

CENTRE FOR LONDON

Temporary Accommodation: London's hidden homelessness crisis

Nicolas Bosetti, Daniel Urquijo and Claire Harding



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Nevertheless, this report is editorially independent of our funders, who do not necessarily agree with or support our recommendations. The views expressed in this report are solely those of the authors, and all errors and omissions remain our own.

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Summary

The risk of a household living in temporary accommodation in London is much higher than elsewhere in England. 59 per cent of all English households in temporary accommodation are in London: this represents 56,500 households, including 75,850 children.

This is not because of the decisions councils make but because of London's high housing costs and shortages, and because the benefits people receive do not reflect these costs.

Councils need to find suitable temporary accommodation for households who are eligible and this is very difficult to find in London, due to the lack of affordable housing stock, and the fact that the benefits homeless households receive are in many cases not sufficient for local authorities to pay for temporary accommodation in London.

Temporary accommodation varies widely in both housing type and quality. For households in London, the best-case scenario is usually a flat close to their previous location. But living in some types of temporary accommodation – such as bed & breakfast facilities – can be grim.

- Households usually have only one room for everyone (including children) to live in, with shared kitchen and bathroom facilities.
- Families living in this type of accommodation say that it is very hard for children to play or do their homework in one room – and that they are sometimes scared to use the shared kitchens and bathrooms.

These and other observations suggest that it is impossible to separate the challenge of providing sufficient temporary accommodation from the challenge of providing enough “general needs” social and affordable housing for Londoners.

Most of our recommendations to improve this state of affairs are targeted at national government, which has the power and funding to change the temporary accommodation system. There are also changes that some local authorities can make to improve the experience of homeless households.

Strategic review recommendation

- The government should set up a cross-departmental working group on temporary accommodation to look at supply issues, their cost to the public purse, and how they can be solved.

Preventing homelessness through the welfare system

- The government should increase the rate of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) for all households, including those in temporary accommodation – and ensure that it increases in line with rental market inflation.
- The government should raise or remove the benefit cap so that fewer people will need to use the temporary accommodation system.

Building more affordable homes

- The government should fund more “general needs” affordable properties.
- In the meantime, the Mayor of London and national government should continue to subsidise local authorities and joint-borough initiatives to increase the supply of temporary accommodation.

- Local authorities should consider how they can use their current assets to expand their stock of social housing and temporary accommodation, including sites that are temporarily vacant for a period of months or years.
- The government should link LHA to changes in the rental market in order to encourage investment in social housing, affordable housing, and temporary accommodation (if required).

Strengthening homelessness prevention

- The government should increase homelessness prevention grants available to local authorities, so they can support households at risk of homelessness due to the cost of living crisis.
- Local authorities and voluntary organisations should target communications and advice toward people who are most at risk of homelessness. This information should include guidance on how people can stay in their homes, as well as the rights of private tenants threatened with eviction.
- Local authorities should increase their training provision for housing officers, supporting them to lead difficult conversations and protect their own mental health.

Improving the experiences of people who live in temporary accommodation

Local authority budgets are under significant pressure – which is likely to grow as the cost-of-living crisis deepens, rents increase and government support is frozen. We recognise that some of these recommendations may be difficult to fund in some cases.

- Local authorities should follow good practice when providing temporary accommodation. (Good practice recommendations are set out below, based on a review of the literature as well as a range of interviews with housing officers.)
- Government grants should enable local authorities to follow good practice as outlined below.

Good practice when presenting as homeless

- Local authorities should give comprehensive information to households, both during the meeting and to take away (online or on paper) – about how the process works, what people’s rights are, and what will happen next.

Good practice when allocating accommodation

- Local authorities should prioritise keeping adults near their work and children near their school, college or nursery – with the option to move placement if a more suitable one becomes available later on.
- Local authorities should ensure that families with children are not allocated nightly paid accommodation without a kitchen (which should be separate from the bedroom).
- For households placed far from their previous homes, local authorities should calculate travel times based on walking or bus rather than car or train. The latter options are usually unaffordable for people in temporary accommodation, and most journeys in London are made by walking or bus.

- Local authorities should make placements that have the shortest possible travel time, unless a household asks to move to further out. If this is not possible, national government should provide funding to make sure councils can place households within the city and as close as possible to where they currently live. If the government fails to do this, local authorities should make sure households' needs are met before placing them outside London (for example by securing school places in the new area). Local authorities should remain in regular contact with households placed outside London, and with services in the receiving authority.
- The government should review the categories used to classify different types of accommodation so that they reflect their suitability more accurately.

Good practice when in accommodation

- Local authorities should enforce consistent quality and safety standards – particularly for cooking facilities – so that people do not have to rely on more expensive and less nutritious no-cook food.
- Where necessary, local authorities should supply a furniture pack, carpets, curtains, and white goods if households are being placed in the private rented sector. Households at risk of homelessness will generally struggle to afford these when commencing a new tenancy.
- Local authorities and their partners should provide households with support including debt advice, benefits advice, and information on how to access food banks. If moving a household to a new area, local authorities should also provide support with the associated administrative tasks – such as registering with a new GP or securing school places.
- Once a placement is made, local authorities should also ensure they follow good practice by keeping in regular contact with support services in the boroughs where they have placed households.

Helping households move through the system faster

- If not procuring through Capital Letters, local authorities and government departments should always inform other local authorities of what properties they are procuring and at what price. They should also follow the same property quality standards as Capital Letters.
- National government should devolve resource to London government to continue to fund and grow city-wide cooperation initiatives like Capital Letters.
- Local authorities should allow homeless households to retain a place on the social housing waiting list, even if they are being rehoused in a private rented home.

Chapter 1: Temporary Accommodation in London today

Temporary accommodation: what it is and who is eligible

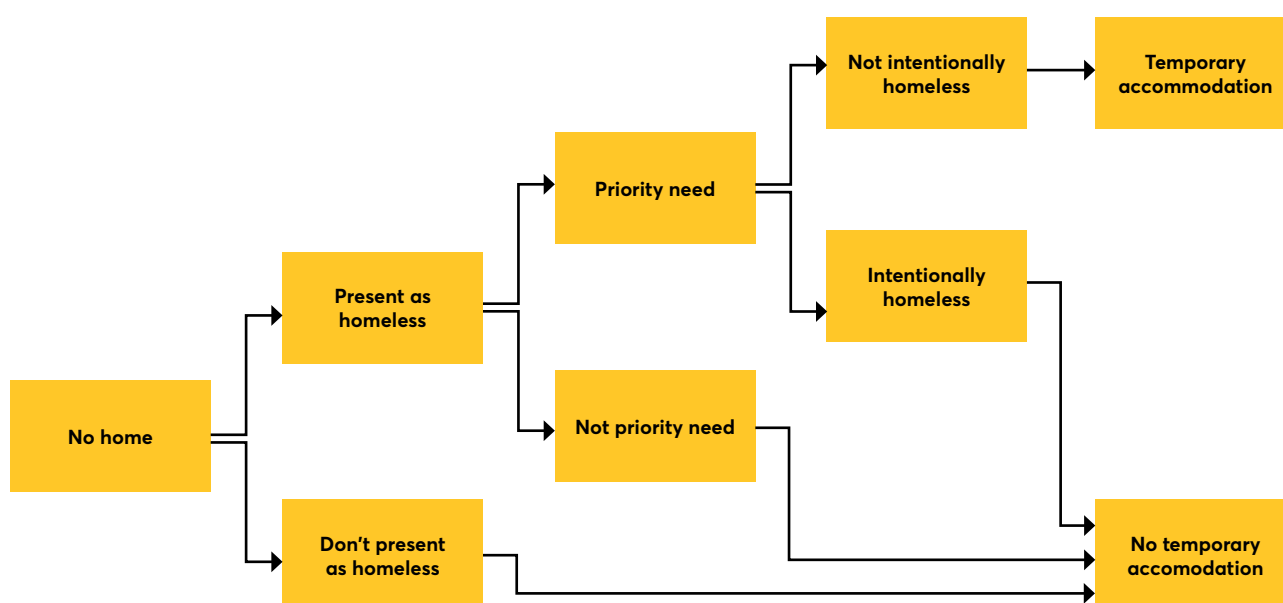
Temporary accommodation is short-term housing that local authorities provide or arrange for people who have become homeless. It is intended as a short-term solution while the person or household finds more permanent accommodation.

Not everyone who becomes homeless ends up in temporary accommodation: the system is complex and can be confusing for people trying to navigate it. Moreover, some people who become homeless do not tell their local council – they may “sofa surf” with friends, sleep rough, or leave the country altogether.

Figure 1 below gives a simplified summary of who is eligible. People who present as homeless are only eligible for temporary accommodation if they are in “priority need” and not “intentionally homeless”. In most cases they must also have a connection to the area – meaning that they either live, work, have family, or receive healthcare there. If they do not, they will be asked to apply to a council where they do. Since people can have a local connection to more than one council, this can lead to arguments with the council about where they have the greatest local connection. However, this stipulation does not apply to people fleeing domestic violence.

People who do not have British or Irish citizenship, settled status, refugee status, or indefinite leave to remain are not usually eligible for support. There are exceptions: Ukrainian and Afghan refugees are eligible under specific government resettlement schemes.¹

Figure 1: Who is eligible for temporary accommodation?



People are considered to be in priority need if they or someone in their household is pregnant, is a dependent child, is at risk of domestic abuse, or is homeless as a result of flood, fire, or other disaster. They may also be in priority need if they are young people who have been in care, or if they are vulnerable – for example due to their health, old age, having spent time in the armed forces or in prison, or because of a threat of violence from someone outside their household. In practice, the majority of households assessed as being in priority need have children: at the end of 2021, 62 per cent of households that were owed a housing duty by the local authority included one or more dependent children (in the rest of England this figure was 58 per cent).²

People are considered to be “intentionally homeless” if they have been evicted due to anti-social behaviour, could have afforded to pay their rent or mortgage but did not, or left a home where they could have stayed. In some cases, this means that people who have been given notice that their private tenancy will end are told to wait until they are evicted by bailiffs – to avoid the risk of being seen as leaving a property which was available to them.

People are also given temporary accommodation by the state for other reasons. This might be under Section 17 of the Children Act, which allows councils to provide accommodation to children in need (and their families)³ if they have recently been released from prison, or because they are asylum seekers. The legal mechanisms underlying such situations are different, and for that reason these measures would not usually be called “temporary accommodation” – but the actual accommodation that people move into may be the same.

Local authorities can also discharge their housing duty by offering households who present as homeless an Assured Shorthold Tenancy – the most common tenancy type in the private rented sector. This avoids placing households in temporary accommodation, but the availability of private properties in London that are affordable to homeless households is very limited, and even close to zero for benefit-capped households (this is explored later in the report).

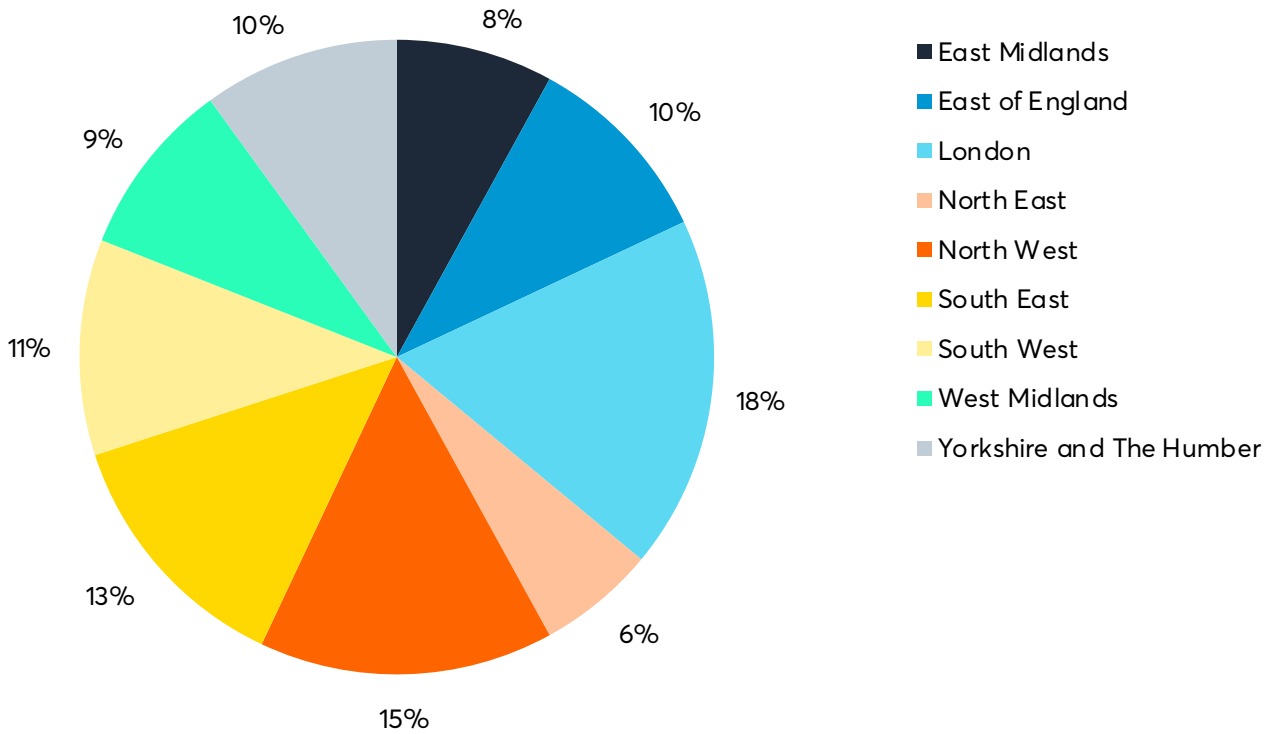
Homelessness prevention duty

Local authorities also have a duty to prevent people becoming homeless by offering support to households who are ‘threatened with homelessness’. As part of this duty to prevent homelessness, local authorities are required to ‘take reasonable steps’ to help households secure accommodation – generally this means providing advice and support to households so they can remain in their current home, for example by helping with benefit claims or resolving a dispute with their landlord. If this is not possible, local authorities would help households secure other accommodation. This support is often life changing for households at risk of homelessness and local authorities receive a government grant for these prevention aims. The Homelessness Reduction Act has increased councils’ duties as regards prevention – this is covered in a specific section later in this report.

How many people in London become homeless, and how many use temporary accommodation?

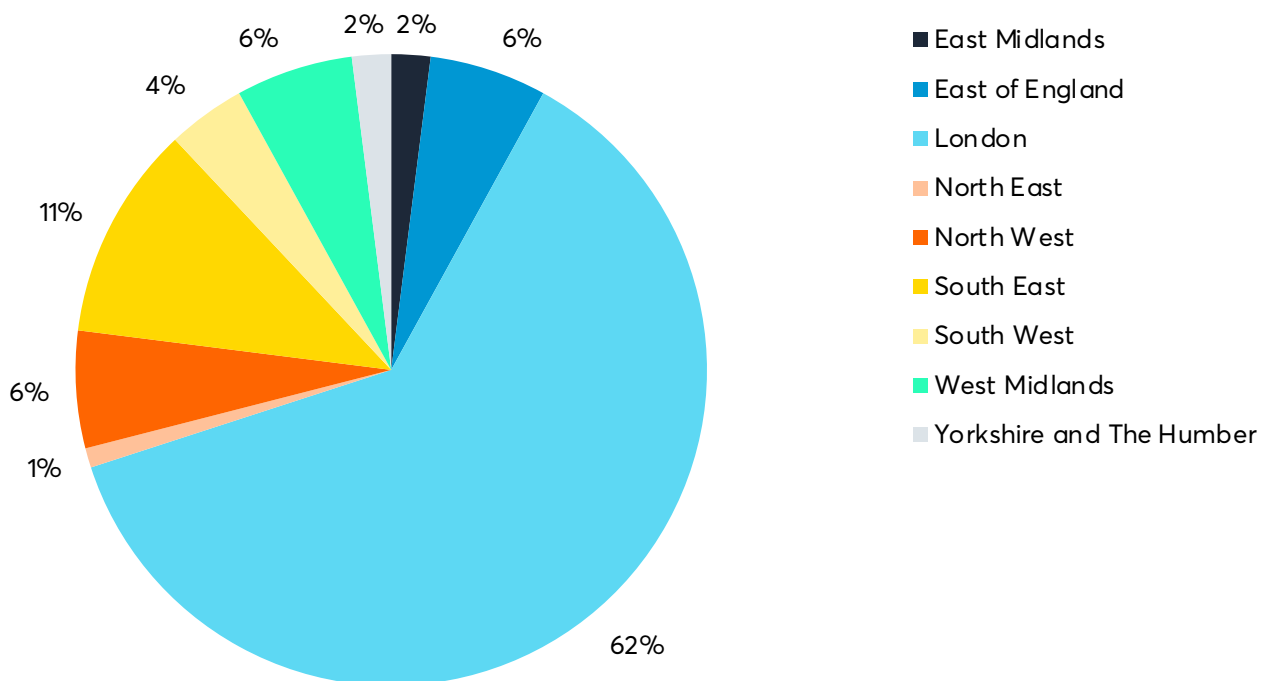
The risk of a household in London becoming homeless in any given year is similar to that of households in most other parts of England. An average of 1.8 households per thousand were assessed as homeless in London in every quarter from 2018 to 2021, compared to 1.5 in England on average and 2.3 in Greater Manchester. However, the rate of households living in temporary accommodation in London is much higher: while 18 per cent of all English homeless households are in London, 59 per cent of all English households in temporary accommodation are in London. This represents 56,500 households, including 75,850 children.⁴ This is more than the total number of children living in Newcastle upon Tyne.⁵

Figure 2: Households assessed as homeless, as percentage of national total, by region (Q4 2021)



Source: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2022). Detailed local authority level tables: October to December 2021⁶

Figure 3: Households living in temporary accommodation, as percentage of national total, by region (Q4 2021)



Source: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2022). Detailed local authority level tables: October to December 2021⁷

Why do people in London become homeless and need temporary accommodation?

People can become homeless for a multitude of reasons: being forced out by their parents or families (a particular risk for LGBTQ+ young people),⁸ escaping domestic abuse, at the end of a relationship, or after the breakdown of a flat share. However, the reasons that people cannot find another home are usually economic – they cannot find an affordable property because their income is too low compared to housing costs.

The reasons that people lose their homes have also changed over time. In the 1990s a key trigger for homelessness was mortgage repossessions, which followed people falling into arrears on their mortgage payments. This is now very rare. The most common trigger cause today is the ending of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy – either because the contract is not being renewed, or because the tenant receives a Section 21 notice, a so-called “no-fault eviction”. 13 per cent of households assessed as being owed prevention duty were facing homelessness after a “no-fault eviction”.⁹

The underlying reasons that people cannot afford a home are twofold: people’s incomes are too low, and property prices are too high. Households at risk of homelessness often require government support to meet their housing costs, despite a majority being in work (60 per cent of homeless households in London were in work according to 2017 figures).¹⁰ A more generous benefits system would reduce the risk of households becoming homeless, and make it easier for them to move into permanent accommodation. (The interaction between benefits and temporary accommodation is discussed more fully below.)

On the supply side, London has a chronic shortage of social housing, which is usually cheaper and more secure than housing in the private rented sector. Households often wait many years for a social home to become available, and just under 300,000 London households were waiting for a social home in 2021.¹¹ As a result many people have little choice but to rent privately. This can be very difficult: the average rent paid by private tenants in London is double that for England as a whole, at over £2,257 per month.¹² For most people at risk of homelessness, high house prices and the requirement for a large mortgage deposit make home ownership unrealistic.

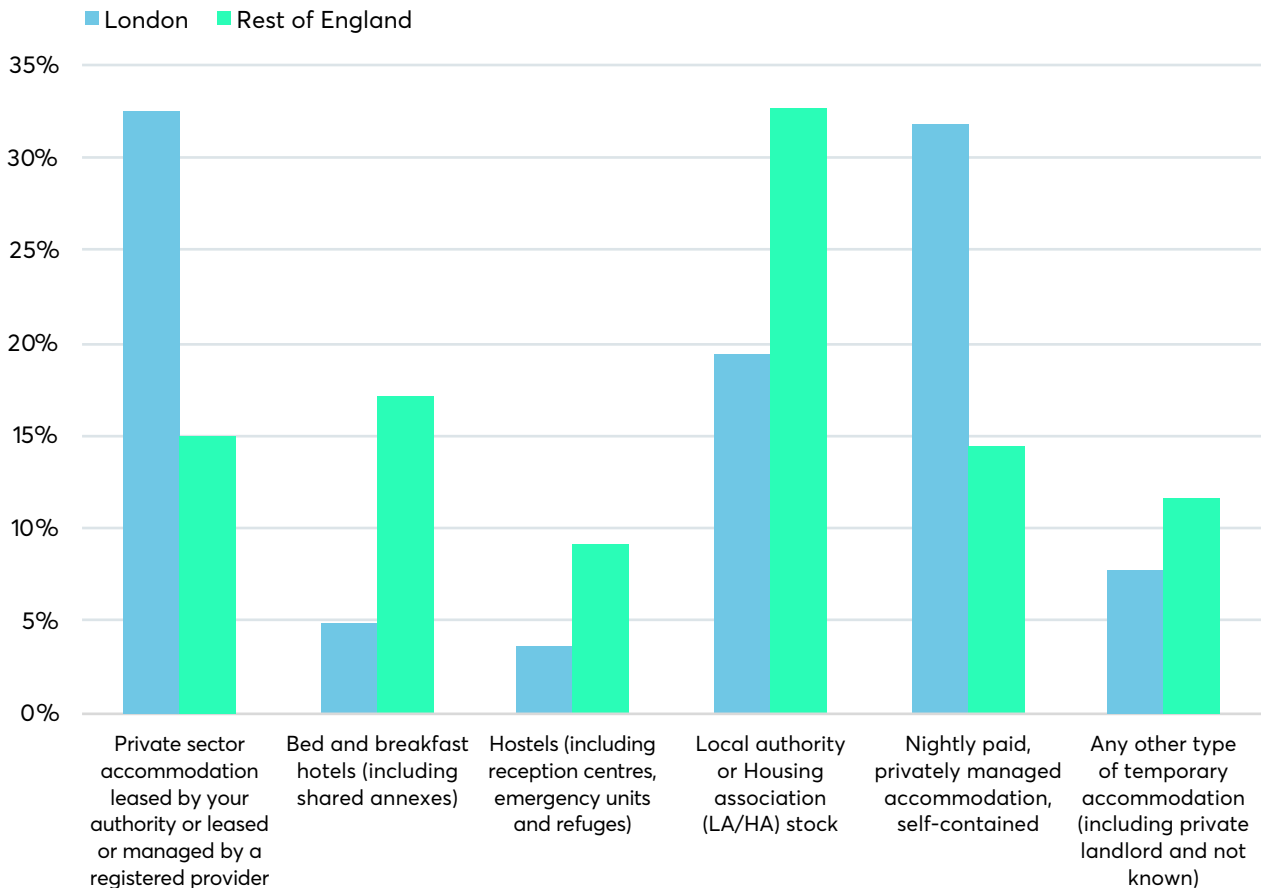


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Types of temporary accommodation

Temporary accommodation varies widely in housing type, quality, and distance from where people were living previously. For households in London, the best-case scenario is usually a flat close to where they were living before and with easy access to their existing school, healthcare provider, work and/or social networks. The worst-case scenario might be a property that is very far away from their previous location, or a “bed & breakfast” property.

Figure 4: Types of temporary accommodation placements (Q4 2021)



Source: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2022). Detailed local authority level tables: October to December 2021¹³

Despite the name – which sounds reminiscent of countryside holidays – living in bed & breakfast accommodation can be very grim. Households usually have only one room for everyone (including children) to live in, with shared kitchen and bathroom facilities. Families living in this type of accommodation say that it is very hard for children to play or do their homework in one room, and that they are sometimes scared to use the shared kitchens and bathrooms.¹⁴ More detail on the experiences of people living in temporary accommodation can be found below.

The number of households placed in bed & breakfast accommodation in London has declined steeply in recent years, as a result of concerted action by local authorities and their partners. But the cost-of-living crisis, combined with the reduced availability of affordable housing, are likely to reverse that progress – unless the government intervenes to prevent a surge in homelessness.

Understanding what is happening for people in temporary accommodation is often complicated, because the categories that local authorities use to record where people are staying are rather confusing and not always mutually exclusive. “Bed & breakfast” refers to a type

of property whereas “nightly paid” refers to a payment model. In some cases, “self-contained” accommodation might mean a whole family living in one room with a small ensuite bathroom, a microwave, and no long-term stability. Similarly, we cannot tell from this data what type of accommodation is being offered when it is provided by the local authority. Revising these categories would make it easier to understand the types of experiences people have when living in temporary accommodation.

Out-of-area placements

People who become homeless usually want to stay close to the area that they were living in before. This makes it easier for children to go to school or nursery, for adults to go to work or find new work, and for everyone to keep their vital social and family connections. Local authorities (and other entities that offer accommodation on behalf of councils, such as Capital Letters) are aware of this and will look to provide accommodation near where the household currently lives, only procuring accommodation outside London as a last resort. However, many boroughs feel they cannot avoid moving some households outside the city – due to both the lack of affordable rental properties and social housing in London, and the government freeze on LHA rates applicable to temporary accommodation (which has been in place since January 2011 despite steep rent increases since then).

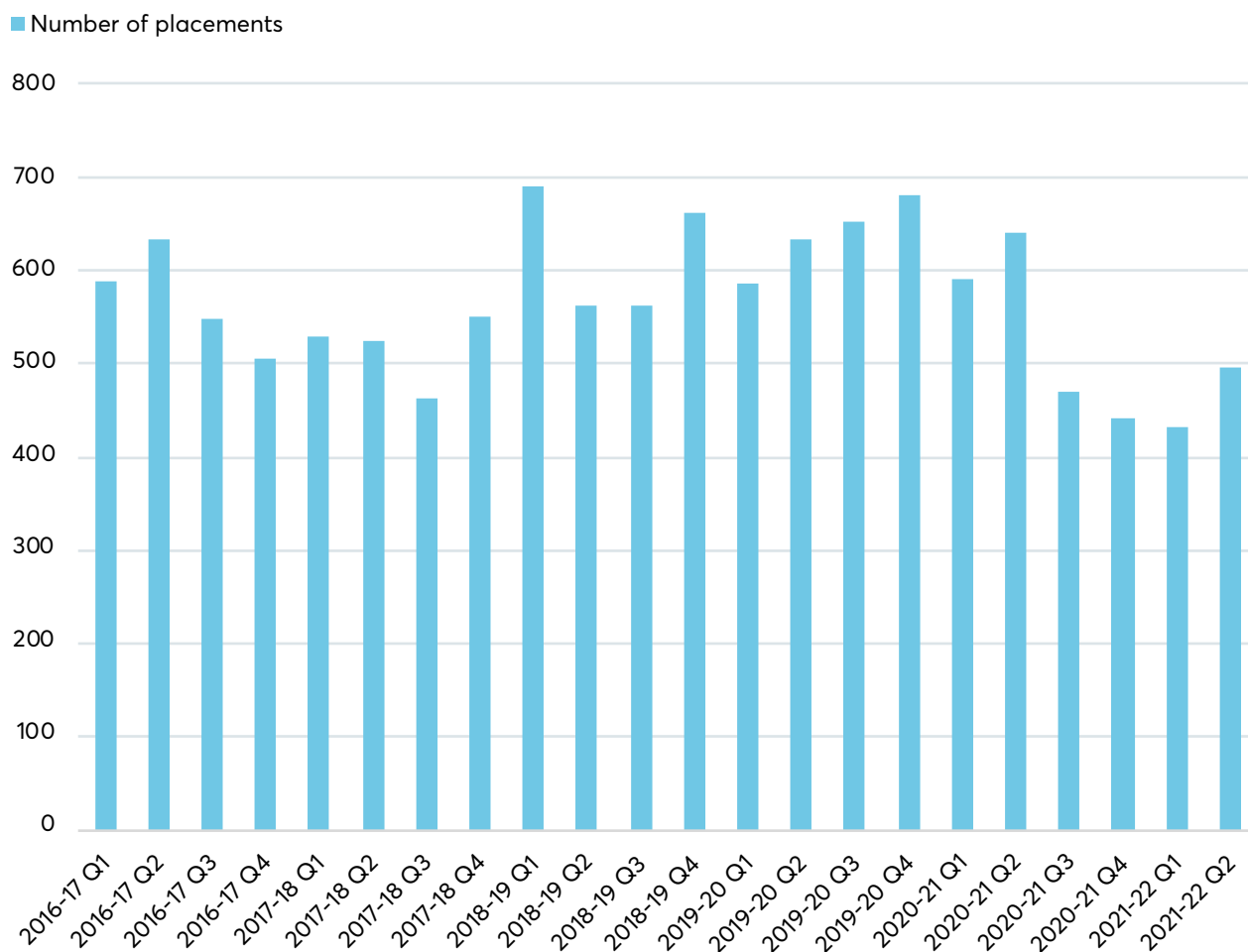
People’s experiences of being placed outside their borough vary. In London, being placed “out of borough” can represent a move of less than a mile – meaning it is possible for people to continue their lives without major disruption – or it can mean a journey of several hours. However, some London households have been placed in temporary accommodation very far from where they live – for example, as far as Stoke-on-Trent.¹⁵ Since this arrangement is temporary, it can be hard for people to put down roots in their new areas, and children sometimes endure long and exhausting journeys by public transport so that they can stay at the same school. “Host” local authorities sometimes experience problems with large numbers of households that have complex needs moving into their areas.

In some cases, households are happy to consider moving to another city – perhaps to join other family members or because they want to live in a more affordable location. However, we have been told that this is uncommon. Victims of domestic or gang violence can also be better off by moving away from their abuser, but it is concerning that households who are not at risk of violence are being relocated very far from home.

Recent figures show that 82 per cent of all English out-of-borough temporary accommodation placements are in London: this is unsurprising, since the affordability crisis is at its worst in London.¹⁶ Most out-of-borough placements by London boroughs are made within London. Nonetheless, the “inside/outside London” distinction may not always be the most important, as it can take just as long to travel within the city as to go outside it – especially since low-income households tend to travel by bus and often cannot afford Tube or train fares.

The number of households placed outside London varies from quarter to quarter but so far they have made up a small proportion of all placements – in Q2 2021 around 7 per cent of London households in temporary accommodation were placed outside London.¹⁷ In some outer London boroughs this might be a relatively short distance outside the London boundary, but for some people it will be much further. These out-of-London placement figures are also likely to be underestimates – since if the council arranges a private tenancy outside London for a person but does not fund the tenancy (known as “discharge to private rented sector”), they may not appear in these figures. The number of out-of-London placements has tended to fluctuate over recent years (see Figure 5 on the next page), but it may go up again if the cost-of-living crisis increases the number of people who become homeless.

Figure 5: Number of temporary accommodation placements of London households made outside London



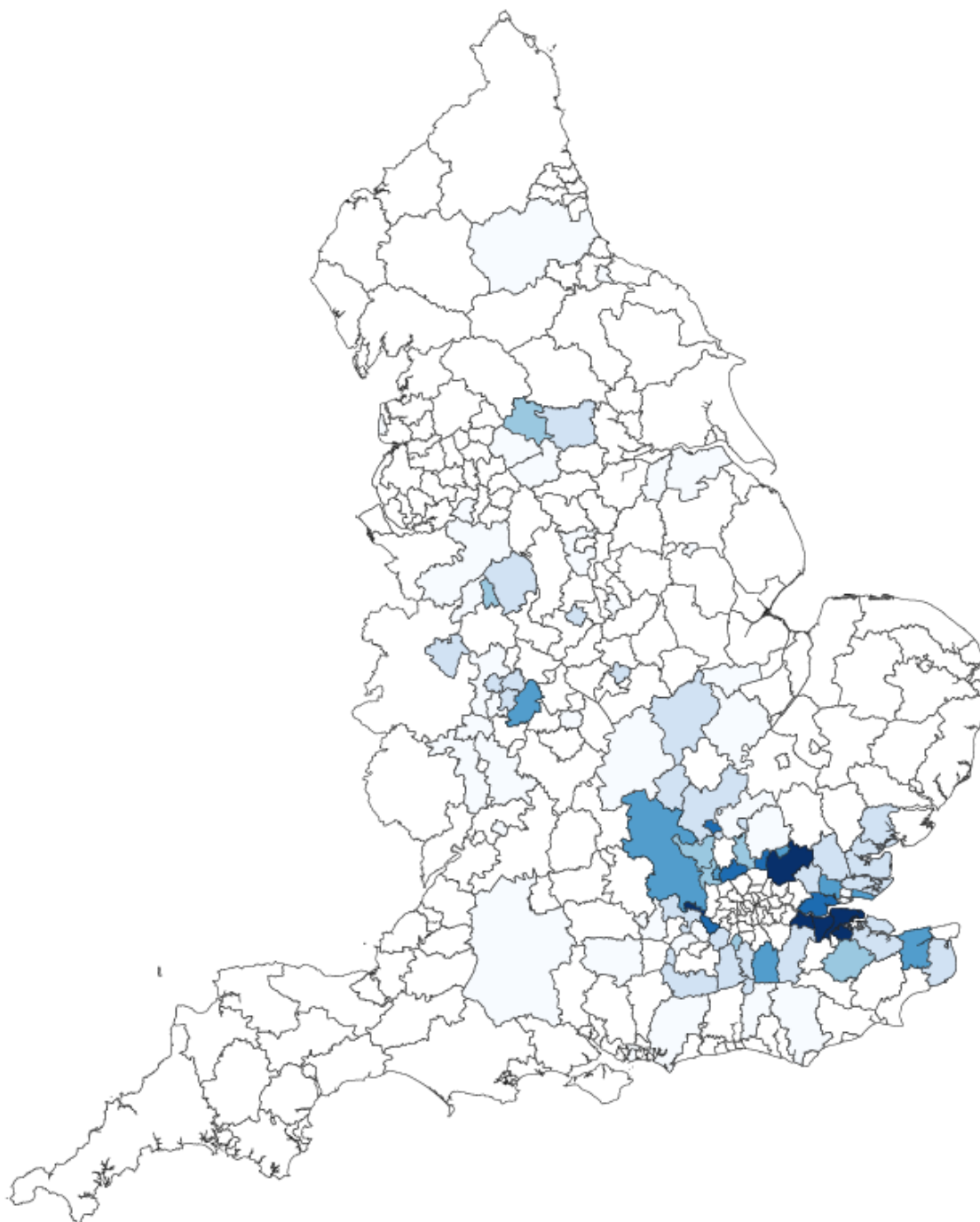
Source: IBAA report: Q1 and Q2 2021/22¹⁸

The data on how many households are placed outside London, the distance of placements, and their experience of these placements, is complex and poor. This is because (a) some boroughs declined to share this information publicly, (b) we do not know households’ previous address, (c) the data doesn’t differentiate between short-term and long-term placements, and (d) as previously mentioned the data we had access to only includes temporary accommodation placements (not “discharge to private rented sector” outcomes). With these caveats in mind, the map below shows that between September 2020 and 2021 that placements far away from the city are common. Households placed outside London are more likely to be in the home counties – but while moving out to Luton or Gravesham may be an attractive option for commuters who can afford train expensive fares back to the city, homeless households will usually rely on the bus – and these services tend to be less frequent and more expensive outside London, if they exist at all.

Some boroughs are more likely to use placements outside London than others, and some boroughs have not placed any of their homeless households outside London (though this might change in the future). Differences between boroughs on placement distance can be partly explained by the fact that boroughs also have very different housing markets: in some parts of London, there is no rental property available that is affordable for homeless households on LHA rates. This creates ripple effects – relatively more affordable boroughs receive placements from less affordable boroughs, and these boroughs need to place households elsewhere as a result.

Figure 6: Placements made outside London by London boroughs between September 2020 and September 2021

1 - 2 2 - 10 10 - 25 25 - 50 50 - 100 100 - 271



Source: IBAA reports

The fact that some boroughs are compelled to make placements far from people's homes shows that there are huge problems within the system: these are described elsewhere in the report. In the meantime, councils that must procure accommodation in other towns or cities can follow best practice when making these placements: they can ensure that households are offered higher-quality accommodation and help with access to essentials in their new area (for example, by securing school places ahead of the move). Councils should also ensure that they follow best practice communication with households they have placed and with the receiving local authority. This is crucial for all placements, but especially for those made out of borough, since it will be more difficult for those households to stay in touch with their housing officer.

Chapter 2:

How the system works

What happens when people move into temporary accommodation

When a household tells their local authority they are homeless, they will be directed to a housing officer. The officer will then interview them to prepare a personalised housing plan, which will include determining whether they are eligible for temporary accommodation. If they are eligible, then the housing officer will try to find housing for them. Sometimes the household is directly moved into a privately rented home, or, very rarely, a social home. However, we have been told by one interviewee that this is unusual, and it is more common for households to be moved into temporary accommodation. In some cases, they might move between different types of temporary accommodation – for example from a bed & breakfast to a flat.

Once people are living in temporary accommodation, the council is required to help them find a permanent home. It might be in social housing, or it might be a private tenancy that is affordable to them. As described above, London has severe shortages of both these types of housing, which can make finding a permanent home very difficult. This contributes to the far higher number of households in temporary accommodation within London compared to other parts of England.

How councils find and pay for temporary accommodation

Councils are responsible for finding and paying for temporary accommodation for their residents. The households using the accommodation pay for it with housing benefit (discussed in more detail below), but in many cases this will not meet the full cost of the rent and the council will have to pay the difference.

Councils can source accommodation in a range of different ways: they might designate some of their social housing stock as temporary accommodation, or build new stock specifically for this purpose – perhaps using an impact investment vehicle to raise the funds. Alternatively, they might block-rent accommodation from private landlords in their borough (or outside it), or they might make specific arrangements with private landlords, paying by the night. In some cases, they might make arrangements with a bed & breakfast or hostel – although as noted above, the number of people in this type of accommodation in London has been falling in recent years.

In almost all cases, using a home for temporary accommodation means it cannot be used by someone else – whether this is a household on the social housing waiting list or a household who would rent privately. Our interviewees told us that in some (relatively) affordable parts of outer London, councils' practice of renting homes for temporary accommodation has pushed up rents for private tenants in the neighbourhood. It is impossible to separate the challenge of providing sufficient temporary accommodation from the challenge of providing enough "general needs" social and affordable housing for Londoners.

Councils very often look for accommodation outside the borough if they can't find any inside it – and this means competing with other local authorities for the same (very small) number of affordable properties. Boroughs have agreed that they will not pay more for temporary accommodation than the receiving local authority would have, under an agreement signed in 2011, called Pan London Agreement on Inter-Borough Accommodation Placements. The latest figures suggest that this agreement is generally respected, though around five per cent of placements breach the cost rule (usually owing to the local authority running out of options to place a household). The agreement also stipulates that boroughs will notify receiving authorities of the placement, with limited data provided including the household name and the property location. The agreement does not specify minimum property standards, and no government departments are currently signatories to it.

Case Study: Coordinated procurement across London boroughs through Capital Letters

Capital Letters is a not-for-profit company owned and founded by London's boroughs that procures homes from private landlords on behalf of its member local authorities (21 London boroughs as of July 2022). Instead of temporary accommodation, it offers private tenancies to homeless households, since it can be easier to find nearby homes this way and avoid the use of bed & breakfast facilities. To help prevent households becoming homeless again, Capital Letters also offers a free tenancy sustainment service for both tenants and landlords.

Capital Letters was set up to solve the problem of coordination between London boroughs. Each local authority is responsible for finding housing for eligible households who present as homeless, but given the severe shortage of social housing, the local authority generally has no option but to procure a property from a private landlord. However, this is also a challenge to arrange, since homeless households can only afford London's very cheapest private rentals (see next section). This means boroughs often compete for a small number of properties, thereby creating a perverse incentive for local authorities to outbid each other or accept lower standards of accommodation. It leads to both increased costs for the public sector and "crossed" placements between local authorities. For instance, between January and March 2021, Islington made 67 bookings in Haringey while Haringey made 45 bookings in Islington.

Capital Letters minimises these undesirable effects by agreeing maximum rents to be paid, setting baseline quality standards, and giving priority to local households. A report by researchers at the LSE found that "there are strong indications of significant savings" for councils placing households through Capital Letters: however, the lack of quality data made it impossible for a value-for-money assessment to be made.¹⁹

Capital Letters shows how cooperation can achieve better outcomes for households facing homelessness. But its future is uncertain. Capital Letters, which is owned by its member authorities, was set up in 2019 by the boroughs and London Councils using a £38m grant provided by central government. The government's vision for Capital Letters was for the organisation to become self-sufficient. The initial plan was for its member boroughs to transfer their procurement teams and property management to Capital Letters, but this has not fully materialised. 12 London local authorities are still not members of Capital Letters, and most local authorities feel that they must retain some procurement capabilities. Transferring properties to Capital Letters is controversial, as properties can be a source of income for boroughs themselves. As a result, Capital Letters has doubled down on its free services beyond property procurement to attract local authorities, while using part of its government grant to purchase its own properties and secure long-term income. But without a long-term funding deal, and incentives for boroughs to become members, the initiative may not last.

Temporary accommodation and the benefits system

Temporary accommodation is paid for through housing benefit, and any rent above this level is covered by the local authority. If the household is not already receiving this support, the local authority will typically help them apply. Given the complexity of applying for benefits, some local authorities use data-led approaches such as the Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT)²⁰ to help households claim the benefits they are entitled to under Universal Credit. They also use such data to identify households who are most at risk of homelessness.

While the benefits system was designed to help during times of need, it is ill-fitted in its current form to deliver the support needed by Londoners at risk of homelessness. There are three key issues with the way the system currently works:

- **The five-week wait:** Households applying for Universal Credit must wait for five weeks to receive their first payment after being declared eligible. If they need the money urgently, they can apply for an advance payment – essentially a zero-interest loan to the household, deducted from their future payments over a year or two. However, taking this loan effectively reduces the support people get over the medium term to below the levels that the government's own assessment has established as the minimum for a household's survival.

- The LHA rate freeze:** The second issue is the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate – the metric used to set the maximum rent covered by housing benefit. LHA rates are set using data from private rents in each Broad Rental Market Area (the area within which a person might reasonably be expected to live). Initially, the LHA rates were set in 2008 at the 50th percentile of rents in each Broad Rental Market Area – put simply, households on benefits would only be able to access the cheaper 50 per cent of the rental market. In 2011 the LHA rates were reduced to the bottom 30th percentile of rents, and year-on-year increases were tied to Consumer Price Inflation rather than the increase in rents in the area. The government then froze LHA rates altogether between 2015 and 2020, so they decreased in real terms. In 2020 the rates were restored to the bottom 30th percentile of rents, but they have since been frozen again, despite inflation reaching a 40-year high. However, LHA rates for temporary accommodation are different to those used for privately rented accommodation, and are still frozen to January 2011 levels – therefore bearing no relation to current prices on the private rental market.
- The benefit cap:** A limit on the total benefits a household can receive was introduced in 2013. The idea was that reducing income from benefits would incentivise people to seek income from work. However, evidence suggests it had little effect on employment: only 5 out of every 100 affected households moved into work because of the cap.²¹ While the benefit cap was first set at £26,000 a year – the average household income in the UK at the time – in late 2016 it was reduced to £23,000 in London and £20,000 elsewhere. The cap has never been increased to keep up with inflation. Despite only representing 16 per cent of the English population, London accounted for 36 per cent of all capped households as of August 2021 – around 53,000 households. The disproportionate impact of the cap on the capital reflects London’s much higher cost of living – which is particularly troubling since London already enjoys a more generous cap. On average, capped households in London miss out on between £184 and £300 in benefits per month.²² In today’s housing market, families with two or more children who are affected by the benefit cap can afford between 0.1 and 0.8 per cent of private rented properties in London with the current level of state support (this varies based on the number of children in the household). For some households there is virtually no accommodation available in the city. And of course, properties at the bottom of the market will almost invariably be properties of the worst quality.²³

Given the impact of the cap on destitution and homelessness, the government encouraged local authorities to make use of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to mitigate the cap’s impact on the most vulnerable households. DHPs are discretionary, short-term payments made by local authorities to help people with their housing costs, but they are now routinely used by boroughs to mitigate the impact of the cap. Nonetheless, there are two key issues with using DHPs for this purpose. First, local authorities do not have access to data on their residents’ benefit claims, so they can only set up a DHP after a resident has approached them with their case – which is often too late to prevent people from falling into hardship. Second, boroughs’ DHP budget is far below the shortfall caused by the cap. In Barnet, for instance, £248,107 was spent between April and September 2021 on DHPs (for households who may or may not be affected by the cap),²⁴ while the amount of benefits capped was somewhere between £752,397 and £1,227,500.²⁵ Government funding for DHP has also been reduced, as explained later in this report.

The combined effect of rising rents, static LHA rates, reduced benefit cap, and lower incomes from the five-week wait for Universal Credit has put many more households at risk of homelessness – particularly in London, as our interviewees explained.²⁶ These factors also make

it very difficult for councils to afford to lease properties as temporary accommodation. Clearly, households relying on benefits alone cannot survive in today's housing market.

Households living in temporary accommodation are exempted from the benefit cap. But temporary accommodation LHA rates are frozen at January 2011 levels, which are completely out of step with the current cost of leasing temporary accommodation to private landlords. This limits the number (and quality) of properties that councils can afford to lease as temporary accommodation, and in some cases requires councils to make up the shortfall from their own budget with DHPs.²⁷

The experiences of people who need temporary accommodation

Housing services are stretched financially and have to spend a lot of time determining households' eligibility. Qualitative evidence shows that households facing homelessness are sometimes frustrated by their early interactions with housing officers, as they are unable to understand what officers mean or perceive them to be coming across as "bullyish" towards them.²⁸ Indeed, demonstrating eligibility can be a re-traumatising experience. At best, households must recount how they came to face homelessness and justify why they should be considered a priority need: this might involve going over experiences of domestic violence, mental or physical health complications, and other experiences that show they are in a vulnerable position.

Households with children are always in priority need, so their experiences in the earlier stages of the assessment are generally different from other types of households (but not by all means always). Single people must justify their priority status, which in many instances deters them from even approaching their local council. People facing homelessness often lack a network of friends and family to support them, which can lead to social isolation. In such cases, it might not be at all easy for them to approach their local council and make a case for their priority need. Interviews with local authorities suggest that some boroughs are providing housing officers with further support to navigate these difficult early conversations with households.

If a household has nowhere to stay, the local authority will offer emergency temporary accommodation on the same day while a decision is made on whether the household is owed a homelessness duty. Emergency placements are designed to be very short-term – perhaps one or two nights in a bed & breakfast – while the housing team sources more appropriate temporary accommodation. Sometimes the emergency accommodation is considered fit for households to remain there. Households do not have much say over the temporary accommodation they are offered – if they reject an offer that the council deems suitable, the borough can say that it has discharged its duty and no longer needs to support the household.

The experiences of housing officers

Frontline housing officers do difficult jobs. Often, the people they work with are in extreme situations – they may be very distressed, and may have children with them who are distressed as well. Sometimes people are angry or abusive, or may be under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Housing officers' jobs become harder still when they cannot offer people the help they would like to be able to offer – which happens a lot in London, as suitable accommodation is scarce. For some officers, this might lead to moral injury – "the strong cognitive and emotional response that can occur following events that violate a person's moral or ethical code" – in this case because they cannot help people who they believe they should help.²⁹

In our research, we heard that frontline housing officers find the H-CLIC form especially complex and cumbersome. This form has to be filled in whenever a household presents as homeless, even if they only

need advice at that stage rather than active intervention. We also heard that housing officers often do not find out what happens to people after they have worked with them: this can cause officers to feel demoralised and demotivated.

"It is getting incredibly difficult to get the right calibre of people, and also retain officers as well."

Homelessness Prevention and Relief lead, local authority

Chapter 3: What has changed and what might change next?

Trends over the last 25 years

The number of households in temporary accommodation has varied considerably over the last 25 years. During the late 1990s and early 2000s it rose steadily, ostensibly for the same reasons that it is rising presently: the combination of increasing housing costs and poverty. But from around the mid-2000s it then began to fall. The causes of this fall are complex, but the most significant factors seem to be the growth in social housing stock and reductions in relative poverty, as well as targeted work to reduce temporary accommodation use.

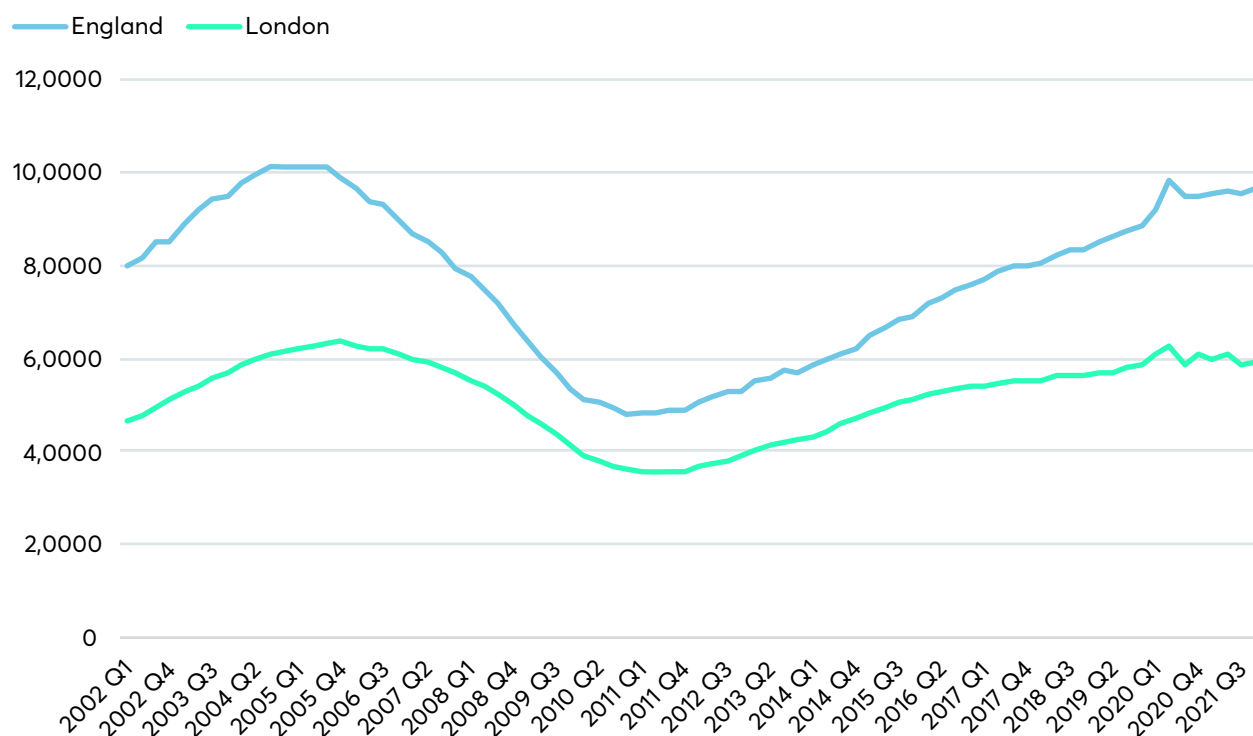
Significant social housebuilding in this period meant that more social homes were being added to the stock than were being sold through right to buy – an unusual moment in the last 40 years of British housing history.³⁰ At the same time, Britain's economic success was increasing average household incomes, and lower-income households were supported through a relatively generous (compared to today) benefits and tax credit system.³¹ Through benefits and service delivery, there was a particular boost in support for families with young children – important because these are at higher risk of needing temporary accommodation.

Finally, the government asked local authorities to report on the number of households in temporary accommodation and the length of time they spent in it, setting targets for these two metrics to decrease. After 2010, this fall in the number of households in temporary accommodation began to reverse as the financial crisis eroded people's earnings, while austerity policies reduced both the value of benefits and the number of social homes being built.

Nonetheless, within London the picture of temporary accommodation is very diverse. Over the past ten years, some boroughs have witnessed an explosion in the use of temporary accommodation (Greenwich and Southwark, for instance) – while others have been able to stay put (Ealing) or reduce their reliance on temporary accommodation significantly (Brent). The reasons for these differences are complex, not always easy to interpret, and may be related to each borough's local circumstances. Data showing the change in the number of households in temporary accommodation for each London borough over the last ten years can be found in the Appendix to this report.

Finally, the rise and fall in the number of households in temporary accommodation shows that its use is not inevitable. On the contrary: the extent to which temporary accommodation is needed is highly influenced by macroeconomic trends and government policy

Figure 7: Households living in temporary accommodation



Source: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2022). Statutory homelessness live tables.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

In the first year of the pandemic, the number of households in temporary accommodation dipped as the (temporary) eviction ban meant that fewer households were becoming homeless.³² People who had been sleeping rough were offered accommodation – often in hotels under the “Everyone In” programme. Many people in this group would not usually have been eligible for temporary accommodation – though some might have been, due to their mental or physical health needs.³³

These falls turned out to be temporary, and the use of temporary accommodation is now rising again. In the early stages of the pandemic there was some talk of an exodus from London, as people re-evaluated their priorities in life (or their need to be in the office). This was doubtless the case for some people – indeed, moving from London to more rural areas is fairly common even outside the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic – but in retrospect it does not seem to have been a major trend. People on lower incomes may have been less able to move because their jobs need to be done in person. Rents in London fell during some periods of 2021, but are now rising again, suggesting that demand continues to outstrip supply and that the challenge of delivering enough affordable homes for London is likely to continue.³⁴

Worsening supply shortages since the pandemic

The last year has seen rental values surge by 15.8 per cent in London (and even 21.1 per cent in inner London) as more people need to rent privately while fewer rental properties are available. On Rightmove, for instance, there are 35 per cent fewer properties listed for rent in London than during an average quarter in the pandemic.³⁵ In all boroughs, rents are now higher than before the pandemic. Despite these rent rises, the LHA rate has remained frozen by the government since April 2020 (and since 2011 for temporary accommodation), meaning that a dwindling number of properties can be used for temporary accommodation. In Q1 2022, 8.8 per cent of rental properties listed on Rightmove were affordable on LHA rates, down from 12.9 per

cent in Q1 2021.³⁶ This percentage will be even lower for households who are affected by the benefit cap (see Chapter 2), or in areas of London where LHA rates are lower – for example the figure in Q1 2022 for South East London was 6.2 per cent.

The reduction in supply and the hike in rental prices has made finding rental properties even more difficult and costly for councils. For some households, councils have no choice but to step in and pay a portion of the rent through a DHP or from their Homelessness Prevention Grant. But the government has recently cut the budget for DHPs – from £140m in 2021-22 to £100m in 2022-23 – and using the Homelessness Prevention Grant to meet the costs of temporary accommodation means it cannot be used to help prevent homelessness in the first place.³⁷ Councils running out of options are likely to turn to hostels and other nightly paid accommodation – or else resort to making more placements outside London.

Demand for social housing is also rising – much more quickly than new homes can be built. Mayoral plans to fund 10,000 new social homes between 2018 and 2022 have been dwarfed by a huge increase in the waiting list for social housing during 2020/21 (from approximately 250,000 to 300,000 households).³⁸

The Homelessness Reduction Act

The 2017 Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) introduced three major changes in addressing homelessness.³⁹ First, it requires local authorities to intervene at an earlier stage to prevent homelessness by extending the definition of “threatened with homelessness” to cover those facing eviction within 56 days – up from 28 days previously. It also extends support to more types of households by providing prevention or relief duties regardless of priority need. If a household is in priority need, the local authority will also secure interim accommodation alongside relief duty. Finally, the HRA was intended to improve the quality of information given to households facing homelessness, by offering free advice to anyone in a local authority (whether they are owed a duty or not) and by creating personalised housing plans aimed at setting out the steps that will be taken by the applicant (and the local authority) to stay in or find suitable accommodation.

Another important component of the HRA was the introduction of the Homelessness Case Level Information Classification (H-CLIC), which was intended to increase the quantity and quality of the data available on homelessness. It was designed to ensure that the journey of households through the system was recorded, and that housing services would know how to contact households who are most at risk of homelessness. While it was a step in the right direction, its implementation was slow, and staff felt that the increased data collection made it difficult to engage with the households presenting as homeless. Several London boroughs that handled particularly high volumes of homelessness applications even postponed H-CLIC’s implementation for months. We were told that it is still not possible for housing officers to easily access a household history, or to fast-track households who present as homeless several times.

When asked about the impact of the 2017 HRA, our interviewees stated that the effect was mixed. While the legislation undoubtedly increased the focus on prevention, it did little to address London’s particular challenges – the high levels of poverty and lack of affordable housing. There is a tension at the heart of the HRA: boroughs have a legal obligation to house homeless households, but they lack the resources to do so.⁴⁰ A 2019 report from London Councils and the London Housing Directors’ Group found that “government severely understated the costs of new duties in London”. The £30m allocated to London boroughs falls short of covering the estimated £80m needed to meet increased costs between 2017/18 and 2022/23.⁴¹ While particularly acute in London due to high housing costs, this issue was echoed across England. The government stated that this underestimate was due to lower-than-expected reductions in temporary accommodation.⁴²

The cost-of-living crisis

The current cost-of-living crisis is leading to more households becoming homeless. Although it is too early to see this from official data, some local authorities are already reporting a rise in cases. This is likely to intensify as the higher fuel price cap kicks in and people need to use heating more – though the additional support available to households to help with their fuel bills this year will go some way towards mitigating the impact.⁴³

At this stage, it seems likely that the main trigger for people becoming homeless will continue to be the end of a private tenancy. Even if mortgage interest rates rise considerably, more stringent stress-testing of mortgages by banks and higher requirements for deposits mean it is unlikely that there will be mass home repossessions (as there were in Britain in the early 1990s and in the US in the late 2000s). However, it is possible that some people with shared ownership properties – some of whom have minimal deposits and thus own only a small proportion of their property – will come into difficulties with their combined rent/mortgage. The legal position in these cases is complex, but it is possible that some could either be forced to give up their home if their bank refuses to extend their mortgage, or be evicted by their landlord (usually a housing association).⁴⁴

The government has committed to ending “no-fault” evictions, and while this should have a positive impact on homelessness, there will be other grounds that landlords can use for repossession – for example, if they are planning to sell the property. The burden of evidence attached to such loopholes may also change, and if so, landlords may be able to easily evict tenants even once “no fault” evictions have been banned. In any case, landlords can still evict their tenants over rent arrears, which is a main cause of homelessness in London.

Chapter 4: Possible solutions

Raising incomes

The most common reason people become homeless is that their income is not enough to afford rent on a suitable home (or they could once afford the rent, but it was raised or their tenancy ended, and they cannot find a suitable replacement). To remedy this, there are three main ways that the state can act to raise people's incomes – through the minimum wage, through welfare benefits, and by making it easier for them to work (for example by providing training or support with childcare).

For households at risk of homelessness, the most effective of these is to raise benefits. As of August 2021, 13.7 per cent of all working-age households in London received Universal Credit or a similar legacy benefit, so in many cases a wage increase would be absorbed by their benefits taper. (In most cases, if a person's wages increased by £1 per hour they would keep around 45p an hour.)⁴⁵ Making work easier can be very helpful for some groups, but the scope for this is limited since employment rates in London are currently fairly high: people have jobs, they just don't earn enough from them.

Raising benefits has not been a popular political cause for the last decade or so, but there are some recent signs that public attitudes to benefit claimants are softening,⁴⁶ possibly accelerated by the cost-of-living crisis. It is notable that the £650 government support for energy bills of households on Universal Credit is not subject to the benefit cap,⁴⁷ which suggests that the government recognises that capped households are still in significant need.

Some commentators suggest that Universal Basic Income would be a good replacement for benefits. This is usually taken to mean a system where everyone is given a set amount to meet the cost of a minimum, basic standard of living. There are certainly advantages to making minimum payments an entitlement: currently, people's benefits can be cut or even removed altogether if they do not comply with job search requirements – a condition which causes great stress and hardship. But we don't believe that Universal Basic Income offers a silver bullet for housing problems. Many households in London needing temporary accommodation are large families living in high-cost areas, often with one or more people who have a disability. A flat-rate payment system would be unlikely to meet this group's needs.

There are two main changes to the benefits system that would impact on the number of households presenting as homeless: increasing the rate of local housing allowance (LHA), and raising or removing the benefit cap. Raising LHA rates would mean that many households in London, especially those renting privately, would see their benefits increase. Raising the benefit cap would mostly make a difference to families that have three or more children and are not in work, or are working very few hours – a smaller but highly vulnerable group (though an issue affecting a growing number of people due to the cost-of-living crisis). Removing the benefit cap altogether would remove one particular complexity of the temporary accommodation system – namely, the fact that LHA payments covering temporary accommodation are exempt from the benefit cap, which means that for some families there is a financial cost to moving into permanent accommodation. Removing the exemption for temporary accommodation rent is not a viable solution, since this would simply move payment requirements from one part of the state to another: councils would have to cover the difference in rent themselves.

Building more affordable homes

The second key issue underlying London's temporary accommodation challenge is the lack of affordable homes – both in social housing and the private rented sector. The lack of affordable homes makes it more likely that people will become homeless, and harder for them to move into a new home. It also means that local authorities find it harder to secure temporary accommodation.

The causes of London's lack of affordable housing – and the solutions that could help deliver more social homes or affordable privately rented homes – are complex and beyond the scope of this report to address. However, our assessment is that it makes more sense to build more “general needs” affordable homes than to build properties designated for temporary accommodation. The major exception to this is sites which are temporarily vacant for a period of months or years: these are not suitable for people who need a long-term home, but can, if managed effectively, be suitable for temporary accommodation. This might include building modular homes on empty land (see box below) or, in some cases, meanwhile use of buildings.

How to find funding for temporary accommodation

The Mayor of London has made funding available for local authorities to grow their stock of temporary accommodation by buying homes (rather than letting from private landlords) through the Right to Buy Back scheme. This usually results in cost savings and gives councils more control over the quality of accommodation they offer to homeless households. It is also a smarter use of taxpayer money: instead of being paid directly to private landlords, housing benefit is being used for the upkeep of publicly owned homes, and investment into social housing. We believe that the Greater London Authority should continue to subsidise local authorities and joint borough initiatives to increase the supply of temporary accommodation.

Nonetheless, funding for building or acquiring social housing relies on (currently very limited) government grants, the value of which has been diminished by inflation in building costs. In some cases, pension funds can provide the investment needed for local authorities to grow their stock of publicly owned homes. This avoids local authorities having to pay for accommodation on London's private rented market, and can make it easier to guarantee the quality of accommodation offered to homeless households (rather than, for example, relying on private landlords to make repairs).

One recent large-scale example in London was the deal struck in 2021 between the London Borough of Bromley and the Pension Insurance Corporation. The £67m investment provided by both parties is used by a “specialist housing group” to purchase and manage up to 300 properties, which will be made available as temporary accommodation for 50 years.⁴⁸ After this period the ownership will be transferred to the borough.

We believe that local authorities should consider how they can use their current assets to expand their stock of social housing and temporary accommodation. Impact investments from private capital, as in the case study above, could also allow local authorities to become less reliant on private landlords for temporary accommodation. (How this can be done well is the subject of a Centre for London report published in 2022.) Attracting investment, however, will be difficult as long as the LHA is frozen: we therefore recommend that the government commits to LHA not decreasing in real terms in the future.

Building modular homes on empty land

When funding and land are available, councils generally prefer to build social housing rather than temporary accommodation – so that households can benefit from the stability of a social tenancy. But London has a lot of land that is only available on a temporary basis – generally this is land that sits empty, often for several years, as landowners wait for its value to increase or for planning consent.

Empty land can be well suited for temporary accommodation, since modular construction allows for high-quality homes to be built in a number of weeks and then moved to another site later. The technology for factory-built homes has advanced tremendously since the prefabs of the last century, and there are now a range of modular homes available – from containerised solutions to high-spec units built to last a minimum of 60 years.

Examples of such projects exist across the country. PLACE Lewisham was one of the pioneer projects built in London in 2016, but since then progress has been very slow. The viability of modular housing projects depends on the number of units built: for orders of a few units, they are more expensive than traditional build, but they can become competitive over a few dozen units. To make building on empty land viable, owners will generally need to build on several sites and agree the same standard of accommodation in order to procure a larger number of units. In some cases, building modular homes on empty land can be a cheaper and more suitable alternative to leasing properties from private landlords. Local authorities should therefore look for suitable land and buildings that could be used as temporary accommodation, including accommodation built as modular homes.



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Strengthening homelessness prevention

The Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) aimed to reduce the number of people presenting as homeless and therefore needing temporary accommodation: its impact was discussed earlier in Chapter 3. There is scope for local authorities to do more to prevent people from becoming homeless, but to do so they need adequate resources from central government. We were told that it is common for boroughs to have to use some of their Homelessness Prevention Grant to help pay for temporary accommodation – which reduces their ability to prevent people becoming homeless in the first place.

One possible route to enhance homelessness prevention is for local authorities and voluntary organisations to target communications and advice toward people who are most at risk of homelessness. Information could be distributed through GP surgeries, children's centres and local support groups, and should include guidance on how people can stay

in their homes as well as the rights of private tenants threatened with eviction. Some people who are most at risk of homelessness may have low trust in the council and other public bodies, so building connections through trusted third parties may be more effective. It might also be possible for the Department for Work and Pensions to target information toward people who are paying rent above the LHA level and are subject to the benefit cap, since this group seems to be at particular risk of becoming homeless. Alternatively, it could share this data with local authorities so they can target prevention support – but there are privacy issues with this that would need to be handled with great care.

“We also offered to do brief sit-in sort of sessions, so the officers would go out and attend a food bank or a church hall for a couple of hours every few weeks or so and offer like a walk-in service that’d just be available to provide advice and to [get] homelessness applications for people that seemed like they would be threatened with homelessness soon. We would have liked to do some more. We still have a lot of community hubs and food banks asking if we can come back and do these walk-in sessions, they’ve got people that really need the advice”

Homelessness Prevention and Relief lead, local authority

While there is a strong consensus among professionals working in the sector about the benefits of reaching more people with homelessness prevention advice, there is more debate over the information people should be given about the temporary accommodation that is offered in their area. Some of our interviewees felt that if people were aware that the temporary accommodation available to them is likely (in some cases) to be cramped, low-quality, or far from their previous homes – and that with long social housing waiting lists they are likely to remain in the private rented sector after their period in temporary accommodation – they would be less likely to present as homeless. Others felt that this would constitute an unacceptable threat, and that the focus of communication needed to be on people’s right to access temporary accommodation that meets their needs – even if this is sometimes difficult for housing teams to deliver.

Improving the experiences of people who live in temporary accommodation

It is vanishingly unlikely that the use of temporary accommodation will fall to zero in the foreseeable future. There is a strong case for policies that attempt to improve people’s experience of being in temporary accommodation, even if this does not reduce the total amount of time they are there. These interventions could include improving the type, standard and location of the accommodation offered, or the information and communication that households receive throughout the process.

Temporary accommodation services are provided separately by each London borough – and each borough has a different population, a different level of housing availability, and (to some extent) different policies and practices. There is also inevitable variation between individual staff members, and between individual properties. As a result, people’s experiences of presenting as homeless, being allocated temporary accommodation, living in temporary accommodation and moving to permanent housing vary hugely within London. This makes it harder

to propose one-size-fits-all solutions, but it also means that there is a range of good practice within London – and indeed outside it – that local authorities may be able to learn from.

Below are some possible interventions that might improve people's experiences of temporary accommodation – many of which are already in place in parts of London:

When presenting as homeless

- Comfortable and non-stigmatising waiting areas while waiting to meet a housing officer, with books and toys for children.
- A quiet and private space to meet with a housing officer.
- A discussion that feels respectful and does not feel rushed.
- Comprehensive information given – both during the meeting and to take away (online or on paper) – about the how the process works, what people's rights are, and what will happen next.

When being allocated accommodation

- Priority given to keeping adults near their work and children near their school, college or nursery, with the option to move placement if a more suitable one becomes available later on.
- Families with children not being allocated nightly paid accommodation without a separate kitchen or bedroom.
- Travel times should be calculated based on walking or bus rather than car or train, since the latter options are usually unaffordable to people in temporary accommodation.
- Local authorities should make placements that have the shortest possible travel time, unless a household asks to move to further out. If this is not possible, national government should provide funding to make sure councils can place households within the city and as close as possible to where they currently live. If the government fails to do this, local authorities should make sure households' needs are met *before* placing them outside London (for example by securing school places in the new area). Local authorities should remain in regular contact with households placed outside London, and with services in the receiving authority.
- The government should review the categories used to classify different types of accommodation so that they reflect their suitability more accurately.

When in accommodation

- Consistent and enforced quality and safety standards (particularly for cooking facilities) so people do not have to rely on more expensive and less nutritious no-cook food.
- Provide a furniture pack, carpets, curtains and white goods if needed when households are being placed in the private rented sector. Households at risk of homelessness will generally struggle to afford these when commencing a new tenancy.
- Information about the property should be provided, such as how to use the heating and who to contact if there is a problem – this could be in the form of an online or paper guest book.

- A named contact housing officer throughout their time in contact with the local authority.
- Regular updates on what to expect next and when the housing team will next be in touch.
- Provide support with debt advice, benefits advice, and information on how to access food banks – as well as support with the administrative implications of moving to a new area (if relevant).
- Provide opportunities for tenant engagement – for example through WhatsApp groups, regular paper or phone surveys, and invitations to attend meetings.

In some cases, interventions that improve people’s experiences of temporary accommodation are likely to be cost-saving – even if they do not result in people moving out of temporary accommodation more quickly. These could include savings on benefits from people being able to stay in work because they live close enough to reach it; savings on healthcare costs if people avoid the medical impacts of overcrowding and stress; and increased productivity in the long term if children’s education is not disrupted. The majority of these gains will accrue not to local authorities but to central government – and this strengthens the case for government support of homelessness and housing services.

The standards for temporary accommodation set by the government are vague, and definitions do not necessarily match the realities that households face. Local authorities follow the Homelessness Code of Guidance when deciding on the suitability of accommodation offered, but its provisions mostly relate to basic safety safeguards, licensing, affordability, and location.⁴⁹ Local authorities are not required to conduct checks on the properties unless they believe it to be necessary – but the low quality of lower-tier rental accommodation in London means that it often *is* necessary.

People’s experiences of temporary housing vary a lot. Households may be placed anywhere – from relatively well-maintained properties to tiny rooms full of toxic mould – and they often have to stay there for a long time. One Human Rights Watch report points out several cases in which families have been placed in poorly ventilated one-bedroom flats for extended periods of time – some as long as six years – which has subsequently caused their children respiratory complications.⁵⁰ In such instances local councils do offer some limited help, but the underlying issue (low-quality housing) remains. Beyond health and safety, we have also been told that it is not uncommon for temporary accommodation to lack reliable Wi-Fi – in larger buildings there may not be enough routers to cover every bedroom or flat, which makes doing homework or online admin even more complicated.

In response to the varying standards and patchy levels of enforcement across London, 31 boroughs created the Setting the Standard (STS) scheme – a pan-London accommodation provision and inspection scheme used by local authorities to ensure that all nightly-paid temporary accommodation meets higher standards.⁵¹ Beyond nightly paid accommodation, there is also potential for this type of scheme to be rolled out for a larger set of properties.

More can be done to help housing officers, who have very difficult jobs – this will be felt by the households they help. Local authorities should increase their training provision for housing officers, helping them to lead difficult conversations and protect their own mental health. Local authorities should also be feeding back updates on supported households to officers, and the government should support them to do this work.

"[It would be helpful to have] a service with experienced housing professionals where they could talk loosely about cases to get assistance from other like-minded professionals, or just as a personal support outside their housing team"

Homelessness Prevention and Relief lead, local authority

"[What I] found most useful in the teams that I have worked in, there were workshops that brought the training to life with real experiences that helped officers realise biases or behaviour that they then decided to change."

Head of Housing, local authority

"One way this could be done is by sending officers to visit teams in other local authorities"

Head of Housing, local authority

Helping households move through the system faster

Initiatives like Capital Letters drive down the costs associated with competition between boroughs, helping them place households within their borough where possible. If not procuring through Capital Letters, local authorities and government departments should always inform other local authorities of what properties they are procuring at what price – and they should follow the same property quality standards as Capital Letters. National government should devolve resources to the GLA and London Councils to continue to fund and grow city-wide cooperation initiatives like Capital Letters.

As local authorities increasingly use private rented properties to house homeless households, some have allowed these households to retain a place on the social housing waiting list. Indeed, some felt it was unfair that only those households placed in temporary accommodation would be eligible for social housing in future. We think this rule should be adopted across London, so that households have more confidence in accepting offers on the private rented market.

Appendix

Households living in temporary accommodation in Q1 2022 by borough

	Total number of households in Temporary Accommodation	Total number of households in TA per (000s)	Total number of children in Temporary Accommodation
City of London	5	1.16	4
Barking & Dagenham	1,384	17.51	2,488
Barnet	2,013	13.08	2,326
Bexley	911	9.05	1,310
Brent	870	7.36	2,007
Bromley	1,653	11.64	1,873
Camden	554	4.78	519
Croydon	1,988	12.80	2,710
Ealing	2,295	18.62	3,464
Enfield	3,196	24.40	1,619
Greenwich	1,600	13.99	2,574
Hackney*	..	..	..
Hammersmith & Fulham	1,070	12.98	1,588
Haringey	2,556	23.36	4,409
Harrow	1,015	11.68	1,861
Havering	870	8.15	1,106
Hillingdon	494	4.44	699
Hounslow	..	..	..
Islington	873	8.10	794
Kensington & Chelsea	..	..	..
Kingston upon Thames	837	12.03	1,075
Lambeth	..	..	..
Lewisham	..	..	..
Merton	222	2.79	289
Newham	5,624	48.25	8,288
Redbridge	2,665	24.32	4,016
Richmond upon Thames	314	3.71	333
Southwark	3,189	23.53	2,688
Sutton	844	10.08	961
Tower Hamlets	..	..	..
Waltham Forest	985	9.49	1,869
Wandsworth	2,894	21.16	3,273
Westminster	2,478	19.83	3,522

Note: .. means missing or incomplete data. Particular figures have been suppressed where local authorities provided erroneous information.

Source: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2022). Statutory homelessness live tables. [52](#)

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