

Appendix A How living in temporary accommodation affects children

1. Purpose and structure of review

- 1.1 At its meeting on 30 April 2019, the Children and Young People Select Committee agreed to look at how living in temporary accommodation affects children.
- 1.2 The Committee agreed the scope and Key Lines of Enquiry on 11 July 2019. The following key lines of enquiry were agreed:

2. Key Lines of Enquiry

1. What are the homelessness and temporary accommodation rates in Lewisham? In London? What percentage of households living in temporary accommodation include school age children?
 2. What is the geographic spread of Lewisham families in temporary accommodation?
 3. How does living in temporary accommodation affect children? What data is available that illustrates the impact on children's:
 - a. Physical health
 - b. Mental health
 - c. Cognitive development
 - d. Academic attainment and school attendance
 - e. Opportunities in adulthood
 - f. Engagement with Children's Social Care, Missing, Exploited and Trafficked (MET)
 4. What impact does the quality and location of the temporary accommodation have (eg Out of Borough placements)?
 5. What can we learn from the lived experience of families living in temporary accommodation?
 6. How do schools support children living in temporary accommodation?
 7. What other support is available for children in temporary accommodation?
- 2.1 Evidence was gathered from schools, parents living in temporary accommodation, officers in Children's Social Care, Ombudsman's reports, desk-based research and through a visit to one of Lewisham's temporary accommodation hostels.

3. Policy context

- 3.1 The Council's Corporate Strategy 2018-2022 sets out seven corporate priorities which drive decision making in the Council. Lewisham's corporate priorities were agreed by full Council and they are the principal mechanism through which the Council's performance is reported. This review supports the following corporate priorities:
 - Tackling the housing crisis – everyone has a decent home that is secure and affordable
 - Giving children and young people the best start in life – every child has access to an outstanding and inspiring education and is given the support they need to keep them safe, well and able to achieve their full potential.

3.2 The Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) 2015 – 2018 (currently being updated) also sets the strategic vision "Together with families, we will improve the lives and life chances of the children and young people in Lewisham".

3.3 One specific priority aim of the CYPP is

- BR4 Mitigating the negative impact of insecure or unsuitable housing for children, young people and families

3.4 A number of council policies are relevant to this report, namely:

- Housing Strategy 2015-2020, which has an objective of helping residents at times of severe or urgent housing need
- The Locational Priority Policy, which sets out the approach the council takes when placing households into temporary accommodation
- The Private Rented Sector Discharge Policy, which details how the council operates the Housing Register and determines the allocation of properties to those in housing need as per an annually approved lettings plan

4. Responsibilities of the council

The main duty

4.1 Where a council believes a person is homeless or threatened with homelessness it must carry out enquiries into that person's circumstances and reach a decision as to what duty it owes to them. (Housing Act 1996, s184)

4.2 If the council is satisfied an applicant is eligible, homeless, in priority need and unintentionally homeless it will owe them the main housing duty. Lewisham, like most councils, carries out this duty by arranging temporary accommodation until a suitable offer of social housing or private rented accommodation can be made. (Housing Act 1996, section 193)

4.3 The council's Private Rented Sector Policy (**Appendix B**) sets out how it will discharge the main housing duty.

No Recourse to Public Funds

4.4 No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) is a condition imposed on someone due to their immigration status. The main housing duty does not apply in these cases, however families with children may qualify for limited support under s17 of the Children's Act (for example in cases of destitution).

4.5 Although not required to do so in law, Lewisham applies the same support standards and policies to NRPF families as it does to families owed the main duty.

Suitability of accommodation

- 4.6 The council must ensure all accommodation provided to homeless applicants is suitable for the needs of the household. This duty applies to both emergency accommodation (accommodation provided while the council carried out enquiries to decide whether a duty is owed) and accommodation provided under the main homelessness duty. (Housing Act 1996, section 206)
- 4.7 The council must consider whether the property is
- affordable
 - in good enough condition
 - available in a suitable location – having regard to personal circumstances, including travel time to work, disruption to education, support networks, caring responsibilities
 - the right size
 - suitable for any health issues or disabilities.
- 4.8 If accommodation falls below certain minimum standards set out in the Housing Act 2004, it is not suitable. The Homelessness Code of Guidance recommends that any accommodation should, as a minimum, be free of Category One hazards assessed under the Housing Health and Safety Rating system. A Category One hazard is a hazard that poses a serious threat to someone’s health or safety, such as exposed wiring, very cold bedrooms, mould, infestation, lack of security.
- 4.9 The large range of nightly paid accommodation providers that the council uses makes it impossible for the council to inspect them all. Instead, the council has an agreement with nightly paid accommodation providers which includes a Code of Ethics governing the required property standards. The provider manages the properties, but the Council carries out quarterly sample inspections. It will also inspect a property if there are any ongoing or escalated issues.
- 4.10 The Court of Appeal has confirmed that what constitutes “suitable” is a matter for the council; it can only be challenged where it is clearly inadequate¹.

Location

- 4.11 The council is required under the Housing Act 1996 to find accommodation within the borough, as far as is reasonably practicable (and unless there are safeguarding concerns about doing so).
- 4.12 Lewisham council operates a Location Priority Policy (**Appendix C**). It tries to place all households in temporary accommodation that is “within or as close as possible to Lewisham”, and assesses whether applicants have priority to be located “in” the Borough, “close to” the Borough, or have no priority as to the location of a property. It also says applicants may ask for assistance in relocating to more settled accommodation.

¹ Codona v Mid-Bedfordshire District Council [2004] EWCA Civ 925 [2005] HLR 1, CA

4.13 The council must consider the location of accommodation when they consider if it is suitable for the applicant and members of their household. If a council places an applicant outside its district, it must consider, among other matters:

- the distance of the accommodation from the “home” district (using Laurence House as the point from which distance is measured)
- the significance of any disruption to the education of members of the applicant’s household
- the proximity and accessibility to local services, amenities and transport (Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) Order 2012)

5. KEY LINE OF ENQUIRY 1

What are the homelessness and temporary accommodation rates in Lewisham? In London? What percentage of households living in temporary accommodation include school age children?

5.1 Nationally, the number of homeless families living in temporary accommodation is rising, and this is reflected across London

5.2 There are a number of reasons for this increase, including:

- A lack of supply of affordable homes and a decline in the availability of social homes for let
- The increasing cost of housing and reliance on the private rented sector (PRS)
- Welfare reform, including the freezing of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates to 2015 levels. LHA is the housing benefit ceiling rate for claimants in the PRS.

5.3 The total number of households in temporary accommodation at the end of June 2019 is 86,130, which includes 127,370 children. The number of placements in London accounts for nearly a third of all placements. There are 59,950 households with 89,130 children in temporary accommodation in London.²

5.4 At the end of June, Lewisham had 2,195 households in temporary accommodation with 4,464 children. This number continues to increase exponentially.

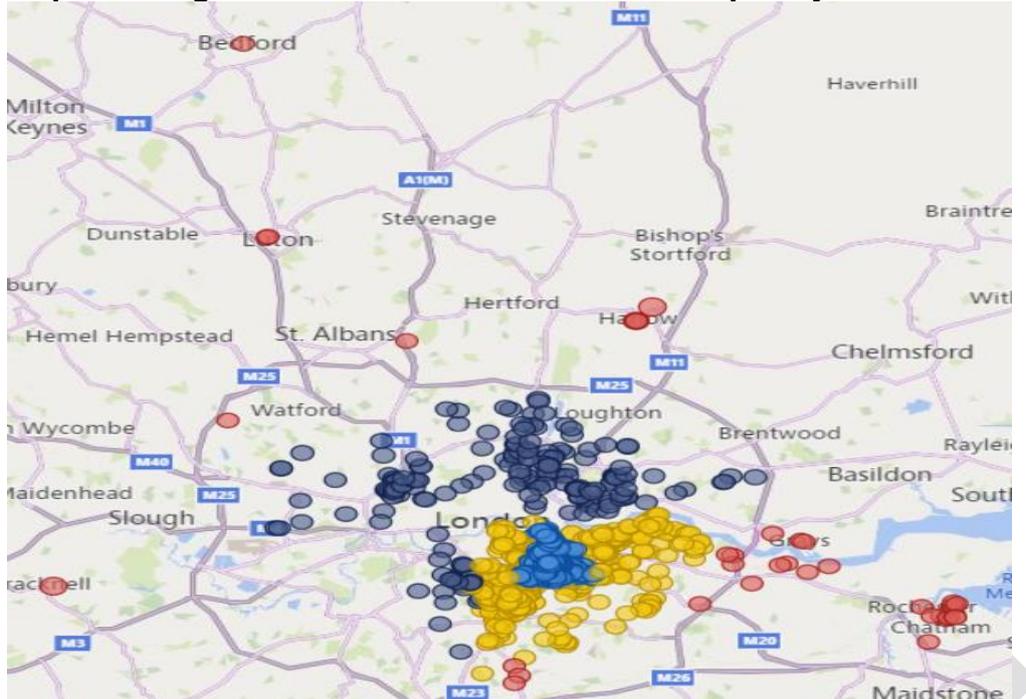
6. KEY LINE OF ENQUIRY 2

What is the geographic spread of Lewisham families in temporary accommodation?

² MHCLG Live tables on homelessness -

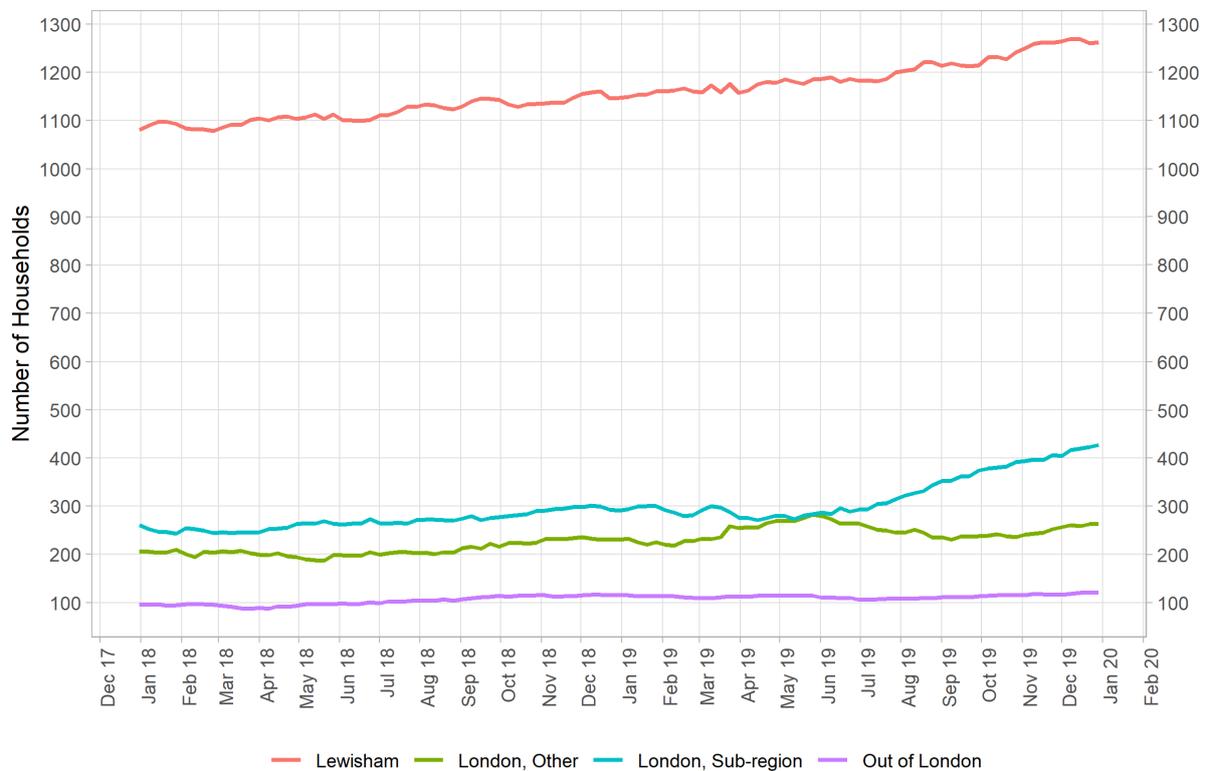
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/852920/StatHomeless_201906.xlsx

Map showing distribution of households in temporary accommodation



Number of households in TA over time, by location

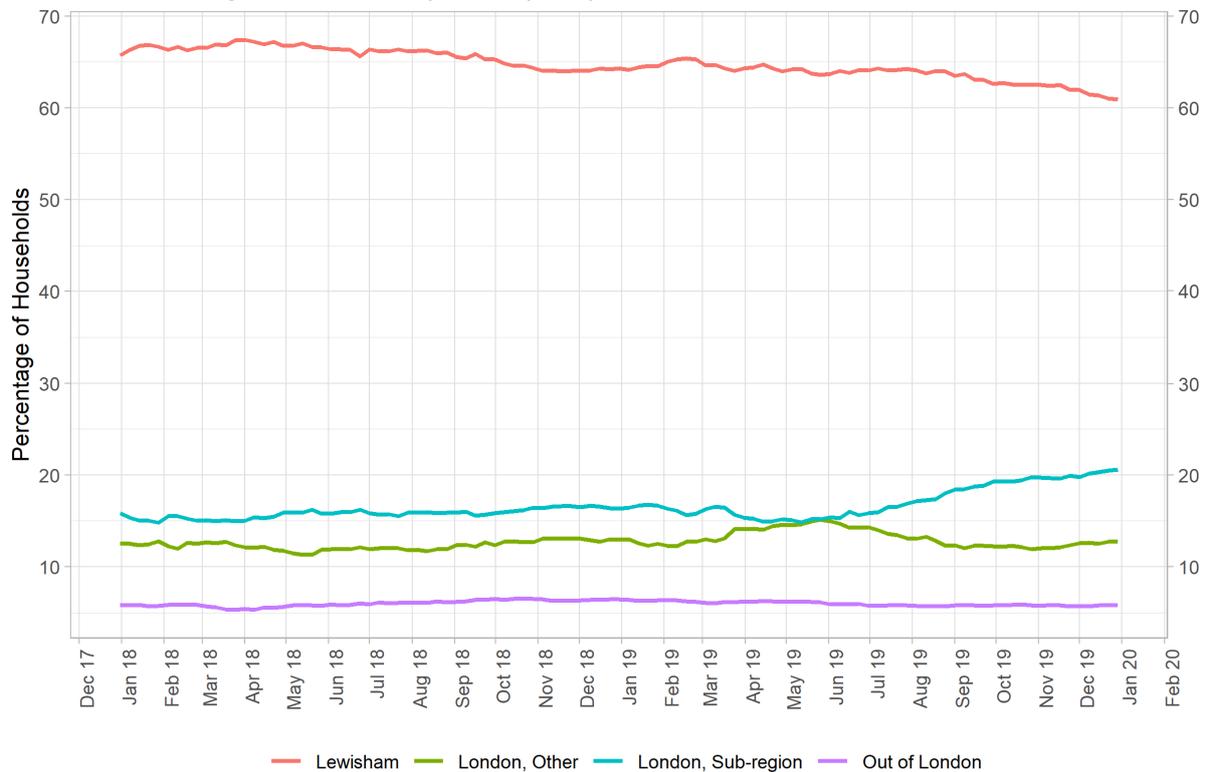
London Sub-region includes Bexley, Bromley, Croydon, Greenwich, Lambeth, Southwark



Source: Housing Insight

Percentage of households in TA over time, by location

London Sub-region includes Bexley, Bromley, Croydon, Greenwich, Lambeth, Southwark



Source: Housing Insight

7. KEY LINE OF ENQUIRY 3

How does living in temporary accommodation affect children? What data is available that illustrates the impact on children's:

- Physical health
- Mental health
- Cognitive development
- Academic attainment and school attendance
- Opportunities in adulthood
- Engagement with Children's Social Care, Missing, Exploited and Trafficked (MET)

7.1 There is extensive evidence regarding the negative impact that living in temporary accommodation has on children. A list of sources is provided in the footnote³.

³ Panos, Eleanor & Stuart 1998

"Homelessness and its impact on children", 2019, The Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health

Hambrick, Rubens, Brawner & Taussig, 2018

Astone, McLanahan 1994; Hagan et al 1996

a) physical health

- Difficulty sleeping, due bed-sharing or being disturbed by the noise of siblings or adults sharing the same room
- Poor quality accommodation can increase the risk of severe ill-health or disability by up to 25% during childhood and early adulthood
- Children living in overcrowded housing are up to 10 times more likely to contract meningitis, and as many as one in three people who grow up in overcrowded housing have respiratory problems in adulthood.
- Children living in damp, mouldy homes are between one and a half and three times more prone to coughing and wheezing - symptoms of asthma and other respiratory conditions – than children living in dry homes.

b. mental health

- Social isolation from peers – particularly acute in secondary children where lack of access to toilet and washing facilities can mean hair and uniform goes unwashed
- Feeling self-conscious and 'different' to peers
- Anxiety – younger children can be withdrawn and less social whereas older children become more aggressive and confrontational
- Homelessness has long-lasting effects on mental health. Anxiety remains after permanent rehousing
- Homelessness-related anxiety affects girls more than boys, thought to be because female-related puberty amplifies anxiety.

c. cognitive and physical development

- Pregnant mothers are less likely to receive consistent early prenatal care
- Exposure to long term stress affects foetal brain development
- Poor maternal nutrition can increase risk of birth complications. Low birth weight, preterm and pre-term birth
- Reduced access to health and dental care
- Impaired parent/child bond due to frequent moves and an unpredictable or chaotic environment
- Lack of access to toys resulting in understimulation
- Late weaning due to lack of facilities to sterilise bottles and feeding equipment
- Delayed crawling and walking due to lack of floor space
- “buggy babies” – infants being left in prams for extended periods causing soft skull bones to become misshapen
- Delayed toilet training, speech delays, bed wetting

d. academic attainment and school attendance

- Falling asleep in class, or appearing physically fatigued and distracted.
- Sleep has recently been shown to have a mediating effect between Adverse Childhood Experiences ACEs and delinquency
- Behaviour – lack of personal belongings or “comforter” items, which can be lost or packed away during a rushed move. Children can become aggressively possessive with other pupils.
- Frequent moves are associated with lower educational attainment by late adolescence
- Lack of study or homework space impacts on academic progress
- Missed school time – particularly if housed far away from school
- Increased risk of exclusion

e. opportunities in adulthood

- Long-term health problems and low educational attainment increase the likelihood of unemployment or working in low-paid jobs.
- Opportunities for leisure and recreation are undermined by low income and health problems.
- The behavioural problems associated with bad housing (including homelessness, overcrowding and poor quality housing) in childhood can manifest themselves in later offending behaviour. In one study, nearly half of young people who had offended had experienced homelessness.

f. engagement with Children's Social Care, Missing, Exploited and Trafficked (MET)

- 7.2 The Scrutiny Manager met with a representative from Children's Social Care (CSC) who gave evidence that being in temporary accommodation does not necessarily make it harder for CSC to engage with a family, since they can be in TA for a number of years, and their whereabouts is known.
- 7.3 TA is a factor in the lives of many children who are subject to a plan. While it is not usually the sole reason that a plan is necessary, chaotic and uncertain living arrangements can be an exacerbating factor. For all of the families it has dealings with, Children's Social Care does gather information on the type of accommodation (temporary/ permanent/ hostel/ PRS) and how long they have been living there.
- 7.4 For those children or young people who are Missing, Exploited or Trafficked (MET), TA is a recurring feature however there is no clear evidence that it is harder for CSC to engage with them or their families.
- 7.5 Homeless families are not routinely referred to CSC for a s17 Child in Need Assessment unless they present as homeless on the day. In most cases a family has 28 days notice that the tenancy will end and so no CSC intervention is needed. A CSC referral is automatically triggered where a family has No Recourse to Public Funds.
- 7.6 CSC identified three areas where it was felt improvements could be made, namely:
- a. Homeless 16 & 17 year olds and care leavers being placed in inappropriate TA – eg B&B or out of borough accommodation - due to lack of suitable accommodation for Young People
 - b. Working with families who are at crisis point but are not owed a housing duty because they are considered to be intentionally homeless
 - c. Support for families in social housing who default on rent payments. Intervening early to prevent the 'domino rally effect' of eviction, requiring joint working between between Housing and Children's Social Care.
- 7.7 CSC suggested a Housing and CSC jointly funded post to address some of these issues and to implement automatic CSC referrals where social tenants with children default on rent, might be beneficial.

8. KEY LINE OF ENQUIRY 4

What impact does the quality and location of the temporary accommodation have (eg Out of Borough placements)?

Location

- 8.1 During visits to Rathfern and Rushey Green Primary Schools, and in gathering evidence from parents living in temporary accommodation with their children, members of the Committee heard that where a family is placed outside the borough

distance from school can be a major problem for families, both in terms of long travelling times and cost. The Committee heard of a family that had to leave the house shortly after 6am to get to school on multiple buses as the £8 per day cost of train travel was unaffordable.

- 8.2 The early start can mean little time for breakfast and the children arriving at school hungry. Even if the child has eaten breakfast, a very early start means a long gap between breakfast and lunch, and hunger can affect concentration.
- 8.3 Long journeys and very early starts are exhausting for children, and schools reported loss of learning time due to children falling asleep or being too tired to engage fully at school.
- 8.4 A parent pointed out that if one child in the family, or indeed the parent in a single parent family, is too unwell to make the journey to school, it can mean all of the children missing school.
- 8.5 Although the journey can make attending school difficult, schools reported that on the whole, families in TA make a huge effort to get their children to school.
- 8.6 Changing schools may seem like the obvious solution. However, the temporary nature of the accommodation and lack of certainty about how long they will be there means families can be reluctant to change school. Plus many families hold onto the hope that they will secure settled accommodation back in Lewisham. The Committee heard the experiences of one family that had moved between temporary accommodation four times in as many months, across four boroughs spanning London. Whereas a long-term gradual transition from one school to another may be appropriate in some situations, it is often not possible or beneficial to the child to move schools with each housing move.
- 8.7 A key concern for parents living with the uncertainty of temporary accommodation is creating consistency in their children's lives. Having a safe and familiar place to go, where the child and family is known to the school becomes increasingly important. When everything else in a child's life is changing, school as the constant can be a protective factor mitigating the impact of homelessness.

Quality of accommodation

- 8.8 Parents commented on the quality of accommodation as being problematic, citing examples of condemned boilers, dangerous fixtures, rats and mice, landlords being slow to make repairs. Some reported feeling as though they were being treated in a derogatory way or in a way that undermined their dignity.
- 8.9 Overcrowding was reportedly a problem too. Overcrowded conditions include situations where different sex children aged 10 or over have to share a bedroom, where parents have to share a bedroom with a child or children, where there are more than two children in a bedroom; and where rooms such as kitchens and living rooms are used as bedrooms.

8.10 Some felt that PRS landlords were not being adequately held to account. Parents had experienced used condoms, syringes and other drug paraphernalia in communal spaces, rough sleepers in the hallway, and filthy foul-smelling common parts. One school shared that a 5 year old had seen a man with a gun in the building. All of the parents that gave evidence were single women. They reported feeling isolated and vulnerable in their accommodation. Several parents reported that their children were reluctant to go home from school, due to issues with the accommodation.

9. KEY LINE OF ENQUIRY 5

What can we learn from the lived experience of families living in temporary accommodation?

9.1 Evidence suggests that better communication is needed, with clear signposting to housing advocacy services, details of named housing officer and details of how to deal with repair requests.

Lack of clarity

9.2 A recurring theme in the discussions the Committee had with schools and parents was lack of clarity of information. This is also reflected in two Ombudsman's⁴ decisions. Evidence indicates a lack of clarity over

1. likely time in emergency or temporary accommodation (the parents we spoke to did not differentiate between the two). One parent said she had been advised she would likely spend between 6 weeks and 6 months in temporary accommodation but had in fact been in temporary accommodation for 8 years. Another reported living in one room with her 2 children for 4 months, having been told she would be there for no more than 6 weeks.
2. likelihood of being offered settled accommodation in the borough.
3. who to deal with regarding repairs, pest control and other complaints, and how to escalate.
4. whether being in temporary accommodation out of the borough impacts on chances of being offered social housing within the borough – one family felt that they had been deliberately housed in out of borough TA so that the council could claim they had not been resident in the borough for 5 years and therefore did not qualify for social housing in Lewisham
5. who to go to for independent housing advice, since the Citizen Advice Bureau in Catford had closed.
6. the role of local MPs and ward councillors, and how to contact them.
7. Rights and responsibilities of tenants, landlords and the council. Parents gave examples of bad practice from PRS landlords such as threatening tenants with eviction for spurious reasons such as “complaining too much”, or landlords not dealing with repairs in a timely fashion. One parent had been caught in a dispute between a letting agency and the council. Another had had problems with a previous tenant trying to gain access to the accommodation.

⁴ <https://www.lgo.org.uk/decisions/housing/homelessness/17-013-673>
<https://www.lgo.org.uk/decisions/housing/homelessness/17-012-265>

- 9.3 When asked what would help, parents wanted that support to move forward, with better representation, to help them have a voice.

10. KEY LINE OF ENQUIRY 6

How do schools support children living in temporary accommodation?

- 10.1 As support services such as Children's Social Care and CAMHS become harder to access, schools say they are left with little choice but to try to meet the needs that they are presented with. To receive an effective education, the child needs good school attendance, to be punctual, to have space to do homework and space to play, to have a healthy diet and lifestyle, to be well rested and able to engage in lessons. Adequate living accommodation is at the heart of this. While schools endeavour to support families as best they can, the knock-on effect for children goes wider than school achievement, affecting mental and physical health, development, wellbeing.
- 10.2 Schools reported a shift in the support needs of families. Whereas previously support was needed in the form of additional lessons, increasingly families needed additional play opportunities, emotional and mental health support, somebody to talk to, support with job applications, CV preparation, benefits applications, housing advocacy.
- 10.3 Practice in schools varies on a school by school basis. The Committee heard details of some of the measures put in place to support families, including making an extended day available to families struggling with long journeys to enable children to have time before school to eat breakfast, and after school to play or do homework. One school described a child becoming very possessive when toys were brought out. The child's toys had all been packed away because the family was in very cramped temporary accommodation. The school responded by making toys available to be played with after school.
- 10.4 One school gives out recycled uniform to all Reception children regardless of need, and subsidises school dinners so that all children can have second or third helpings. Both of the schools visited are part of the Magic Breakfast⁵ programme, and give out bagels for breakfast before school.
- 10.5 Schools can only offer support to families living in temporary accommodation if they are aware of their living arrangements. Schools reported that families often take a long time before they open up to the school, whether because of embarrassment – one parent said “I feel like a failure for not providing a nice home for my children” - or fear of officialdom, particularly if they have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). Usually, schools find out through dealing with SEN. If the child does not present with needs, then the school would not know. However schools felt it was important to identify early help needs sufficiently early in order to break trajectories and see academic success and to avoid exclusions.
- 10.6 Both schools acknowledged that while social work is not the school's responsibility, they have no choice but to take on that role, supporting parents, signposting to specialist services, writing letters to help resolve housing problems. Often, letter

⁵ www.magicbreakfast.com

writing has little practical effect other than giving the parent a voice and offering much needed reassurance. Both schools reported increasing demand for feedback vouchers.

- 10.7 Both schools said that the majority of their families start off in emergency accommodation in Ilford, before being moved on to temporary accommodation as far away as Strateford, Whitechapel, Redbridge, Croydon, Watford, Romford.
- 10.8 Families and school expressed frustration about their dealings with Housing officers. According to schools, families cannot always name their Housing Officer. Schools also reported that families do not know how long they will be in temporary accommodation, and think that if the school writes on their behalf they will be moved back into the borough.
- 10.9 Staff had experience of working in other schools in the borough and the Committee heard that good practice in supporting families living in temporary accommodation is not consistent across all Lewisham primary schools. They felt families could benefit from examples of good practice being shared across the borough's schools via Lewisham Learning.
- 10.10 The Committee heard that the waiting list at Kaleidoscope does not feel any better to schools, who are having to find alternative ways of supporting mental health needs, such as through charities.
- 10.11 Shelter has recommended a number of good practice examples that schools can do to effectively support homeless children⁶. While some of the references are out of date – Connexions no longer exists – the recommendations are still useful. Many schools in Lewisham will be doing some of these things already, but this will vary on a school by school basis. Shelter's recommendations are available at **Appendix D**.

11. KEY LINE OF ENQUIRY 7

What other support is available for children in temporary accommodation

11. [evidence to be gathered from Housing at the 23 January meeting]

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https://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/81010/Engaging_with_homeless_children_-_Guidance_for_education_professionals.pdf

Appendix B Location Priority Policy

Appendix C Private Rented Sector Policy

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Recommendations

There are many things that education professionals can do in order to effectively support homeless children.

- Identify children living in temporary accommodation or bad housing by getting to know pupils as individual personalities. This can make it easier for teachers to identify changes in their behaviour or character and make any necessary concessions.
- If a child is identified as being homeless all relevant teachers and support staff should be informed.
- Provide staff-supported homework facilities both during the school day and out of school hours, including school holidays.
- Offer access to funding for transport to and from school for homeless children who have been forced to move a considerable distance away from the school.
- Provide funding for special supplies required for schoolwork or extra-curricular activities or school trips that may not otherwise be affordable.
- Introduce children to welfare staff, such as mentors or Connexions staff as they may be nervous about making contact with these people independently. It is important that education professionals have regular meetings with the child, allowing them to keep up-to-date with how the child is progressing, and to ensure there are no further problems.
- Make contact with parents for an informal chat if they have missed parents' evenings, ensuring that contact is maintained between the school and the parents.
- Include details of support that is on offer from school in any correspondence to parents of new pupils and in any information packs or prospectus.
- Where a child has been moved to a new school as a result of their housing situation, it can be beneficial to pair the child up with a 'buddy' to look after them while they settle in.
- Allow staff, including Connexions staff, the time to develop links with local organisations that may be useful for signposting children or parents to. For example, this could include developing links with a local housing advice agency or forum.
- Have designated members of staff for pastoral care who do not have teaching responsibilities.
- When providing additional help and support to a child, care must be taken to ensure that this is done in such a way as to not single them out from their peers.
- Take the time to speak to the child about their interests, and where relevant offer invitations and support which will allow the child to access after-school activities and clubs.
- Take each individual's personal situation into account when issuing sanctions, eg when a child is persistently late, as this could be because the child has been moved to temporary accommodation a substantial distance from the school.
- Keep a store of school uniform for those pupils whose parents have insufficient funds to purchase a new uniform.
- Be creative in problem solving, there doesn't always have to be a large monetary cost to solutions.

Shelter, the housing and homelessness charity

Righting housing wrongs

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