because my leg was smelling a bit and you should never be evicted for an illness.'

'My music, they said it was disturbing, that is why I was out.'

'They wrote me a letter saying that they were going to evict me because I was sneaking people into the building, and that was absolute rubbish, I have never had anyone in there. When I confronted them and said that letter was a load of rubbish they kind of brushed it under the table, so instantly I felt like they were picking on me, attacking me, just to get me out really.'

Residents frequently report that they do not know if or why they will be evicted. This insecurity, while an inevitable feature of temporary accommodation, has an additional negative impact on the mental and physical health of tenants (Credland 2004).

Without developing a new type of tenancy for this kind of accommodation, the additional protections that can be built into the existing system are limited. However, alongside a standardised tenancy agreement setting out the basic rules and responsibilities of the tenant and landlord (as outlined in the previous section), we also recommend that **landlords should be required to issue pre-eviction written warnings (based on templates to be developed by the proposed temporary accommodation boards), and to send a copy of any such warning to the named support worker on the tenant's agreement, so that potential issues are flagged up immediately.** This would ensure that both the tenant and support worker fully understand why the landlord is proposing eviction and what they can do to prevent it.

Finally, along with local authorities using their full powers of enforcement and prosecution, **any landlord found to be repeatedly evicting tenants without warning or good grounds should be added to the local temporary accommodation board's exclusion list.**

The process of leaving

In most cases, moving on from unsupported temporary accommodation is far more of a challenge to tenants than moving in. All of the problems described in chapter 1, in terms of access to mainstream housing options, recur. Having failed to overcome the ‘homeless hurdles’, single-adult homeless households are typically not recognised as having any right to housing, but nonetheless struggle on in the mainstream housing market.⁴

Where unsupported temporary accommodation tenants are successful in accessing move-on accommodation, this occurs through an organisation or worker referral, not through self-referral. Of our 45 research participants, two have moved into housing association accommodation, seven to housing in the private rented sector, and nine into supported accommodation.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, many research participants report that the only way to move out and move on was to forge a link with a voluntary-sector support agency – but even here there is limited support to do so. The annual review of single homelessness services by Homeless Link is worth quoting at length, given its relevance to this group.

‘Almost all accommodation projects (91%) reported refusing access to homeless people who were assessed as being too high a risk to other clients or staff, which has increased by 12% since last year (79%). Three-quarters (74%, 63% in 2013) reported refusing access for people whose needs were too high for the project to manage, and 40% refused access to people intoxicated on drugs or alcohol, up from 22% from last year. This suggests that those people with the most challenging behaviour and with the highest needs are finding it more difficult to get access to support to help them.’

Homeless Link 2014: 26

Furthermore, the 2015 report pointed to growing backlogs, making it even harder to access supported accommodation.

‘Accommodation projects reported that a quarter (25%) of people currently staying in their services were ready to move on but had not yet moved. Of those that were waiting to move ... one in five (27%) had been waiting for six months or more.’

Homeless Link 2015: 42

Support workers interviewed for our research confirm this, explaining that there are fewer and fewer routes into supported accommodation for clients experiencing severe and multiple disadvantage. Criteria for supported accommodation may require applicants to be homeless and have an additional support issue – such as drug or alcohol misuse – yet support workers report that many are now *not* accepted if their additional support issue is ongoing.

Social housing is not an unlikely final destination for single homeless households, but access to it is complicated and often requires support. Individuals have to have access to computers and the internet, and the skills to use them, in order to register themselves on a registered provider’s housing lists and to ‘bid’ for a home online. They also need to understand the priority and banding process, which theoretically enables those most in need to access housing. In many places, however, waiting lists for social housing are so long that many people are discouraged from even registering.

⁴ Perversely, where a homeless family is living in unsupported temporary accommodation, this would be seen as temporary accommodation, and thus would probably fall under the definition of being homeless under the Housing Act 1996; whereas for single people who are not seen as ‘in priority need’ under that legislation, and therefore not owed a housing duty, unsupported temporary accommodation may be classified as adequate, rather than as a temporary staging post.

Because of how difficult it can be to move from unsupported temporary accommodation into supported or social rented accommodation, many people are left to the private rented sector (PRS).

Several of our research participants found PRS homes and sustained their tenancies through a scheme administered by the charity Crisis.⁵ This particular scheme, Justlife at Home, also gave them additional help and resources, such as support to find, move into and set up a home, including move-in furniture packages. Between 2010 and 2014, Crisis-funded schemes created 8,128 tenancies and achieved a tenancy sustainment rate of 90 per cent. In its final evaluation, Crisis noted that it was more difficult to meet the tenancy creation target than the tenancy sustainment target (Rugg 2014), which highlights the critical challenge in simply accessing housing.

Most private landlords require deposits and rent in advance, as well as references. Support to secure a PRS tenancy takes a variety of forms, including initial financial aid, such as deposit provision for those who cannot afford a down-payment on the rent. The London borough of Bromley, for example, offers a month's rent in advance to participating landlords via their PRS access scheme.⁶

It is increasingly common for such a scheme also to provide a bond guarantee, worth up to the equivalent of one month's rent, paid to the landlord at the end of a tenancy if any damage has been done to the property. This needn't create a significant liability for the authority – indeed, in its review of PRS access schemes Crisis notes that:

'alongside sensible measures to minimise claims, bond scheme claim rates do not generally exceed 15–20% of the total liability in a given year. This means that 80–85% remains unspent and can be carried forward into the next year.'

Crisis 2015: 3

Help in moving on

PRS access schemes provide valuable support to former tenants of unsupported temporary accommodation who find it difficult to enter the private rented market. However, provision is patchy, and varies from area to area. Moreover, local authority schemes will typically be conditional, and may only be available to 'priority need' households (Garvie and Robinson 2013). Consequently, we recommend **that all local authority housing departments should work with their local landlords to develop a PRS access scheme, and that the scope of provision should be expanded beyond priority need households to include wider homeless groups.**

Helping new tenants to sustain their tenancies is a key part of the process of preventing people from cycling in and out of unsupported temporary accommodation, and so continuity of support is vital. **We recommend that tenants are provided with access to support from their original key worker for up to six months after they leave unsupported temporary accommodation.**

The difficulty that former unsupported temporary accommodation tenants have in accessing mainstream housing options needs to be addressed. **It is vital that local housing associations are included on the proposed temporary accommodation boards, to bring them into the decision-making process and accommodation offer for single homeless households.**

5 The Crisis PRS Access Development Programme 2010–2014, funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

6 As well as offering the landlord one month's rent in advance, these schemes offer fast-tracked housing benefit appointments, an end-of-tenancy property inspection service, and support for tenants to ensure they are able to sustain their tenancy.

Finally, it is critical to know if the support provided to help people move on to more secure housing options is working. At present, many do not move on – 14 of our research participants remain living in unsupported temporary accommodation, despite moving in and out of different rooms and properties. Once out, it is not uncommon for former tenants of unsupported temporary accommodation to find themselves back again after a few months or years; others, however, will disappear altogether – at the point of publishing, we are unaware of the whereabouts of 12 of our original 45 participants. Wherever they end up, **data collection on tenants' last known address is a valuable step in providing local temporary accommodation boards with the information they need to provide efficient and effective support and enforcement.**

5. CONCLUSION

There is limited political appetite to recognise, let alone address, the problem of single-adult homeless households living in unsupported temporary accommodation, either by widening the safety net for single homeless people or by increasing the extent to which they are captured by mainstream homeless support services.

Without intervention, however, the cycle in and out of temporary accommodation will not be broken. It therefore falls to a coalition of willing local services and the voluntary sector to use their limited resources to intervene throughout the cycle in order to make positive changes where they can.

There are many steps that local authority housing departments – working formally with other local partners involved with single homeless households – can take that would have a limited impact on local resources yet create long-run savings for those services involved in picking up the pieces of the systemic failure to address these problems.

Key to this is the gathering and sharing of information, and the mobilisation of coordinated action between local partners, to restrict access to the worst-quality accommodation, direct potential tenants to well managed and good-quality accommodation, and incentivise landlords to maintain and improve their properties and services.

Bearing down on demand for poor-quality bedspaces will not work in all markets, especially where very few places are available. Here, authorities should be using the new provisions in the government's Housing and Planning Bill to serve improvement notices more quickly, and use civil penalty notices to force landlords to improve their property and management practices. (This will also help to fund some of the enforcement and support required to improve the system.) These high-demand areas also need to establish PRS access schemes to support people to move out of temporary accommodation as quickly as possible.

Whatever the housing market circumstances, residents must be central to this process. Residents' experiences are essential to understanding the value of different interventions at specific points in their journeys in and out of unsupported temporary accommodation. Their testimony about the quality of properties and management abilities of landlords should be fed back to local temporary accommodation boards, as part of a feedback loop between tenants and local authorities designed to drive continuous improvements in unsupported temporary accommodation and how it is run.



In summary, the social and physical environment of unsupported temporary accommodation is appalling, and the fact that as a nation we do not know the number, situation or names of single homeless households living in these conditions exemplifies how little priority and attention these groups have been given by mainstream public services. Without concerted action, single homeless households will continue to fall into and become trapped in the type of accommodation that should not exist in a modern, wealthy country like ours.

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