

“WE ARE

STILL

HUMAN”

**STORIES FROM
TEMPORARY
ACCOMMODATION
IN HACKNEY**

healthwatch
Hackney



Shelter



**“I WAS SO
DEPRESSED,
I WAS WORRIED
I WAS PASSING
IT ON TO
MY CHILD.”**

JOYCE, HOSTEL

INSIDE THESE FINDINGS

The experiences inside these findings are from people in temporary accommodation in the London Borough of Hackney.

Based in the heart of the borough, the Shelter London Hub supports people from across the city with housing and homelessness issues.

Our work there showed an alarming number of people in temporary accommodation contacting us for support, with a significant proportion coming from Hackney.

Working in partnership with Healthwatch Hackney’s NHS Community Voice Manager, Shelter’s London Community Organiser embarked on a listening campaign to capture these resident’s experiences.

The campaign started with a telephone survey, followed by virtual focus groups which allowed residents to express what their experience in temporary accommodation is, and what needs to change.

27 households took part. All were in temporary accommodation.

Their stories paint a vivid picture of life in temporary accommodation – and why it must change.

WHY IT HAS BEEN MADE

London is in the grip of a housing emergency.

Unaffordable and insecure housing, a lack of social homes, and changes to benefits and local housing allowance has led to a sharp increase in homelessness.

At the end of September 2020, **58,730 households were recorded as homeless and in temporary accommodation in London, including 40,870 families***.

In the capital, Hackney has one of the highest levels of families in temporary accommodation. In June 2020, **8,004 people were recorded as homeless and in temporary accommodation in Hackney, equivalent to 1 in 35 people****. Also in September 2020, **3,319 households were recorded as homeless and in temporary accommodation in the borough**.

Both Shelter and Healthwatch Hackney are members of the Hackney Temporary Accommodation Action Group (TAAG), a group of local organisations, residents, and landlords working together to address the issues faced by people in temporary accommodation.

The experiences inside these findings provide a snapshot of life in temporary accommodation within the borough, but we recognise these experiences are felt by many across the capital.

*MHCLG, [Statutory homelessness live tables](#), Table TA1

**Shelter, Report: [Homeless and Forgotten: Surviving lockdown in temporary accommodation](#)



THE RESIDENTS

Over three months, we spoke to 27 households in Hackney to better understand their experience of temporary accommodation.

Following these conversations, we had in-depth group discussions with nine of the households.

From this research several themes emerged, explored in this report.

All names have been changed to maintain confidentiality of participants.



27
HOUSEHOLDS

ALL ARE IN
TEMPORARY
ACCOMMODATION
IN HACKNEY

ALL RESIDENTS ARE EITHER
THE ONLY ADULT IN THE
HOUSEHOLD OR LIVE ALONE



THE MAJORITY OF
RESIDENTS HAVE
AT LEAST ONE CHILD

THIS IS THE TYPE OF TEMPORARY
ACCOMMODATION THEY LIVE IN:

HOSTEL



SELF CONTAINED
HOUSE/FLAT



ROOM IN HOUSE/
FLAT SHARE



WHAT

RESIDENTS

SAID



SUPPORT

Life in temporary accommodation can be isolating and difficult, which is why it's essential people get the help they need.

“I've never lived on my own. I had no information on how council tax or benefits work, which led to me getting in arrears.”

TANIA, SELF-CONTAINED FLAT

“My housing officer never got back to me. I was given a name when I moved in and they didn't respond once. It was only when a third party got in touch that they replied. I feel like my son and I have just been left here.”

MILLA, HOSTEL

“I don't have any support besides my neighbours. Even though we're in a hostel, we are still human. When the council put you here, they forget about you.”

CRISTINA, HOSTEL

“They always ask for documentation, then I hand it in. I see it get stamped, then they tell me that I haven't handed it in. It's so frustrating.”

SAMANTHA, SELF-CONTAINED FLAT

“Nobody showed me where I was supposed to move, they just gave me an address. I was knocking and asking people until someone came out and told me it was temporary accommodation.”

CIARA, SELF-CONTAINED FLAT

ONLY 26%

of residents had a housing officer after six months in temporary accommodation

OVER 50%

of residents don't know their housing officer and are still waiting to be contacted by one

66%

of residents haven't been told how long they might be in temporary accommodation

81%

of residents weren't told how to access local services

FACILITIES

A lack of access to basic facilities can have a significant impact on a resident's life.

“I feel so isolated. No visitors are allowed and there's no internet. There are six washing machines for 148 rooms, and five of them are broken. In September I begin university, and it's all online. I don't know how I'll do it.”

JOYCE, HOSTEL

“My last hostel said if I install wi-fi, I would go to court.”

ZOE, SELF-CONTAINED FLAT

“Only one washing machine works. The lack of wi-fi is bad – you can only get it at reception, so all the kids congregate there.”

LAUREEN, HOSTEL

“My son can't do online homework because we don't have internet. The teacher shamed him in front of the whole class.”

SAMANTHA, SELF-CONTAINED FLAT

“There are no communal washing facilities. I have to walk 20 minutes to the launderette where it's £7 for a small wash.”

VIVIEN, HOSTEL

“I'm trying to do my degree but have no internet. No visitors are allowed and I have a three year old to take care of.”

SADIRA, HOSTEL

Residents were asked if they have a washing machine in their temporary accommodation:



62%

of residents do not have access to free or paid wi-fi

33%

of residents share their kitchen with other households

33%

of residents share their bathroom with other households

SUITABILITY

With many having to share a room with their children or use their living room as a bedroom, the majority of residents expressed their temporary accommodation wasn't suitable to their needs.

"I was moved from an £84 per week hostel to a £256 per week hostel. I can't go back to work because my housing benefit will decrease and I won't be able to afford the rent."

SHAYLA, HOSTEL

"For eight years I've moved around hostels. In one, the lift only went to the third floor. I had to do 18 stairs with my new-born and a pram to get to my room on the fourth."

SONYA, HOSTEL

"I was a single mum with a new baby and had to carry the buggy and all my stuff up 15 stairs or more. I even emailed the Mayor because it got too far."

SADIRA, HOSTEL

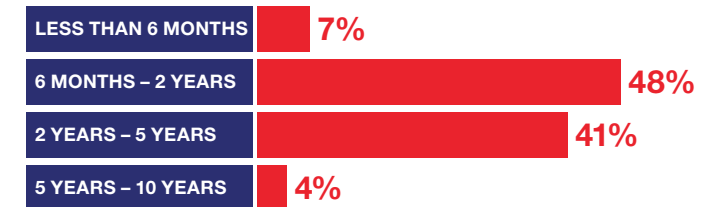
"I have three kids in one room with me. It's really hard to cope. My daughter can't do homework because there's no internet, so she has to stay late at school then walk home in the dark."

ELISABETH, HOSTEL

"The rooms are so small. There are only single beds and you're not allowed to bring your own. My son is getting older and I need a bed for him. He scratches his knees on the rough floor as he is now crawling."

SABINE, HOSTEL

How long residents have been in temporary accommodation:



80%

of residents don't think their temporary accommodation is suitable

66%

of adults share a room with their children

85%

use their living room as a bedroom

SAFETY AND REPAIRS

It's vital residents feel safe. Whether it's the condition of the address or being near anti-social behaviour, they need to be able to voice their concerns and have issues remedied.

"The cooker has been broken for three weeks and a burst pipe leaks into the room. I still haven't been moved. It's expensive having to always buy takeaways."

HABBIBA, HOSTEL

"The damp was so bad my son had to move out of his bedroom. We had to complain to the ombudsman to get anything done."

GLORIA, SELF-CONTAINED FLAT

"The landlord told me to stop using the sink because it's broken and buy bottled water instead."

HABBIBA, HOSTEL

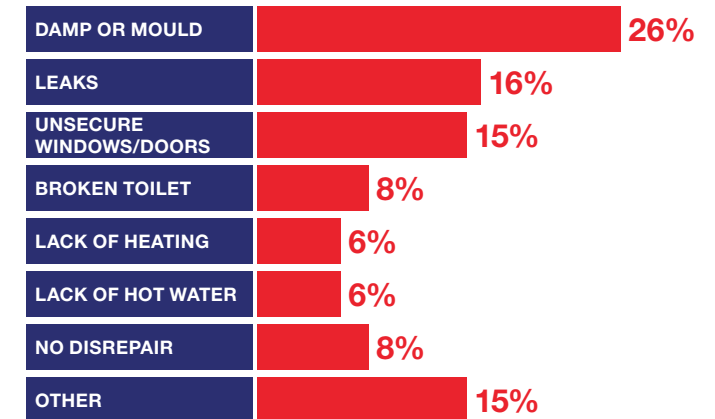
"The shower door broke two months ago. It shattered and cut my son and we had to go to A&E. The manager said someone would come and repair it. They haven't. There is still glass in the room."

STEPHANIE, HOSTEL

"Someone robbed me in the hostel. You can get in easy through the windows. The person was found not guilty and they still haven't moved me. My child cries all the time. I feel like I'm dying slowly."

ROMANY-JADE, HOSTEL

Residents were asked if they experienced any of the below disrepair in their temporary accommodation:



63%

of disrepairs were not remedied within four weeks of being reported, with 15% of disrepairs not repaired at all

59%

of residents don't feel safe in their temporary accommodation, and listed crime/anti-social behaviour and poor conditions as the main reasons

IMPACT ON HEALTH

Life in temporary accommodation has a clear impact on wellbeing for the residents involved, impacting their physical and mental health.

“My daughter had bad eczema in our first temporary accommodation, which was infested with red ants, mould, and damp. This cleared up when we moved but no visitors are allowed in our new place, which makes me feel isolated and depressed.”

SHAYLA, HOSTEL

“I’ve been in temporary accommodation for 15 months with my one year old. It makes me sad that I need help from the council. I used to support people in these situations at work – now I find myself in their place.”

CIARA, SELF-CONTAINED FLAT

“I was so depressed, I was worried I was passing it on to my child.”

JOYCE, HOSTEL

“I worry about my kids. When everything around them is so stressful, they end up worrying about things children shouldn’t have to.”

GLORIA, SELF-CONTAINED FLAT

“I gave birth a year ago and developed back problems. The mattress is so bad it made it worse. They refused to change it until I filled out a form. I never heard back.”

LAUREEN, HOSTEL

78%

of residents said living in temporary accommodation had an impact on their mental health

46%

of residents said living in temporary accommodation had an impact on their physical health

WHAT COULD HELP

Ending the housing emergency will only be solved by building more social homes. While we campaign for this change, life in temporary accommodation must be made more manageable for residents.

While every resident's situation is unique, the campaign highlighted several areas for improvement.

1. **All residents should have access to wi-fi.** So they can work, study and socialise without having to depend on unreliable and expensive phone data.
2. **All residents should have access to laundry facilities** that work, are within walking distance, and available at a reasonable price – if not free.
3. **Residents must be given information when they move** about where they are moving to, how to access local services, and what rights they have.
4. **Residents should feel supported**, with clear access to information about their case and consistent support from the local authority for their wellbeing.
5. **Residents should feel empowered.** They should be listened to, have their concerns addressed, and be involved in open forums, meetings, and service design.

**“I’M TRYING
TO DO MY
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**“I DON’T HAVE
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WHEN THE
COUNCIL PUT
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CRISTINA, HOSTEL

GET INVOLVED

RESIDENTS

If you're in temporary accommodation in Hackney, connect with other residents, make your voice heard, and help change life for residents like you.

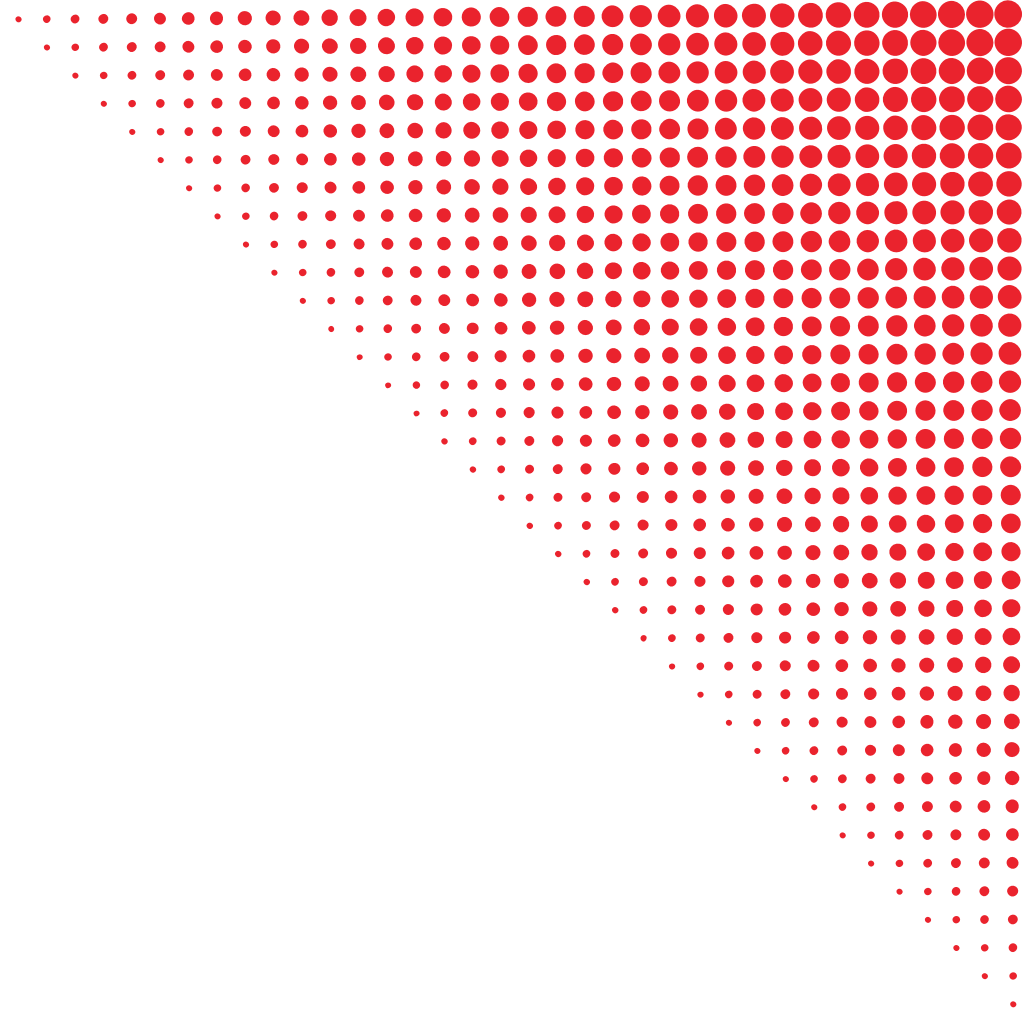
ORGANISATIONS

Find out how to support residents and join local organisations in the campaign.

LANDLORDS

If you provide temporary accommodation in Hackney, join the conversation on how change can be made to benefit all.

Everyone has a role to play. Contact Tyrone, Shelter's London Community Organiser, to find out how you can fight the housing emergency:
tyrone_scott@shelter.org.uk



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