

# Overview and Scrutiny



## How living in temporary accommodation affects children and young people

Children and Young People Select Committee  
September 2020



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**Councillor Luke Sorba (Chair)**

**Councillor Caroline Kalu (Vice-Chair)**

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# Contents

<b>Chair's introduction</b>	<b>p2</b>
<b>1. Executive summary</b>	<b>p3</b>
<b>2. Recommendations</b>	<b>p4</b>
<b>3. Purpose and structure of review</b>	<b>p6</b>
<b>4. Key Lines of Enquiry</b>	<b>p6</b>
<b>5. Policy Context</b>	<b>p6</b>
<b>The Findings</b>	
<b>6. Responsibilities of the Council</b>	<b>p7</b>
<b>7. Homelessness rates</b>	<b>p8</b>
<b>8. Geographic spread</b>	<b>p11</b>
<b>9. Impact on children and young people</b>	<b>p16</b>
<b>10. Quality and location of accommodation</b>	<b>p19</b>
<b>11. Lived experiences of families</b>	<b>p21</b>
<b>12. Support from schools</b>	<b>p23</b>
<b>13. Other support</b>	<b>p25</b>
<b>14. Monitoring and ongoing scrutiny</b>	<b>p25</b>

## Chair's Introduction

Homelessness in London is no secret.

The shock with which Ken Loach's breakthrough 1960's BBC drama *Cathy Come Home* was received by the public and by policy makers would probably not be repeated today.

Does that mean society in the UK is resigned to accepting homelessness as normal? Certainly not in Lewisham where the Council's commitment to increasing significantly the provision of social housing is a top priority.

And certainly not by this committee whose dedication to bring forward the human face as much as the statistical picture is evident in this report. As is its commitment not just to chronicle the injustice of widespread homelessness in this richest of global capital cities, but to search for improvements in practice on behalf of the children of Lewisham, paying close attention to how living in temporary accommodation affects their education, their physical and psychological well-being, their chances of living the lives they deserve.

I would particularly like to thank the committee's Scrutiny Manager, the Vice Chair, Councillor Caroline Kalu, and the Chair of the Housing Select Committee, Councillor Peter Bernards as well as fellow members of the Children and Young People Select Committee for their contribution to the report and its recommendations.



**Councillor Luke Sorba**

Chair of the Children and Young People Select Committee

## **1. Executive summary**

- 1.1 Ensuring secure and decent homes for residents and giving children and young people the best start in life are two of the council's stated corporate priorities. But with homelessness growing in Lewisham, as it is across the Capital, and demand for social housing significantly outstripping supply, families are increasingly being housed in temporary accommodation, sometimes far outside the borough boundaries, and in some cases, with shared kitchen and/or bathroom facilities.
- 1.2 This review looks at the extent of homelessness among Lewisham's families, the geographic spread of families in temporary accommodation and how temporary living arrangements impact on children and young people. During the course of the review, the committee met with families living in temporary accommodation and the schools supporting them and their children. Their experiences are reflected in this report.
- 1.3 While there is no 'quick fix' to the shortage of social or affordable housing, the recommendations in this report seek to make practical improvements to alleviate some of the difficulties experienced by Lewisham families living in temporary accommodation.

## 2. Recommendations

2.1 The Committee would like to make the following recommendations:

2.1.1 That the Housing Department collects data on types of placements, numbers of children, ethnic profiles which it updates at reasonable intervals and makes available on request to relevant Members/ Committees.

2.1.2 That the Housing Department responds swiftly and thoroughly to enquiries from Members, officers outside the Department and other stakeholders, including schools, Citizen's Advice Bureaux etc.

2.1.3 That the Homelessness Reduction team seeks to identify early where children are more likely to be evicted and a Liaison Officer be appointed to work with the Children and Young People Directorate and Housing to facilitate joint preventative work where a potential eviction is anticipated to lead to a child being referred to CSC.

2.1.4 That

- a. prior to placing tenants, properties are inspected in person by or on behalf of Lewisham Council, with a written condition report and photos; and
- b. no family be placed in unsatisfactory accommodation. When deciding whether a property is satisfactory, due regard should be given to
  - i. the fabric of the building – including a range of qualities such as state of repair, natural light, space
  - ii. the appropriateness of other residents and building users.

2.1.5 That the council does not place

- c. families with children under 18
- d. 16 & 17 year olds
- e. Care leavers

in nightly paid accommodation with shared amenities.

This is because sharing kitchens, bathrooms and/or toilet facilities with strangers has a profoundly damaging effect on children and young people's physical and mental health, which can impact on school attendance, academic attainment, and cognitive development.

2.1.6 That clear and accessible information be provided to all households on their rights, pathways for resolving issues with temporary accommodation, the location of local amenities such as the GP, dentist, shops, library, together with regularly updated advice on the anticipated length of stay so families can make informed decisions around school placements.

2.1.7 That communication with service users be more open and a culture that builds trust, transparency and information-sharing be encouraged. This includes seeking and recording feedback from service users which is then acted upon, and service users kept informed, where appropriate.

2.1.8 That placing a family in temporary accommodation outside the borough should not contain an assumption in advance as to the location of their settled/ permanent accommodation.

- 2.1.9 That an additional post focused on the welfare of children who are schooled in Lewisham but placed in accommodation outside the borough be created.
- 2.1.10 That the information from Shelter in Appendix C on page 101 of the report should be updated to ensure accuracy and circulated to all schools in the borough.

### **3. Purpose and Structure of Review**

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 The Committee agreed the scope and Key Lines of Enquiry on 11 July 2019. The following key lines of enquiry were agreed:

### **4. 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?
- 4.1 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.

### **5. Policy context**

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 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".
- 5.3 One specific priority aim of the CYPP is



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

5.4 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

## 6. Responsibilities of the council

### *The main duty*

- 6.1 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)
- 6.2 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)
- 6.3 The council's Private Rented Sector Policy (Appendix B) sets out how it will discharge the main housing duty.

### *No Recourse to Public Funds*

- 6.4 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).
- 6.5 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*

- 6.6 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)
- 6.7 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.
- 6.8 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.
- 6.9 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.
- 6.10 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 inadequate<sup>1</sup>.

*Location*

- 6.11 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).
- 6.12 Lewisham council operates a Location Priority Policy (Appendix A). 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.
- 6.13 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)

## 7. Homelessness rates

**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?

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

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

- 7.2 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.

7.3 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.<sup>2</sup>

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

*Ethnic profile of homeless families*

7.5 Data regarding the ethnicity of homeless families is not routinely gathered or analysed. The Committee asked officers to look at how different communities, including Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, are affected by homelessness.

**Recommendation 1**

That the Housing Department collects data on types of placements, numbers of children, ethnic profiles which it updates at reasonable intervals and makes available on request to relevant Members/ Committees.

7.6 The tables below are drawn out of decisions on homeless cases since April 2018, including all acceptances, positive preventions and positive reliefs for households places into shared facility nightly paid accommodation. There are some gaps in the data due to difficulties cross matching cases across various systems. Around 90% of relevant applications are captured in these tables.

By Volume	Decisions		Accepted		Positive Prevention		Positive Relief	
	Count of Cases	Total Dependent Children	Count of Cases	Total Dependent Children	Count of Cases	Total Dependent Children	Count of Cases	Total Dependent Children
<b>Ethnicity With Dependent Children (A-Z)</b>								
Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British Chinese	1	2	1	2	0	0	0	0

<sup>2</sup> MHCLG Live tables on homelessness - [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/852920/StatHomeless\\_201906.xlsx](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/852920/StatHomeless_201906.xlsx)

Asian or Asian British Indian	2	2	2	2	0	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British Other	7	9	7	9	0	0	1	1
Asian or Asian British Pakistani	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Black or Black British African	71	113	64	99	0	0	4	9
Black or Black British Caribbean	41	56	39	54	0	0	3	4
Black or Black British Other	4	7	3	5	0	0	0	0
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic - Other	2	2	2	2	0	0	0	0
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic - White and Black African	2	2	2	2	0	0	0	0
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic - White and Black Caribbean	1		1	1	0	0	1	2
Other ethnic group - Arab	2	3	2	3	0	0	0	0
Other ethnic group - Other	21	34	21	34	0	0	0	0
Refused / Unspecified	16	26	15	23	0	0	1	1
White - English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	44	58	42	56	1	1	4	5
White and Black Caribbean	3	4	3	4	0	0	0	0
White Other	12	19	12	19	0	0	1	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>316</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>24</b>

By %	Decisions		Accepted		Positive Prevention		Positive Relief	
<b>Ethnicity With Dependent Children (A-Z)</b>	Count of Cases	Total Dependent Children	Count of Cases	Total Dependent Children	Count of Cases	Total Dependent Children	Count of Cases	Total Dependent Children
Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi	0.4%	0.3%	0.5%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Asian or Asian British Chinese	0.4%	0.6%	0.5%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Asian or Asian British Indian	0.9%	0.6%	0.9%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Asian or Asian British Other	3.0%	2.7%	3.2%	2.8%	0.0%	0.0%	6.3%	4.2%
Asian or Asian British Pakistani	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	6.3%	4.2%
Black or Black British African	30.9%	33.3%	29.5%	31.3%	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	37.5%
Black or Black British Caribbean	17.8%	16.5%	18.0%	17.1%	0.0%	0.0%	18.8%	16.7%
Black or Black British Other	1.7%	2.1%	1.4%	1.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic - Other	0.9%	0.6%	0.9%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

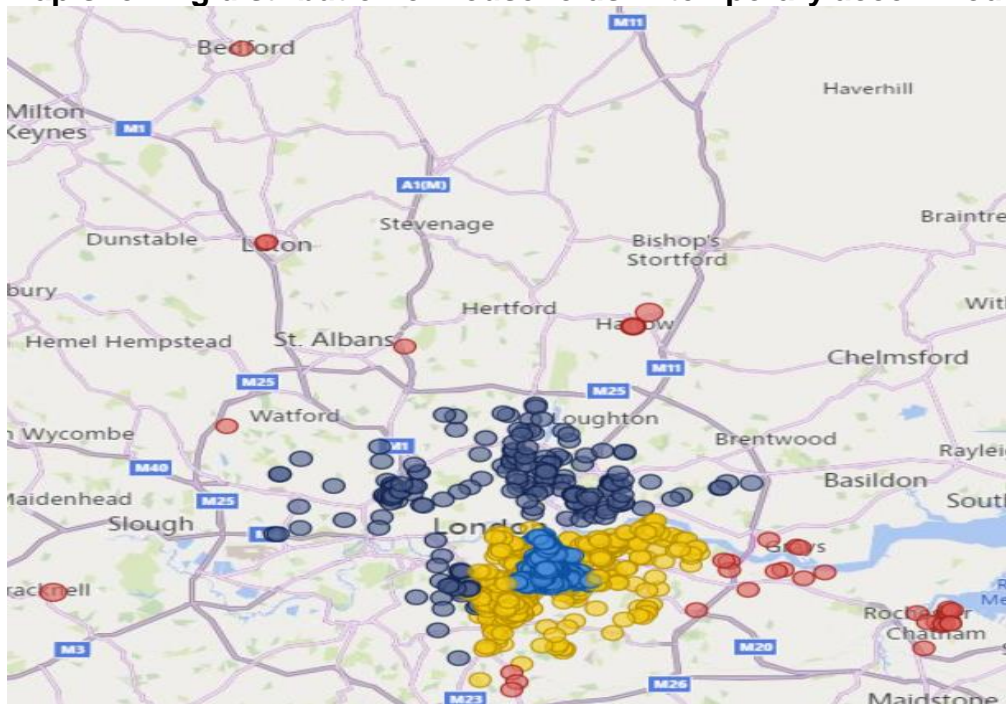
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic - White and Black African	0.9%	0.6%	0.9%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic - White and Black Caribbean	0.4%	0.3%	0.5%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	6.3%	8.3%
Other ethnic group - Arab	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other ethnic group - Other	9.1%	10.0%	9.7%	10.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Refused / Unspecified	7.0%	7.7%	6.9%	7.3%	0.0%	0.0%	6.3%	4.2%
White - English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	19.1%	17.1%	19.4%	17.7%	100.0%	100.0%	25.0%	20.8%
White and Black Caribbean	1.3%	1.2%	1.4%	1.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
White Other	5.2%	5.6%	5.5%	6.0%	0.0%	0.0%	6.3%	4.2%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

## 8. Geographic spread

### **KEY LINE OF ENQUIRY 2**

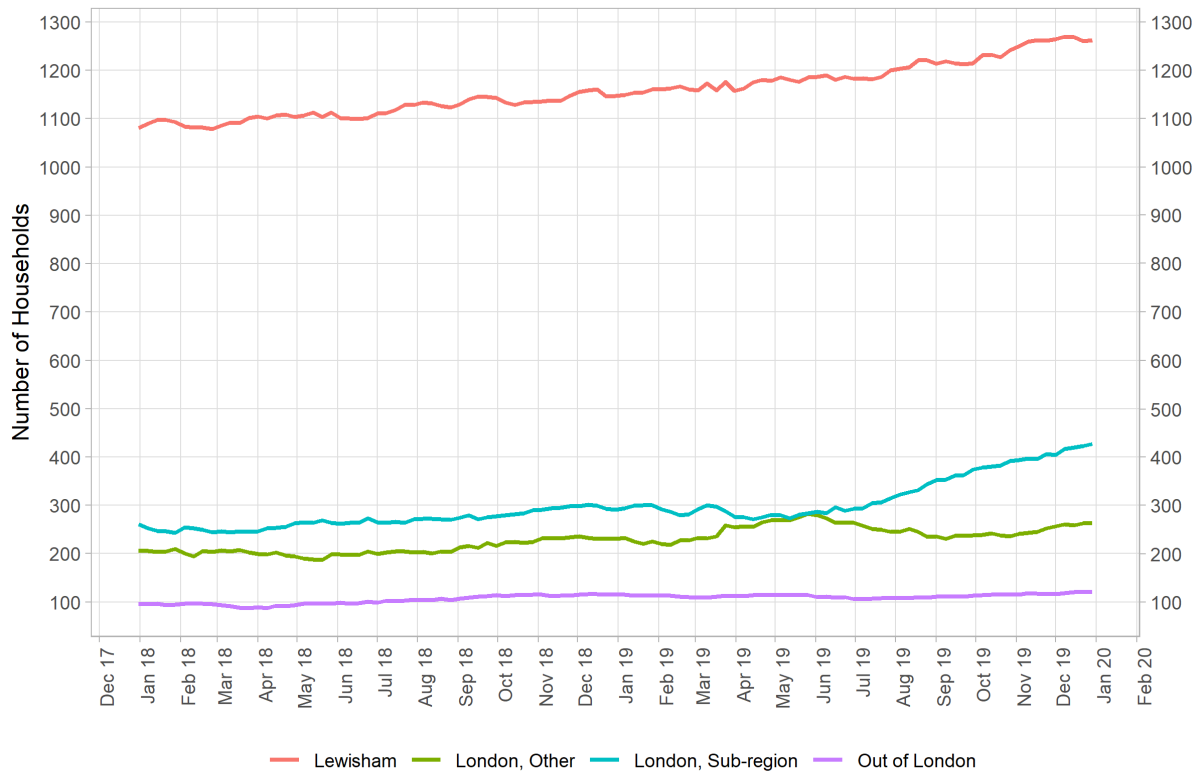
What is the geographic spread of Lewisham families in temporary accommodation?

**Map showing distribution of households in temporary accommodation**



### Number of households in TA over time, by location

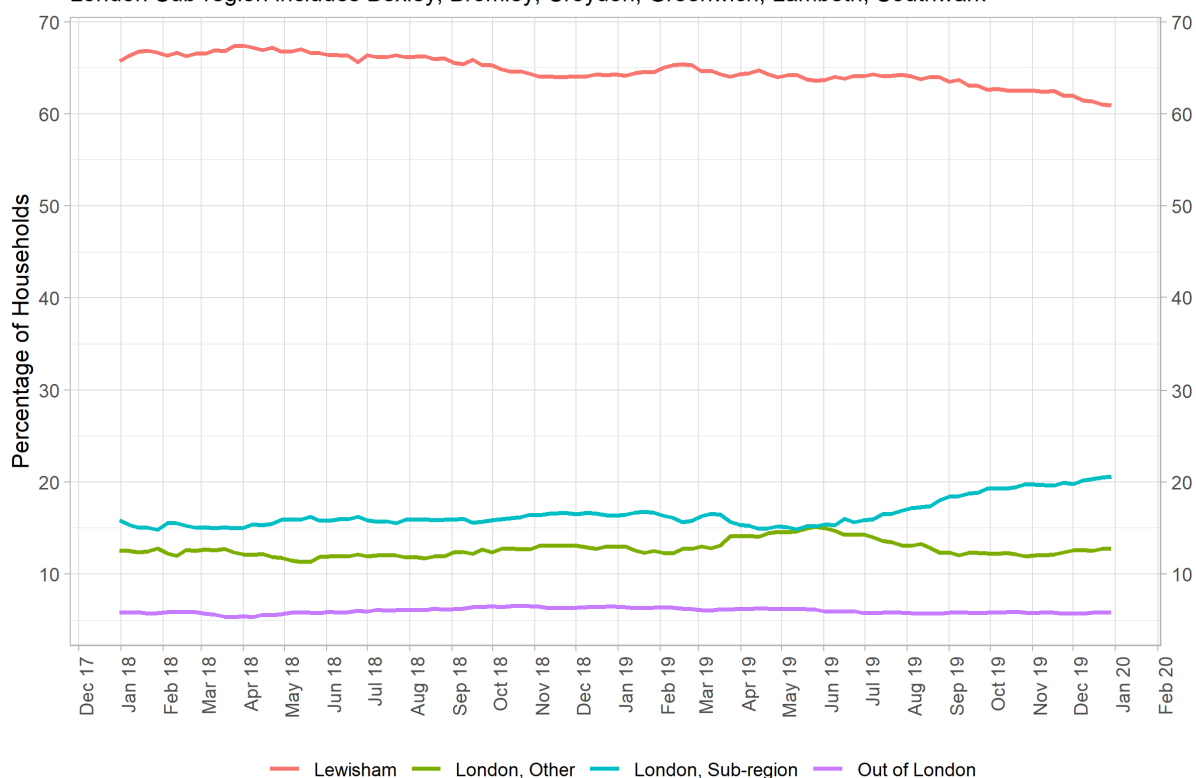
London Sub-region includes Bexley, Bromley, Croydon, Greenwich, Lambeth, Southwark



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

- 8.1 The Committee asked for the map (above) to be broken down by ethnic origin. This has not been possible because the volume of information that the map would need to show would make it illegible. Instead the information is provided in the tables below. Again, this represents applications since April 2018 where the family has been placed into nightly paid shared facility accommodation.
- 8.2 There are some gaps in the data due to difficulties cross matching cases across various systems. Around 70% of relevant applications are captured in these tables.

**Table 1: % of each ethnic group placed in any given location**

Row Labels	Lewisham	London, Other	London, Sub-region	Out of London	Grand Total
Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi	62.50%	12.50%	0.00%	25.00%	100.00%
Asian or Asian British Chinese	58.33%	0.00%	25.00%	16.67%	100.00%
Asian or Asian British Indian	35.71%	7.14%	57.14%	0.00%	100.00%
Asian or Asian British Other	53.85%	17.31%	25.00%	3.85%	100.00%
Asian or Asian British Pakistani	60.00%	40.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Black or Black British African	61.46%	16.57%	18.11%	3.85%	100.00%
Black or Black British Caribbean	66.77%	7.28%	20.57%	5.38%	100.00%
Black or Black British Other	72.22%	5.56%	13.89%	8.33%	100.00%
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic - Other	66.67%	0.00%	33.33%	0.00%	100.00%
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic - White and Black African	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic - White and Black Caribbean	41.18%	11.76%	35.29%	11.76%	100.00%
Other Asian background	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Other ethnic group - Arab	47.37%	15.79%	21.05%	15.79%	100.00%
Other ethnic group - Other	60.31%	13.74%	22.14%	3.82%	100.00%
Refused / Unspecified	60.00%	12.00%	25.00%	3.00%	100.00%
White - English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	66.54%	10.29%	18.38%	4.78%	100.00%
White and Black Caribbean	59.46%	13.51%	27.03%	0.00%	100.00%
White Other	57.14%	19.05%	20.95%	2.86%	100.00%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>62.36%</b>	<b>12.75%</b>	<b>20.38%</b>	<b>4.51%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

**Table 2: % of all placements in a given location by ethnic group**

Row Labels	Lewisham	London, Other	London, Sub-region	Out of London	Grand Total
Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi	0.48%	0.47%	0.00%	2.67%	0.48%
Asian or Asian British Chinese	0.68%	0.00%	0.88%	2.67%	0.72%
Asian or Asian British Indian	0.48%	0.47%	2.36%	0.00%	0.84%
Asian or Asian British Other	2.70%	4.25%	3.83%	2.67%	3.13%
Asian or Asian British Pakistani	0.29%	0.94%	0.00%	0.00%	0.30%
Black or Black British African	30.76%	40.57%	27.73%	26.67%	31.21%
Black or Black British Caribbean	20.35%	10.85%	19.17%	22.67%	19.00%
Black or Black British Other	2.51%	0.94%	1.47%	4.00%	2.16%
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic - Other	0.96%	0.00%	1.47%	0.00%	0.90%
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic - White and Black African	0.39%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.24%
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic - White and Black Caribbean	0.68%	0.94%	1.77%	2.67%	1.02%
Other Asian background	0.10%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.06%
Other ethnic group - Arab	0.87%	1.42%	1.18%	4.00%	1.14%
Other ethnic group - Other	7.62%	8.49%	8.55%	6.67%	7.88%
Refused / Unspecified	5.79%	5.66%	7.37%	4.00%	6.01%
White - English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	17.45%	13.21%	14.75%	17.33%	16.36%
White and Black Caribbean	2.12%	2.36%	2.95%	0.00%	2.22%
White Other	5.79%	9.43%	6.49%	4.00%	6.31%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>



**Table 3: Volumes of placements by ethnic group**

Row Labels	Lewisham	London, Other	London, Sub-region	Out of London	Grand Total
Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi	5	1		2	8
Asian or Asian British Chinese	7		3	2	12
Asian or Asian British Indian	5	1	8		14
Asian or Asian British Other	28	9	13	2	52
Asian or Asian British Pakistani	3	2			5
Black or Black British African	319	86	94	20	519
Black or Black British Caribbean	211	23	65	17	316
Black or Black British Other	26	2	5	3	36
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic - Other	10		5		15
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic - White and Black African	4				4
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic - White and Black Caribbean	7	2	6	2	17
Other Asian background	1				1
Other ethnic group - Arab	9	3	4	3	19
Other ethnic group - Other	79	18	29	5	131
Refused / Unspecified	60	12	25	3	100
White - English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	181	28	50	13	272
White and Black Caribbean	22	5	10		37
White Other	60	20	22	3	105
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1037</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>1663</b>

- 8.3 On 3 February 2020, the BBC aired a Panorama investigation called "Cashing in on the Housing Crisis", which gave a stark insight into life in converted office block accommodation in Harlow. The main issues brought out by the programme concerned lack of security, housing families alongside single occupants who may be exhibiting challenging behaviour due to addiction or mental health difficulties, problems with anti-social (ASB) and criminal behaviour such as drug dealing from the premises.
- 8.4 At the time of writing<sup>3</sup>, Lewisham currently leases 40 self-contained 2-bedroom family units across two buildings in Harlow – Templefields House and Terminus House. These buildings were office blocks that were converted into residential flats under permitted development. The flats are leased from Caridon Property Limited on three year leases, which terminate between 2020- 21.
- 8.5 There have been some reports of ASB received from Lewisham households to the housing reviews team, which have been passed on to Caridon by Lewisham. Caridon are not aware of any incidences of ASB caused by Lewisham families placed in the properties.
- 8.6 The communal areas of Terminus House were inspected in January by a council officer. No signs of ASB in the form of smells or signs of drug use, graffiti, urine or congregations of gangs were evident at the time of the visit.
- 8.7 6.7 In response to concerns raised by a Harlow Councillor, a number of senior officers, together with the Cabinet Member for Housing visited Terminus House on 27 January 2020. They concluded that the accommodation was suitable and more importantly safe for our residents, with adequate measures in place in terms of security and health & safety.
- 8.8 A full briefing note is provided at Appendix D.

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<sup>3</sup> February 2020

## 9. Impact on children and young people

### **KEY LINE OF ENQUIRY 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)

9.1 There is extensive evidence regarding the negative impact that living in temporary accommodation has on children. A list of sources is provided in the footnote<sup>4</sup>.

#### **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.

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<sup>4</sup> 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

"The impact of homelessness on children and their development" a presentation by Marcus McPhillips, Shelter

[https://england.shelter.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0016/39202/Chance\\_of\\_a\\_Lifetime.pdf](https://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/39202/Chance_of_a_Lifetime.pdf)

## **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.

### Recommendation 2

That the council does not place

- a. families with children under 18
- b. 16 & 17 year olds
- c. Care leavers

in nightly paid accommodation with shared amenities, and amends its Housing prioritisation processes accordingly.

This is because sharing kitchens, bathrooms and/or toilets with strangers has a profoundly damaging effect on children and young people's physical and mental health, which in turn can impact on school attendance, academic attainment and cognitive development.

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

- 9.2 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.
- 9.3 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.
- 9.4 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.
- 9.5 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.
- 9.6 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.
- 9.7 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.

**Recommendation 3**

That the Homelessness Reduction team seeks to identify early where children are more likely to be evicted and a Liaison Officer be appointed to work with the Children and Young People Directorate and Housing to facilitate joint preventative work where a potential eviction is anticipated to lead to a child being referred to Children's Social Care.

**10. Quality and location of accommodation**

**KEY LINE OF ENQUIRY 4**

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

*Location*

- 10.1 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.
- 10.2 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.
- 10.3 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.
- 10.4 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.

- 10.5 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.
- 10.6 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.
- 10.7 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.

#### **Recommendation 4**

That an additional post focused on the welfare of children who are schooled in Lewisham but placed in accommodation outside the borough be created.

#### *Quality of accommodation*

- 10.8 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.
- 10.9 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.
- 10.10 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.

### **Recommendation 5**

That

- a. prior to placing tenants, properties are inspected in person by or on behalf of Lewisham Council, with a written condition report and photos; and
- b. no family be placed in unsatisfactory accommodation. When deciding whether a property is satisfactory, due regard should be given to
  - i. the fabric of the building – including a range of qualities such as state of repair, natural light, space
  - ii. the appropriateness of the local population, particularly other residents and building users.

## **11. Lived experiences of families**

11.1 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*

11.2 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's<sup>5</sup> 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.

### **KEY LINE OF ENQUIRY 5**

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

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.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.lgo.org.uk/decisions/housing/homelessness/17-013-673>  
<https://www.lgo.org.uk/decisions/housing/homelessness/17-012-265>

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.

#### **Recommendation 6**

Placing a family in temporary accommodation outside the borough should not contain an assumption in advance as to the location of their settled/ permanent accommodation.

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.

#### **Recommendation 7**

Clear and accessible information should be provided to all households in temporary accommodation on their rights, pathways for resolving issues with temporary accommodation, the location of local amenities such as the GP, dentist, shops, library, together with regularly updated advice on the anticipated length of stay so families can make informed decisions around school placements.

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.
- 11.3 When asked what would help, parents wanted that support to move forward, with better representation, to help them have a voice.
- 11.4 Through their casework some Members had themselves experienced difficulties in contacting named Housing officers, including disconnected phone numbers, phones ringing out, mailboxes full and unable to take messages, having to ask the Operator to email caseworkers to request that they empty their voicemail.



- 11.5 Housing officers are often away from the office attending properties, however service users need to be able to contact the service, leave a message and be confident of receiving a response.

**Recommendation 8**

That communication with service users be more open and a culture that builds trust, transparency and information-sharing be encouraged. This includes seeking and recording feedback from service users which is then acted upon, and service users kept informed, where appropriate.

**Recommendation 9**

That the Housing Department responds swiftly and thoroughly to enquiries from Members, officers outside the Department and other stakeholders, including schools, Citizen's Advice Bureaux etc.

## 12. Support from schools

**KEY LINE OF ENQUIRY 6**

How do schools support children living in temporary accommodation?

- 12.1 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.
- 12.2 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.
- 12.3 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 the family was in very cramped temporary accommodation. The school responded by making toys available to be played with after school.
- 12.4 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 Breakfast<sup>6</sup> programme, and give out bagels for breakfast before school.

- 12.5 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.
- 12.6 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 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.
- 12.7 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.
- 12.8 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.
- 12.9 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.
- 12.10 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.
- 12.11 Shelter has recommended a number of good practice examples that schools can do to effectively support homeless children<sup>7</sup>. 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 C**.

**KEY LINE OF ENQUIRY 7**

What other support is available for children in temporary accommodation

<sup>6</sup> [www.magicbreakfast.com](http://www.magicbreakfast.com)

<sup>7</sup>

[https://england.shelter.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/81010/Engaging\\_with\\_homeless\\_children\\_-\\_Guidance\\_for\\_education\\_professionals.pdf](https://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/81010/Engaging_with_homeless_children_-_Guidance_for_education_professionals.pdf)

**Recommendation 10**

That the information from Shelter in Appendix C of the report should be updated to ensure accuracy and circulated to all schools in the borough.

**13. Other support**

13.1 No evidence was collated on this during the course of the review.

**14. Monitoring and ongoing scrutiny**

14.1 The Committee expects to receive an update on the implementation of any agreed recommendations approximately three months after receiving the Mayoral response to this report.

Appendix A	Location Priority Policy
Appendix B	Private Rented Sector Policy
Appendix C	Shelter report: Engaging with Homeless Children
Appendix D	Briefing – use of temporary accommodation in Harlow