



West Midlands
Combined Authority

Families living in temporary accommodation

**West Midlands
Combined Authority
Homelessness
Taskforce**

Final report v4.0

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Project details	3
Introduction	4
Our approach	5
Literature review.....	7
The big picture	7
Factors making families vulnerable to homelessness.....	7
Impact on families living in TA	8
Initiatives that help families avoid homelessness or TA.....	10
National and regional picture	12
Constituent local authority snapshot.....	15
Demographic data.....	15
Reason for homelessness and housing duty owed.....	18
Type of accommodation and length of time in TA	19
Stakeholder views	21
Which families are living in TA?	21
The impact on families, and support provided	23
Challenges, national and local	29
Types of accommodation.....	32
Impact of Covid	35
Suggested solutions	36
Family voices	38
Reason for being homeless	38
Life in TA.....	41
Impact of TA.....	44
Support provided	46
Future housing.....	49
Preventing homelessness	52
Conclusions	53
Profile of families and typical journeys into TA	53
Different types of TA used	53
Impact of living in TA.....	54
Families longer-term housing needs.....	55
Good practice.....	55
Recommendations	56
Bibliography	58

Project details

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Client	West Midlands Combined Authority Homelessness Taskforce
Project number	20142
Author & Research Manager	Adam Knight-Markiegi
Report reviewer	Helen Woods David Chong Ping

M·E·L Research Ltd

Somerset House, 37 Temple Street, Birmingham, B2 5DP

info@melresearch.co.uk

melresearch.co.uk

0121 604 4664



Introduction

M·E·L Research has been commissioned by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Homelessness Taskforce to undertake a research project into families in temporary accommodation (TA) across the region.

The WMCA Homelessness Taskforce was established in 2017, with the aim to design out homelessness. The Taskforce membership includes all seven constituent local authorities, representation from non-constituent local authorities, key public sector agencies, voluntary, private and charitable organisations, working together to prevent and relieve homelessness.

The WMCA has no statutory duties or powers around homelessness but, in designing out homelessness, is committed to identifying and addressing gaps in policies, procedures, laws, structures, systems and relationships that either cause or fail to prevent homelessness.

In recognising that homelessness takes many forms - rough sleeping, sofa surfing, night-shelters, B&B, temporary accommodation, hostels, squatting; and is a complex mix of personal and wider structural factors, such as health, employment, relationships and housing; the Taskforce follows the key principles of:

- a people centred preventative approach
- working collaboratively
- connecting mainstream strategies
- achieving system change.

Temporary accommodation for families is an integral part of homelessness provision and one that is currently used at a high level and presents real challenges to both households using it and organisations providing it. Where possible The Taskforce wants to support the reduction in use of TA and in the meantime identify what can be done to maximise the positive impacts of TA while minimising the negative impacts.

Some TA provides an opportunity to maintain a family life and some, e.g. bed and breakfast, hotel and hostel type accommodation are likely to place additional challenges on families. All suspend the potential for a settled home and all that goes with that. The Taskforce therefore wanted to better understand the impact on families in relationship to work, health, education and more and on their broader longer-term opportunities, including what 'protective factors' affect a family's resilience to the impact of TA.

Here is the initial list of key questions the Taskforce wanted this project to answer:

- What are the profile and key characteristics of families in TA in the area, including their previous settled accommodation?
- What are the typical journeys into TA and could these have been altered to avoid homelessness?
- How long are families in TA and what is the impact of time in TA on key areas such as work, family relationships, health and child development?
- What is the impact of TA on family's protective factors, such as strong family relationships etc?
- What kind of TA is used and are there different outcomes for families?
- What are we doing that works?
- What are the typical medium to long term housing needs of families in TA?
- How can best practice in TA be promoted and used across the WMCA and broader West Midlands region?

In particular the Taskforce wants to be able to:

- raise the profile of this form of homelessness with decision makers and policy makers
- engage other agencies in supporting families (early help and prevention etc)
- promote best practice and provide insight for commissioners where needed
- inform and influence development of permanent affordable housing
- inform prevention and relief approaches.

Our approach

In order to address these research questions, we carried out the following activities:

- a focused review of key literature
- analysed national and regional level secondary data on TA
- collected and analysed snapshot data from constituent local authorities
- interviewed the lead for TA (and sometimes additional colleagues) in each of the seven WMCA constituent local authorities – Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall and Wolverhampton – hearing from 12 colleagues in total
- interviewed 12 stakeholders more widely in the West Midlands, including housing associations, support providers, other local authorities in the region and more
- spoke to three wider agencies in the region, representing health and wellbeing, safeguarding and domestic abuse
- engaged with 21 families, mostly currently living in TA, and a few homeless families who had so far managed to avoid TA
- researched and engaged with a wider group of 'good practice' providers.

To present the findings, we have broadly followed the order of the above methods, starting with the literature review, then following up with national and regional data, then the local snapshot. Next is the collation of stakeholder views, followed by the families' voices. We end with our conclusions. We have woven in good practice examples into the report and picked out lots of particular case studies

from families in that section, helping to tell the personal stories from our research. Alongside this full report is a stand-alone summary report.

Terminology used

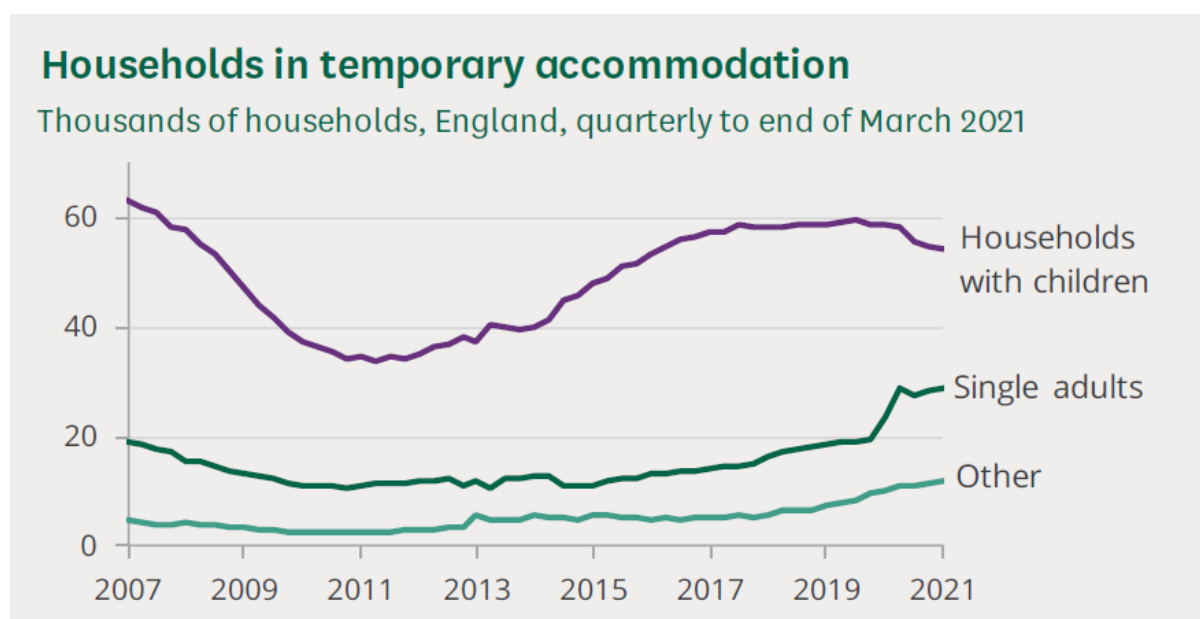
For clarity when we are referring to the seven constituent authorities that make up the WMCA we will refer to it as the 'WMCA area'. When we refer to the whole of the West Midlands we use the 'wider West Midlands' or 'West Midlands region'.

Literature review

This section summarises the literature that already exists on families living in temporary accommodation, limited though the literature is. We targeted our search on national homelessness charities (e.g. Shelter, Crisis, Homeless Link), relevant academic reports (e.g. York University, CRESR at Sheffield Hallam University), the seven constituent local authorities themselves and a few wider sources (e.g. Joseph Rowntree Foundation).

The big picture

The chart below shows the situation for TA from 2007. This shows an increase in single adults and households with children in TA from about 2015, the number of families with children plateaued between mid-2017 to 2020 nationally, then falling back slightly at the start of the Covid pandemic in 2020.



Source: MHCLG, Statutory homelessness live tables, Table TA2, July 2021 in House of Commons Library (2021)

We go into the regional and local picture in detail later in the report.

Factors making families vulnerable to homelessness

Over the years, research has identified that some groups are more likely to be at risk of homelessness than the general population (Shelter, 2007). These include young people, care leavers, ex-offenders,

refugees, people with addictions and ex members of the forces. Similarly, The Big Lottery Fund (2018) also found varied personal and social factors can impact the likeliness of homelessness. These include lacking education or social support, having debts or mental health problems as well as institutional backgrounds. Structural causes, often beyond an individual's control, include poverty, lack of affordable housing and wider policy developments.

An earlier study by the University of York (2008) on statutory homelessness in England found that the majority of families (65%) accepted as homeless were found to be headed by lone mothers, usually with one or two children. In addition, 41% of the respondents reported being affected by domestic abuse, as well as 52% self-reporting feelings of anxiety, depression, and other mental health problems.

When assessing the pathway that leads families into TA, Birmingham City Council (undated – see bibliography) presentation suggests it can be due to several factors, including:

- poor housing by private landlords
- removal of benefits
- redundancy / reduction of sick pay
- limited availability of social housing through local authority
- financial crash / debt
- domestic abuse / sickness, illness or disability.

Impact on families living in TA

All forms of TA can lead to negative experiences and outcomes for homeless households and where relevant their children. According to detailed research into TA in Scotland (Watts, 2018) and to Pleace (2019), those who live in cramped, unfit and overcrowded spaces with little or no green space cause health and development issues for children, and increased stress for parents. A survey by Shelter (2004a) found that 58% of families reported their health deteriorated since living in TA, with families who lived in the accommodation longer more likely to correlate their poor health to their housing situation.

It is widely accepted that these impacts are felt more acutely where the form of TA is poor quality, large scale or concentrated in nature (Credland 2004; Mitchell et al 2004; Bush-Geertsema and Shalin 2007; Boyle and Pleace 2017; Mackie, Johnson and Wood 2017). This builds on earlier evidence from UK-based case control studies of moving and childhood asthma, which found that there was an association between moving home in the early years and the development of asthma in childhood (Hughes and Baumer, 1995; Jones et al, 1999). Moving into TA is one more move for children, then at least one more move out to longer-term housing, aggravating this issue.

An important theme for those living in TA is the length of time they had been there combined with uncertainty of when they would be moved on, contributing to a feeling of being in limbo and lacking control over their and their family's lives and future (Watts, 2018). Families may become "stuck" in TA due to the shortages in housing supplies (O'Sullivan, 2016). We look at this further in the following sections.

An earlier portrayal of TA by Shelter (2004) described one case history of a single mother and her son were made homeless due to domestic abuse. The parent suffered with depression since her first move into TA, as it was caused by their homelessness, lack of security and treatment by the local authorities. The temporariness of the accommodation made the family feel as though they are constantly being observed, whereas they felt being permanently housed would enable them to restart their lives. Shelter (2004) found that the lack of information about the housing process created stress for the families as they were constantly being moved at short notice, enhancing the feelings of insecurity that families already faced when living in TA.

Housing insecurity unfortunately becomes a normality for children living in TA (Children's Society, 2020). As a result, children have elevated poor health and are less likely to be fully immunised with primary immunisations than those who were moved less. Stress and anxiety levels are heightened as children do not know why, when and where they would move to. Housing is often cramped and in deprived areas where muggings, fights and gangs are prevalent preventing the needs for safety in young people. Parents were extremely concerned and sometimes distressed about the impact living in TA was having on their children – wellbeing and sense of home and stability, children's ability to play and have fun, and feelings of stigma (Watts, 2018).

The effect of Covid has heightened mental and physical negative impact on families across the country. During lockdown 4,340 families with children lived in emergency B&Bs or hostels in England, according to Shelter (Dec 2020) research. Families were placed in poor conditions and accommodation that lacked facilities such as laundry facilities, fridge, working cooker and even basic needs of a bed. Communal facilities such as bathrooms, kitchens and toilets were in such an unhygienic state, that it deterred families from using them, effecting their health and mental state.

There can be a lack of space and internet access for children to work, an even greater concern during lockdowns due to the Covid pandemic (Shelter, Dec 2020). "Almost two thirds of parents we spoke to suggested that their children's education and development had been negatively affected by living in the TA" (Shelter, Dec 2020). Families we spoke to for this research voiced similar concerns (see further below).

At a local level, Birmingham City Council (undated) found that being placed into TA can cause challenges in accessing education. Local authorities may not have been able to provide them with accommodation close to schools, therefore there may be poor attendance due to the distance to schools, Birmingham's presentation documented. Similarly, there may be difficulty in accessing transport, lack of amenities and poor quality of sleep for children, it stated. Changing school can leave children having to start the whole process of making new friends again (Children's Society, 2020). Watts (2018) also showed the impact of living in TA on attendance and performance at school.

Initiatives that help families avoid homelessness or TA

The key aim of the Homeless Reduction Act is to ensure that homelessness can be prevented as much as possible through local authorities intervening as early as possible. Remaining in the current home is a good first option, at the stage of a threat of homelessness (Shelter, 2020a). This avoids costs and the need for TA, as well as keeping the family in settled housing. Measures to support this include using Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) to allow arrears to be cleared and therefore preventing eviction or proactive home visits (Shelter, 2020a).

However, recent findings suggest that within the last year only a fifth of households across England were able to remain within their homes when threatened with homelessness. Shelter's (2020a) audit into homelessness services found that limited negotiations took place to help people stay in their homes. Shelter hubs reported an increase in TA numbers nationally and the time that people spend in them. Two-thirds of local authorities reported households have longer stays within TA since the implementation of the Act (Local Government Association, 2019).

Preventing homelessness generally may be effective when integrated with other strategies, such as rapid rehousing, collaborating with other homeless services and creating packages with mental health and drug and alcohol services (Pleace, 2019). However, the outcome of these strategies may be impacted through the lack of affordable homes, particularly for large family units (LGA, 2019). In addition, this LGA survey of local authorities found landlords were often reluctant to take tenants on Universal Credit through fear they would fall behind on rent. Ultimately, preventing homelessness requires increased affordable housing.

A key area where gains can be made is in taking preventative efforts further 'upstream' from traditional prevention work (Watts, 2018). This requires enhanced partnership working with a range of public and third sector agencies, including schools, housing associations, social work, addiction services and child protection agencies. Prevention work can also be enhanced via more intensive work

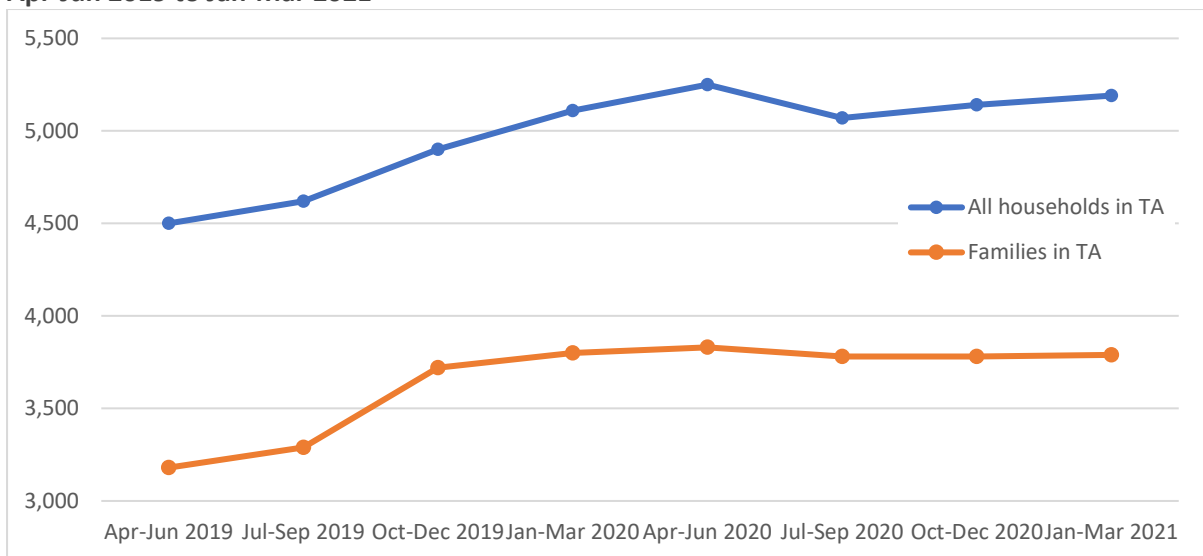
to prevent evictions from the private rented sector and in working with households to improve their employment prospects and maximise their income.

National and regional picture

This section presents some national and regional data taken from published statutory homelessness statistics.

The number of households living in TA in the whole West Midlands region has been growing since early 2019 (the blue line below), up from about 4,500 households in Apr-June 2019 to almost 5,200 in Jan-Mar 2021. Families with children account for the largest share of these, with a consistent number of about 3,700 since the last quarter in 2019 and staying at that level up to the first quarter of 2021 (the latest published data available). In fact, this bucks the national trend, where the number of families living in TA has fallen slightly. This accounts for over 8,000 children living in TA in the West Midlands region at any one time.

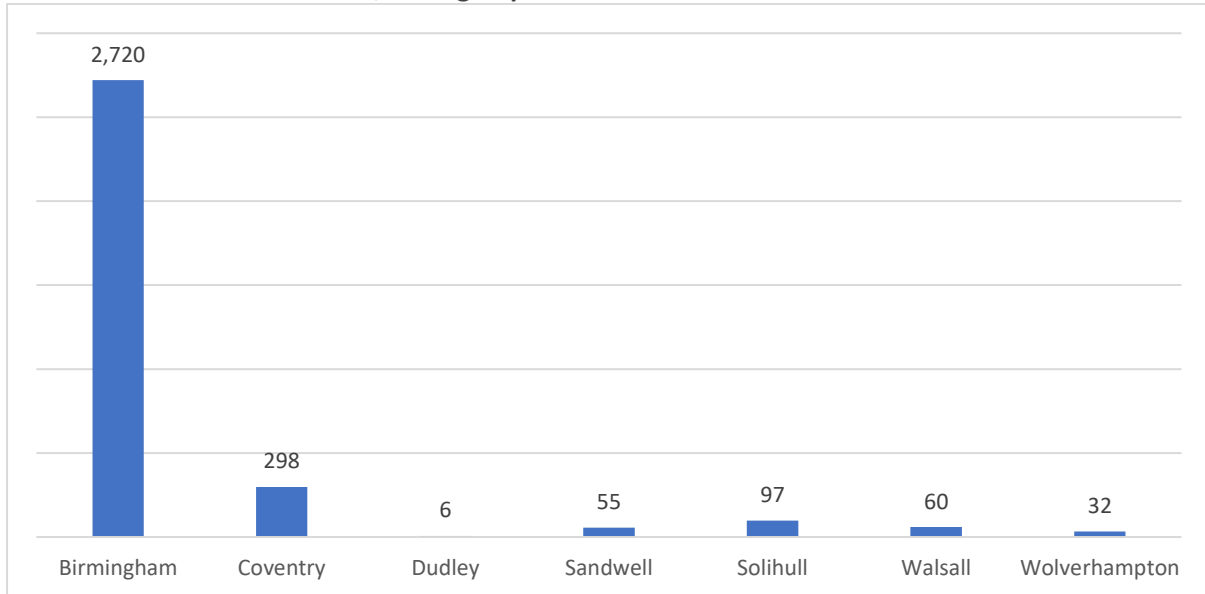
Total number of households and families with children in TA in West Midlands region, quarterly Apr-Jun 2019 to Jan-Mar 2021



Source: Statutory homelessness: Detailed local authority-level tables

The picture above is not the same across the seven constituent WMCA local authorities, with varying numbers of families with children living in TA, as shown below, ranging from an average of under 10 up to well more than 2,700 over Apr-June 2019 to Jan-Mar 2021.

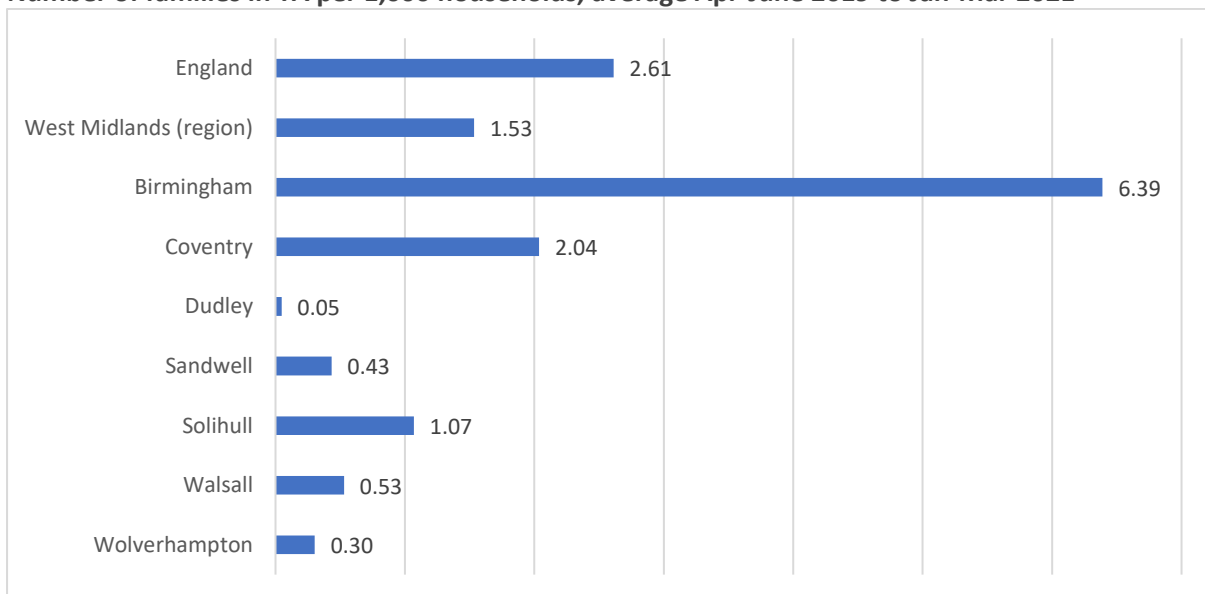
Total number of families in TA, average Apr-June 2019 to Jan-Mar 2021



Source: Statutory homelessness: Detailed local authority-level tables

It can be useful to see the rate of families in TA compared to all households in the local area. The chart below shows this for the seven constituent local authorities alongside the whole West Midlands region and England. Birmingham has the highest number on this measure, with 6.4 families in TA per 1,000 households in the authority. This translates to 1 in every 156 households, more than double the national rate of 2.6. Coventry is second, at 2 families in TA per 1,000 households (about 1 in every 500 households), then Solihull, at 1.1 per 1,000 households.

Number of families in TA per 1,000 households, average Apr-June 2019 to Jan-Mar 2021



Source: Statutory homelessness: Detailed local authority-level tables

Using data to the end of June 2020 as a snapshot, we have also compared the seven constituent local authorities with others in England, to help put the local situation into a broader context. Looking simply at absolute numbers shows that Newham had the highest number of families with children in TA at that point, at over 3,800. Birmingham is next, with over 3,000. All the top 10 such authorities are in London, with the exception of Birmingham and Manchester.

Top 10 LAs by number of households in TA with children

Rank	Local authority	Number of households with children in TA
1	Newham	3,820
2	Birmingham	3,064
3	Haringey	2,494
4	Hackney	2,180
5	Brent	1,867
6	Croydon	1,621
7	Manchester	1,530
8	Kensington and Chelsea	1,477
9	Wandsworth	1,454
10	Barnet	1,445

Source: MHCLG, Table TA1 - Number of households by type of temporary accommodation provided: England, 30th June 2020

When looking at the rate of families in TA, as shown earlier, but at a regional level, London stands out. There were 12.5 families with children living in TA per 1,000 in London in June 2020. The next biggest rate is the West Midlands region, at 1.6. This translates to about one household in every 640 in the West Midlands region is a family with children living in TA, compared to one in every 80 in London.

Constituent local authority snapshot

Moving on from the national picture, we collected a snapshot of data from the seven local authorities of all families with dependent children living in TA on 1 March 2021 (25 February for Birmingham). This starts to pull out who are the families living in TA locally and partly captures some of the reasons for families being in TA.

Demographic data

Birmingham had the largest number of families with dependent children living in TA across the seven constituent local authorities, at 2,955. Coventry had a tenth of this, 281, followed by Solihull with 115. The lowest number – at just 6 families – was Dudley.

Number of families in TA by local authority

	Number	% of total
Birmingham	2,955	84.0%
Coventry	281	8.0%
Solihull	115	3.3%
Wolverhampton	71	2.0%
Walsall	50	1.4%
Sandwell	40	1.1%
Dudley	6	0.2%
Total	3,518	100.0%

Lead applicants

Across all seven authorities two-thirds of lead applicants were women, where this data was provided. This is higher in some authorities, notably Wolverhampton, Coventry and Walsall. This tallies with earlier evidence presented in the literature review.

Gender of lead applicant

	Birmingham	Coventry	Solihull	Wolverhampton	Walsall	Sandwell	Dudley	Total
Female	70%	78%	0%	79%	78%	75%	50%	68%
Male	30%	22%	0%	21%	22%	25%	50%	28%
Unknown	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%

Looking at the age of lead applicant the most common age band was 30–39, for almost two fifths (38%) of all families. The decades either side of this also hold significant proportions of lead applicants. Altogether, lead applicants aged 20–49 made up 87% of all applicants in this snapshot. These

proportions are broadly the same across the authorities, although Sandwell has a slightly older cohort, with just 8% of lead applicants aged 20–29, although a lower total number of families.

Age of lead applicant

	Birmingham	Coventry	Solihull	Wolverhampton	Walsall	Sandwell	Dudley	Total
17–19	1%	2%	0%	4%	4%	0%	0%	1%
20–29	23%	28%	0%	27%	28%	8%	33%	22%
30–39	39%	35%	0%	39%	40%	58%	17%	38%
40–49	28%	25%	0%	23%	28%	33%	50%	27%
50–59	7%	9%	0%	6%	0%	3%	0%	7%
60+	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Unknown	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%

When we consider ethnicity we see a diverse mix of lead applicants, although not entirely reflective of the wider populations across these seven authorities. Birmingham had a large proportion of Black/Black British lead applicants, making up a third of all families in the snapshot. This is a much higher representation for this group than their representation in the wider population of Birmingham (just 2.8% in the 2011 census). When broken down further, Black/Black British African lead applicants form 20% of the Birmingham’s total households in TA. One possible explanation is that there is a larger number of former asylum seeker applicants, a point that came out from stakeholder interviews (see below). This same pattern is seen in Wolverhampton (17% Black/Black British African) and Coventry (12%).

Worth noting is the relatively low proportion of white lead applicants, around only half of lead applicants in three of the seven authorities: Wolverhampton (54%), Dudley (50%) and Coventry (49%). Given the wider population in the region, there is a relatively low proportions of Asian/Asian British lead applicants for TA, although highest in Birmingham at 24%. Across all authorities, Asian / Asian British households were larger on average than most other ethnic groups, one factor that can lead to longer lengths of stay in TA, as we see in Birmingham (below).

Ethnicity of lead applicant

	Birmingham	Coventry	Solihull	Wolverhampton	Walsall	Sandwell	Dudley	Total
Black / Black British	32%	23%	0%	23%	4%	8%	17%	29%
White	22%	49%	0%	54%	30%	25%	50%	25%
Asian / Asian British	24%	10%	0%	3%	4%	10%	17%	21%
Other	10%	6%	0%	7%	0%	5%	17%	9%
Mixed	6%	6%	0%	6%	0%	8%	0%	6%
Unknown / refused	6%	7%	100%	8%	62%	45%	0%	10%

More work may be needed to fully understand the factors at play in relationship to the impact of ethnicity on use of TA.

TA households

Single mothers were the majority household type in six of the seven authorities, up to 82% of families in Coventry. Couples tended to be next, forming a third of all households across the seven constituent local authorities. In Coventry, however, multi-adult households (with three or more adults) were the second most common, making up one in ten (10%). These might be parents with older, non-dependent children or larger families living with older relatives.

Household type

	Birmingham	Coventry	Solihull	Wolverhampton	Walsall	Sandwell	Dudley	Total
Single mum	55%	82%	70%	62%	65%	68%	17%	58%
Couple	39%	1%	23%	32%	27%	20%	67%	35%
Single dad	6%	6%	4%	4%	6%	8%	17%	6%
Multi adult	0%	10%	3%	2%	3%	3%	0%	1%
Other	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%	0%	0%

Looking at the household size, most common was three-person households, making up one in four (26%) of all families in TA in the snapshot. But two-person and four-person households were also common (21% and 20% respectively). These are the count of all household members, both adults and children, so a two-person household in this context represents a single parent with one child. This split is broadly the same across all seven authorities.

Of note, is larger households. About a tenth of larger families in Coventry (11%) and Birmingham (10%) had seven or more household members, the two authorities with the highest numbers of families in TA. We also know from stakeholders (in the next section) that it can take longer to find suitably sized

properties for larger families, which can delay how quickly they are housed longer-term. In total, the snapshot captured 14,008 people living in TA on 1 March 2021, averaging 4.0 people per household.

Household size

Household size	Birmingham	Coventry	Solihull	Wolverhampton	Walsall	Sandwell	Dudley	Total
2	20%	28%	23%	17%	16%	28%	17%	21%
3	26%	23%	25%	28%	30%	35%	33%	26%
4	20%	20%	26%	25%	20%	23%	17%	20%
5	15%	12%	16%	14%	20%	5%	17%	14%
6	9%	6%	3%	11%	8%	5%	0%	9%
7	6%	4%	3%	4%	4%	3%	0%	6%
8	2%	2%	3%	0%	2%	3%	17%	2%
9	1%	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
10+	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Over a third (36%) of all families in TA in the snapshot had just one child, the most common number. This pattern is slightly different in Sandwell, Solihull and Wolverhampton, where the most common group is two children. In total, the snapshot captured 8,240 children living in TA on 1 March 2021, averaging 2.3 per family.

Number of dependent children

Dependents	Birmingham	Coventry	Solihull	Wolverhampton	Walsall	Sandwell	Dudley	Total
1	36%	39%	26%	21%	28%	35%	50%	36%
2	26%	24%	31%	38%	26%	38%	17%	27%
3	19%	16%	23%	14%	20%	15%	0%	19%
4	10%	9%	11%	14%	16%	8%	17%	11%
5	6%	5%	5%	11%	8%	3%	0%	6%
6	2%	2%	3%	1%	2%	0%	17%	2%
7+	1%	3%	0%	0%	0%	3%	0%	1%
Unknown	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Reason for homelessness and housing duty owed

The reason for homelessness was recorded for almost half of families in the snapshot. The table below shows percentages among those where the reason for homelessness is known.

The top three reasons for most authorities were:

- an end of an assured shorthold tenancy – even during the Covid pandemic and ban on evictions
- being asked to leave by family or friends
- domestic abuse.

Where the reason is known, these three reasons account for between 13% and 34% of the families in five of the authorities (not Dudley, with such low numbers altogether). The exact split varies by authority, though. For example, in Wolverhampton and Solihull about one in four households (26% and 25% respectively) were homeless because of domestic abuse, whereas being asked to leave by family / friends accounted for one in five (20%) of families in Coventry and Sandwell.

Reason for homelessness (% where known)

	B'ham	Coventry	Solihull	W'hampton	Sandwell	Dudley	Total
End of AST	34%	16%	17%	19%	20%	0%	29%
Asked to leave by family / friends	18%	20%	23%	15%	20%	17%	19%
Domestic abuse	13%	18%	25%	26%	15%	0%	15%
Rent / mortgage arrears	11%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	8%
Fleeing violence / harassment	5%	9%	17%	7%	3%	33%	6%
Asylum seeker / refugee	4%	8%	0%	13%	23%	17%	5%
Relationship breakdown	2%	4%	7%	6%	13%	0%	3%
Institution or care	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%
Emergency	3%	1%	2%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Evicted	0%	7%	0%	2%	0%	0%	1%
Property not fit / unsafe	0%	4%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Sofa surfing	0%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Overcrowding	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
End of social / supported	0%	0%	1%	2%	3%	0%	0%
Other	5%	6%	8%	11%	5%	33%	6%

This data was not available from Walsall, so not shown in this table.

What this may disguise is the housing situation beforehand. For example, if a single mother flees domestic violence and stays with her own parents but is later asked to leave, the stated reason for homelessness will be 'asked to leave by family / friends', even though domestic abuse is an earlier factor. This may be the same with asylum seekers or refugees, such as if housed for a short stay by friends before approaching the local authority for longer-term housing.

Type of accommodation and length of time in TA

Type of accommodation provided for TA, local authority stock accounts for the largest share of the accommodation provided (including LA stock managed by arms-length management organisations, ALMOs), almost half across all seven authorities. Within that there is variation, Dudley, Solihull and Walsall provide at least 90% of placements in their own stock (even if managed by an ALMO), according to the data. In Coventry, which transferred its stock to Citizen, the biggest proportion of accommodation used is PRS leased property, accounting for almost half of their placements on 1

March 2021. Such stock represented about one in four placements for Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Sandwell.

Bed & Breakfast accommodation was used as TA for 30% of families in Sandwell and 15% in Birmingham, whereas nightly rate self-contained accommodation was housing a third (32%) of Coventry's families in TA at the snapshot.

Type of TA

	B'ham	Coventry	Solihull	W'hampton	Walsall	Sandwell	Dudley	Total
Local authority	50%	2%	92%	73%	90%	45%	100%	49%
PRS leased	29%	47%	0%	27%	0%	25%	0%	29%
B&B	15%	0%	0%	0%	0%	30%	0%	13%
Hostel	6%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%
Nightly rate self-contained	0%	32%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%
Housing association	0%	20%	0%	0%	10%	0%	0%	2%
Hotel	0%	0%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

The snapshot also included data on the total time in the current TA placement. As there is such a wide range of times, we have also shown the median when broken down by days. This shows quite a variation across the authorities, least in Sandwell (36-42 days or 5-6 weeks) and highest in Birmingham (498-504 days or 1.4 years), where almost two-thirds of families had been living in TA for more than a year.

Total time in current placement

	B'ham	Coventry	Solihull	W'hampton	Walsall	Sandwell	Dudley	Total
Under 1 day*	0%	4%	1%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%
1-7 days	0%	3%	3%	6%	8%	25%	0%	1%
8-21 days	2%	9%	6%	20%	10%	15%	0%	3%
22-56 days	5%	12%	24%	11%	20%	18%	0%	7%
57-112 days	6%	24%	13%	23%	14%	15%	0%	8%
113-364 days	23%	34%	30%	37%	38%	23%	0%	25%
365-728 days	32%	10%	17%	4%	8%	3%	0%	29%
729+ days	32%	3%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	27%
Unknown	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%	100%	0%
Median (days)	498-504	106-112	127-133	78-84	71-77	36-42		414-420

* Coventry included 6 households that were about to enter TA that week.

Stakeholder views

Qualitative stakeholder interviews are useful in gaining insights into specific local context and impacts, as well as the attitudes, experiences and perspectives of the selected stakeholders. By their very nature, due to the relatively small sample sizes and style of questioning, they are not necessarily representative of broader conditions or impacts. During analysis we are looking for broad consensus of opinions to highlight key findings but we also highlight outlying views that may need to be taken into consideration.

This section pulls together the views from a range of interviews, with homelessness and TA leads in the constituent local authorities and beyond, wider colleagues in those seven councils, representatives from housing associations and support agencies. Lastly, we spoke to those with a wider remit in the region, covering safeguarding, domestic abuse, and health and wellbeing. We have structured it broadly in line with the research questions.

Which families are living in TA?

We asked stakeholders which type of family is living in TA and whether there are any shared characteristics. Several stakeholders noted that **debt** was a significant and contributory factor for families in TA, with specific reference to rent arrears for many families. For example, one LA lead told us the arrears often go back a long time, which can total thousands of pounds; others feared that arrears will have got worse during Covid, with debt increasing, as landlords were unable to evict tenants.

ASB was another common theme, stakeholders suggested, that included families who have “burnt bridges” and often done “the circuit” and ended up in the private rented sector, until evicted by the landlord. Some felt it can also be hard to find social housing with a history of ASB. For other stakeholders, being asked to leave by family or friends was a big immediate cause of homelessness. Some feared that during Covid these will have become hidden homeless families, hidden within other households but more recently being asked to move out, thus presenting as homeless and ending up in TA.

Domestic abuse came up during interviews with stakeholders, a recurring theme. For example, Birmingham Council believed this was in the top three reasons for homelessness, whether or not actually recorded in homelessness records. Some interviewees believed the homelessness statistics undercounted levels of domestic abuse among families ending up in TA. One believes that when you

“unpick women-led families” in TA you will find domestic abuse. Not everyone presenting as homeless because of abuse will say so, not immediately. One constituent local authority agreed that they accept a lot more families because of domestic abuse, particularly because of the significant risk if help is not provided.

Covid may have masked the number of domestic abuse cases, with fewer opportunities for women to interact with wider agencies and raise the alarm. Also, some families may flee the family home and temporarily live with relatives, before ending up in TA. The immediate reason for homeless is then being asked to leave by family or friends, not the preceding domestic abuse. Even where levels of domestic abuse presentations were high, this can be a good sign that people are willing to report it and seek specialist support, one homelessness lead said from a constituent local authority.

Asylum seekers, refugees and those given leave to remain in the UK also appear in statistics and this was repeated during interviews. Some spoke about the constituent local authorities that are working as dispersal areas, including Birmingham, Coventry, Sandwell and Wolverhampton. Once a Home Office decision is made, families are given 28 days’ notice to leave their NASS accommodation, we were told. This makes it hard to prevent this type of homelessness, with local authorities often not aware at this stage. When presenting to the local authority as homeless, these families tend to be larger, so harder to house, and can also have higher expectations (e.g. for houses, not flats, especially in contrast to the “nice houses” the Home Office supplies), we were told by one authority, which can leave families to remain in TA for longer.

Other **larger families** also spend longer in TA, stakeholders told us, and these are often ethnic minority households. We heard of an example of 10 family members sharing one room, for example, or the 100-plus families in TA in Birmingham who need a 5+ bedroom property, though these are in short supply. Legally they cannot allocate a smaller property, even if it is better than B&B, we were told. Elsewhere, another constituent local authority said there are few of these larger families but they are the local authority’s “greatest challenge”. Four- or five-bedroom properties are “few and far between” in the private sector, one housing provider said. Another authority told us about one family that had been split into two and moved into two private rented properties as an alternative.

Families with disabled members also stay in TA for longer than others, we were told, though there are fewer such households. In Birmingham, these account for some 100 to 150 families, we were told, which represents no more than one in twenty families in TA. In Dudley, the longest any of their families had been in TA, nine months, was such a family. Adaptations are only possible in permanent, not temporary, housing, possible in social housing but unlikely in the private sector, which does not want to adapt properties to make them suitable for these households. In Birmingham, for example, this can

lead such families to end up in adapted rooms in the Travel Lodge but therefore impersonal accommodation.

How long families stay in TA varies, as we have seen in the earlier section. Two wider WM authorities we spoke to described straightforward cases in and out in 4–6 months, longer if needing a bigger property or where the needs are higher. In contrast, Birmingham told us the 40 families who had been in TA for long periods were settled in their current property and had built a life there.

The impact on families, and support provided

“Nationally, they look at homelessness through one lens, which is housing, but people’s lives and the drivers that push you into homelessness are a lot more broader than that. They do not look at it as a one system approach and it needs to be a lot more upstream” (wider WM stakeholder)

Several stakeholders contrasted the situation between homeless families that are housed in TA and single homelessness. One homelessness lead summarised it as family homelessness being driven by housing need in contrast to singles, driven by vulnerability. Others also said that the more complex cases tend to be among single homeless people, such as an institutional background like care, prison or mental health setting.

Poverty

Poverty is a real issue among families living in TA, many stakeholders said. Changes to welfare, such as the two-child limit on benefits, is one issue, though one support agency said it spanned longer than this. This “overwhelming” poverty and absolute deprivation was leaving families struggling even to eat. One support agency told us they provided a food bank and food parcels to their service users, for example, particularly stark when separating from the breadwinner in the family because of domestic abuse. You either run away with nothing, not even a mattress for children to sleep on, or stay and suffer the abuse, one support agency said. This places a great need for basic shelter and even furniture at the point of entry into TA.

GOOD PRACTICE: Support around debt

Birmingham is testing an approach to debt issues by working with families in TA who have accrued rent arrears, both prior to and while in TA. The offer of help includes clearing rent arrears in order to remove that blockage to move on from TA.

The lack of furniture came up in several interviews. The challenge of having to find furniture can become overwhelming for families, making everything too much for them. Stress increases if your fridge is broken, cooker not working, you lack furniture, have no carpet. Charitable grants to buy white goods or even the basics, pots and pans, can help. One housing provider had closed down a family hostel during Covid and “raided” its furniture to give to families moving on from TA, as a stop-gap solution. Not owning furniture can also be a challenge when moving out of TA, delaying the move-on. If not, you can move into a new home, especially a social home, with nothing. Families “haven’t got [household] tools they need to run a house”, one support agency said, where the basic things “do not exist”.

Arrears were common among families in TA, stakeholders stated, leading several authorities and support agencies to provide money management or support around finances, in particular to help families to sustain tenancies when moving onto longer-term housing. For some, this is about “income maximisation”, ensuring families are claiming all the welfare benefits they are entitled to. Some of this stretched to securing discretionary housing payments (DHPs) or a prevention loan to pay off arrears, as well as setting up payment plans to pay off debt. In one authority, having the housing team in the same directorate as welfare benefits helped. One housing association we spoke to wanted to see evidence of a period of settled accommodation before (re-)housing families. Budgeting support is also provided by some local authorities and agencies, particularly important in TA, which can increase costs, such as higher service charges and higher costs of buying take-aways in B&Bs rather than cooking for yourself where facilities exist.

During Covid “you didn’t see many messages ... about ‘if you can pay your rent, please try to. Do not bury your head in the sand, if you got financial difficulty, here are some tools you can look at to how to budget.’” (wider WM stakeholder)

Domestic abuse

Some interviewees were critical of the police, for example, stating that they are in short supply and have had to deprioritise some crimes like domestic abuse. In Coventry, we were told about big challenges with domestic abuse, including children making disclosures at school and some high-risk cases. One safeguarding stakeholder said that the police drop charges if there is no victim statement,

with the CPS claiming there is a lack of evidence. This interviewee wanted the police to do more, including acting without a statement; the black eye and body-worn evidence should be enough, this person said. Also, a focus on risk, not need, can limit early intervention. If this is the case, it limits the ability to offer any support in the family home and can lead more people to flee and end up in TA.

Trauma is associated with domestic abuse in several ways. If you have experienced trauma, you can be targeted and have challenging relationships. Also, women and children will often be traumatised by exposure to domestic abuse. You therefore need someone who understands that, from an honest and trusted specialist support provider, agencies told us. You need somebody who will walk alongside you, one said, not push or drag you. We did hear of some such support services that can help families either avoid TA or once there. In Wolverhampton there is the Haven, specialist services, the IDVA, sanctuary provision; Bedworth works closely with Coventry, to avoid too much uprooting.

Mental health

The wider impact on mental health came out of several interviews too, both for parents and children. Being in TA is “living in limbo”, one lead for TA told us. Living in TA can worsen families’ mental health, aggravated by being cooped up during the Covid pandemic. Living in unsettled housing, not able to put down roots, no permanent address, the lack of dignity for parents sharing a room with their children. Refugees may well have suffered emotional and mental distress, fleeing a war-torn country and possibly also domestic abuse; it is normally an emergency that is brought them there, with trauma as the legacy.

Again, we heard of varying levels of mental health support available. One stakeholder praised work to identify families with additional needs in Birmingham, while another said it was increasingly difficult to access mental health support, especially if not diagnosed in past.

“With regards to their mental wellbeing there’s a huge impact and feeling like they are not important enough or they’ve made so many mistakes they do not know where they are going to go next.” (support agency)

Impact on children

Several stakeholders highlighted the impact of TA on children. For some, this was also about mental wellbeing, whether exposure to domestic abuse in the run-up to living in TA or about living in temporary housing itself. In refuges, for example, children fear they will be found by the abuser, so live with a lot of anxiety. They can also become institutionalised in such settings, lacking control over

their lives. Such children can also be more vulnerable to exploitation and “extra-familial exploitation” in settings like TA, one stakeholder told us, such as gangs, knife crime, county lines.

One stakeholder described an extreme example of one parent in TA spending six hours a day travelling to school and back or getting up at four or five in the morning to get ready for school. We did hear of some children living in TA who did do well at school, so the picture is not all negative. In fact, school may be a pleasant distraction from life in TA, stakeholders admitted.

Impact from quality of TA

Others spoke about the impact of living in TA itself. There are often “very, very small flats”, tiny rooms, nowhere to play or study. Internet is not always available and why would you set up a new broadband connection in a temporary home. Access to the laundry can be scarce. Moving out of the local area also takes you away from friends and a support network, for both parents and children. This highlights the practical challenges of living in TA for the whole family.

GOOD PRACTICE: White Chapel Centre, Liverpool/Knowsley

A leading homelessness charity in Liverpool offering support to both families and single adults who are homeless and/or have complex needs, though not evidenced in the bulk of families we have researched in the West Midlands. Many families for this Centre are fleeing domestic abuse and honour-based violence. Some are involved with gang violence. Many families have some sort of “social services oversight” and are facing issues around mental health and substance misuse. About half of families are refugees.

- Perceived as authoritative but less formal than statutory services thus enabling an **intermediary role** where families in need turn to for support when connections with statutory workers are tenuous.
- Families can be referred from the local authority’s housing options team and live in a **family centre** rather than a hostel which has more stigmatized connotations and on occasion, has invoked biases from schools. One family centre, Belvedere, has 16 self-contained flats and communal areas including a play area and an IT suite. The target time for a length of stay is 10 weeks.
- Children and young people can develop a relationship with a **dedicated worker** who maintains a focus around recovering from trauma, engaging with education and reducing anti-social behaviour. This post is funded by Children in Need and includes engagement with the wider community outside of those residing in the family centres.
- White Chapel centre partners with **children’s therapy service** called ‘White Path’ and can bypass the waiting list. The therapist only works if there is guarantee of being able to work with someone for a minimum of 14 weeks.
- Engaging with education is regarded as a “life changing route out of poverty”.

- The focus on **working with both parents and children** enables both short term and long-term prevention where parents are connecting with their children’s education who may also be engaging in less anti-social behaviour. The changes in children and young people can promote the recovery and changes in parents that can contribute to an increased chance of independently maintaining a tenancy. The long-term prevention is envisaged to manifest as young people enter the world of work with experience, qualifications and less and/or no complex needs.

Support provided

“Everything is about relationships when dealing with complexities” (safeguarding lead)

What level of support is provided and how it is delivered was covered throughout interviews with stakeholders. At a wide level, several highlighted the impact of austerity on the level of support available generally. Year on year savings can lead to more demand for less resources, one said, while another criticised the poor level of services because of funding pressures, with staff and volunteers stretched too thinly. Some voiced concerns about access to social care and mental health services, with long waiting lists for both. It can also be hard for families to navigate their way around services, to know about them and how to access them. This becomes harder still when it is only a digital offer, more so during Covid. In a crisis, you just want someone to help you, one interviewee said.

“When we transferred tenancy sustainment across to [ALMO], I think there were about 12 officers, I think that’s reduced now and they’ve made them more specialist, whereas ours were quite generic.” (WM homelessness lead)

GOOD PRACTICE: Wider partnership working

- All families in TA in Birmingham are being contacted and being offered a **bespoke support package** as part of a **multi-agency early help offer**. The agencies involved include Social Care, health, housing and the third sector. The initiative is being led by Children’s Services.
- Nuneaton & Bedworth’s housing team work closely with the **family information service**, which is really hands-on, make quick referrals and sit with the MASH team.
- Wolverhampton Homes promotes **multi-agency working**, including 24-hour MASH support along with daytime (8am–midnight) on-call support for mental health and children or adults.
- Even when Coventry discharges its housing duty, **children’s services** still pick up Section 17 responsibilities when there remain other needs.
- Wolverhampton have **good links with health**, including getting health visitors onsite (even during the pandemic) and to dispersed accommodation, ensuring families can access healthcare.

Even though budgets have shrunk support is being provided to families in TA, sometimes before reaching TA, during their time in TA and sometimes after moving on. This is being done by in-house

teams at authorities or outsourced, whether to generic floating support providers or specialist support services.

Some of the constituent local authorities spoke about intensive in-house support, with “in-depth conversations” and seeing families a couple of times a week, helping to keep on top of families in TA and therefore helping to move them on sooner. This can include support with paperwork for housing applications, bidding for local authority properties or looking at estate agents and Gumtree for private rented properties. Seeing 99% of families the same day as they applied for homelessness support helped one housing options team to keep on top of families.

One homelessness lead spoke about having an exit plan right from the beginning of TA. Light-touch traditional support does not empower customers, this person said, preferring to address head-on the circumstances that led to homelessness. A few agencies were critical about the lack of specialist support, including for mental health and domestic abuse in TA and beyond. Some also wanted wrap-around services, including longer-term support provided to families after moving on from TA, although the provision of this varies by local authority.

“Making sure their period of time in temporary accommodation, however long it might be, they come out better than they were when they went in in the first place.”
(WM homelessness lead)

GOOD PRACTICE: Support services

- Nuneaton & Bedworth offer pre-tenancy work, including help with **furniture, white goods and carpeting**.
- In Wolverhampton there is a European-funded **furniture and home makeover project**, where people from new communities are trained to do home makeovers, including Housing First and homeless households. They upcycle furniture that they have had from charities and do some basic painting and decorating.
- Black County Women’s Aid is helping to **keep families in homes and moving out perpetrators**.
- P3 deliver a **whole-family support plan** in some services.
- Dudley help to sort out income and benefits first, then move onto housing, **maximising income** and not just the “soft stuff”, next moving onto empowering families.
- Walsall’s support package includes an **impact programme for 16–29 year olds** e.g. into education, employment or training. They ask: ‘what are your interests and what do you want to do?’ It is “almost like being a parent to them”.
- P3 run **tenancy ready courses**, with evidence given to the new housing provider.

Linked to the support provided is homelessness prevention, as seen through the lens of the Homelessness Reduction Act. This can happen if people present to the local authority or are referred early enough. For example, we heard plenty of examples of working with the private rented sector,

such as using DHPs to cover arrears or paying landlords an incentive to retain a family. One housing association believed Covid had changed the mindset of other housing providers, away from evicting households, seeing this as a failure.

Lastly in this section was support provided around the private rented sector. A few local authorities spoke about rent deposit schemes helping families in TA to move out, finding properties or contacting landlords on behalf of families. Some landlords do not want a high deposit and do not need a guarantor, so there are options in the PRS for families currently living in TA; furthermore, DHP can cover rent in advance. Another spoke about families saving for a deposit or to buy white goods while living in TA, paradoxically able to be supported and save more the longer families are in TA. This also provides some agency for the families, taking ownership of their situation.

Challenges, national and local

“TA has got bigger and bigger and bigger” (WM TA lead)

As shown in an earlier section, the number of families living in TA in the West Midlands has increased, notably higher from 2020 than in early 2019, in contrast to the falling number of families in TA nationally. When speaking to stakeholders, several issues came out, notably the lack of affordable housing, often social housing but also in the private rented sector. Even once families are in TA, the lack of move-on accommodation then keeps families in TA for longer, so experiencing the impact of TA for longer.

The lack of social housing stock came up repeatedly in interviews. Some local authorities in the region have transferred all their stock and simply do not have any of their own, for example Coventry and Walsall; Solihull and Wolverhampton use an ALMO to manage properties. The remaining three constituent local authorities do retain their own stock, though numbers of properties have dropped. One stakeholder told us that Birmingham’s local authority stock had halved from 120,000 properties to some 60,000 today, mostly due to right to buy. The demand for housing means that waiting lists are almost all higher than the availability of properties through voids and new development. In Coventry, for example, an extra 43,000 homes are needed, their homelessness team stated.

Several stakeholders spoke about high expectations among families living in TA. One described generational issues, with the past two generations living in local authority housing so the current generation also expects that. Elsewhere, we heard about expectations that do not match the everyday reality of access to affordable housing in the urban West Midlands. For example, families in the north of Solihull want to live in the leafier south, while others want a three-bedroom house with a garden

and garage in Birmingham, yet the top Band 1 priority group will only get you a two-bedroom house; 41% of Birmingham Council's stock is one-bedroom properties.

The level of choice given to TA families of accepting offers of longer-term housing varied. One stakeholder said families should not be allowed to decline offers, whereas another interviewee suggested that some local authorities bid on behalf of families, sometimes with little input from the families themselves, so little agency from them. A few stakeholders suggested that families were moving in with relative in social housing in order to then be asked to leave by their family to secure TA and on into secure social housing, with a higher band than if remaining in their relative's home. Even a move into housing association properties can be limited by a family's situation and history. Some interviewees said social housing want perfect tenants, working and with no history; housing associations also told us that significant arrears or serious ASB can also be barriers to access. While these may not be the views of all stakeholders we spoke to, it does suggest a more inflexible view of what families in TA should be offered when discharging homelessness duties.

The private rented sector therefore has to be an option for homeless families, whether this is their expectation or not, many believed. Some local authorities already do this routinely and work with the sector to support families there. For example, several spoke about landlord liaison officers, landlord forums and incentives like rent deposit schemes or access to DHP or grants. One local authority admitted that it had not engaged with the sector enough to discharge its homelessness duty. In some areas, though, it can also be difficult finding such properties, such as in Birmingham, Coventry or Wolverhampton. In Coventry, it is competition from students; in Birmingham, there is multiple competition for private rented properties, including the Home Office for asylum seeker housing, exempt supported accommodation and family-size properties being converted into HMOs, with housing now a commodity rather than a roof over your head, as one support agency put it.

GOOD PRACTICE: Private rented housing

- Wolverhampton is **buying properties** and has **lease arrangements** in the private sector, "big cash projects", increasing stock for both TA and move-on.
- Coventry has an **agreement with Cornerstone** to discharge into the private rented sector but at **LHA rates**, including a **rent guarantee** scheme and an extra month's rent as a sweetener. This has been going since May 2020 and had no calls on the bond from the 38 households in its first year of operation.
- Several local authorities use **DHPs** to cover arrears. Nuneaton & Bedworth are also using it for **rent or bond** for up to three months.
- Sandwell runs a **call before you serve** service for landlords at the point of someone falling into arrears, already preventing 13 households becoming homeless in its first five months. This

includes free advice to landlords, showing them the local authority is there for them, not just enforcement and supporting tenants.

- Solihull's [Solihome service](#) is a free tenant matching service for private landlords, helping to prevent homelessness, providing financial assistance and offering mediation. If needed, it can also look at ASB. Like Sandwell, it is a call before you serve approach.

At a wider level, several stakeholders felt that there had been a greater focus on single homelessness than on families, in particular with the focus of on rough sleeping and Everyone In during the pandemic. A lot of money and attention had gone into that, some said. Another felt there needed to be a refocus on family homelessness and ensuring families do not stay in B&Bs for more than six weeks. "I think we take our eye off the ball a little bit," one WM homelessness lead said, referring to families in contrast to rough sleepers.

GOOD PRACTICE: Leeds homelessness team

"Often looking for a really glitzy, glossy answer but the boring answer is that it is hard work."

- **PREVENTION OVER CRISIS** There is a culture based around prevention rather than crisis and the local authority shifted funding and activity to prevention.
- **MAINTAINING HOUSING PRIORITY** "If you accept this private tenancy, you'll keep the same level of priority...that was a risk, create an incentive to go into temporary accommodation and a disincentive to leave, it is about taking a psychologically informed approach and thinking, what would people want out of this?."
- **SUPPORT FROM ABOVE** Leeds Council is described as having a supportive political administration and senior management structure "who allowed these risks".
- **PARTNERSHIP** The homelessness team partners with other agencies that provide TA both commissioned or not commissioned. A lot of people in TA have support needs associated with their situation. A key example is OWLS, a charitable organisation that offer 300 training flats across Leeds as a first tenancy for young people, "if you can go home, stick by the rules, saying to parents we have got a plan to get these young people into somewhere new, easier to deal with when there is an end, not like with the wait for local authority housing -you could be waiting for two years, owls – two months with OWLS, reduces the stress from the situation.
- **PROACTIVE CASE WORK** The homelessness team takes responsibility for supporting TA providers to move people into more independent living situations, "case workers were checking availability every day, a lot of old fashioned housing case work, our guarantee is any vacancy we create, we will fill it the same day and if there is couple of days delay, we'll pay the room charge if you can hold that vacancy for us."
- **SOURCING LESS EXTENSIVE CHILDREN'S SERVICES PLACEMENTS** The homelessness team part funded a team leader grade post that sits within children services to inject housing focused case work skills into a children's service teams. This includes cheaper – and more appropriate – placements.

With such high numbers of families in TA, it is worth looking at Birmingham in more detail. Above we have already seen the challenge of a big drop in local authority housing, a lack of large properties and the competition for access to the private rented sector. But what else is leading Birmingham to have such high numbers and rates of families living in TA? One stakeholder suggested the bar was low to accessing TA in the city, with decisions made quickly to place families for 28 days, they believed. However, with a rising caseload, keeping on top of all these families can then be a challenge which maybe contributing to the rise in numbers. This had placed “phenomenal” demands in the city, one support agency said, “huge pressure”, said a wider WM stakeholder. If there is limited engagement with families in TA, with few conversations about homelessness, this will contribute to reduced move-on. With few assessments, too, some families may not even have dependent children any longer, one stakeholder said.

There were local pressures elsewhere in the region too. In Coventry, for example, cheap hotels and cheap TA means they are a net importer of families from other local authorities, placed into the city, something Dudley also mentioned. Across the region there are other local tensions and challenges. In Shropshire, for example, the problem is its size, its homelessness lead told us. A family in Oswestry does not want to move to Ludlow, an hour and a half drive away.

“It is a problem if you are uprooting a family from that support network” (wider WM homelessness lead)

Types of accommodation

As shown in earlier sections, families in TA live in different types of accommodation, within and across the region.

GOOD PRACTICE: Accommodation-related

- Coventry has **no households in B&B**, with families there only in an emergency. This is down from 200+ in the past.
- Inside Housing has come out to see Birmingham’s **Barry Jackson tower and Magnolia house**, seen as a form of Housing First for families. It offers full **wrap-around support**, with safety and security designed into Magnolia, child friendly and more spacious rooms, with input in the design from those who run it.
- Nuneaton & Bedworth ensure **full cooking facilities in hotels**, with microwaves and fridges in rooms.
- P3 runs **supported housing** in Warwickshire specifically **for young families**, with an attractive communal lounge and outdoor play area. Staff are on-site 9am–5pm, while all families get peer support, including cake-making, art projects, day trips and picnics.

There is a statutory limit of six weeks for families living in bed and breakfast accommodation, so authorities try to limit their use for families in any situations. One authority spoke about 18 families living in B&Bs but just two of these for more than six weeks in the previous year. Another spoke about moving families on from B&Bs as soon as possible. In Birmingham, the number of families in B&Bs had dropped from 790 in 2018 to some 300 recently. A key problem with B&Bs is that they are not self-contained, usually just a room or two and can have a wide mix of people living there, so raising safeguarding concerns. They are not secure by design, people can easily get into them to harass families and support is not routinely provided, unlike family units, in contrast.

**“Bed and breakfast certainly cannot safeguard any domestic abuse victim”
(safeguarding stakeholder)**

Most families are reticent to move into a hostel, we were told, with connotations of being scary, risky and unsafe, very vulnerable. They can be in run-down blocks, in areas with existing problems and not in leafy suburbs, we were told. Some families do not want to be stigmatised by being associated with such accommodation, even preferring to be homeless than staying in a hostel, an interviewee said. In contrast, another stakeholder felt that hostels can offer some benefits, such as security measures from CCTV and entry fobs, better safeguarding support, lack of isolation as in self-contained units and the ability to share food and costs.

GOOD PRACTICE: Doorstep, Camden

“We’re providing community, someone to go and talk to, when you need it, not because it is between that time and that time that someone is available.”

Operating within a hostel setting since 1982, with a long history of supporting families.

- **Creche facility** that parents can leave their children at operating under Early Years guidelines with due assessment and monitoring.
- After school **homework club** is facilitated in partnership with a local private school and educational engagement forms a corner stone of Doorstep’s holistic approach.
- Doorstep are uniquely positioned to **slowly build trusting relationships** with families and collectively, build community within the hostel. “We’re providing community, someone to go and talk to, when you need it.”
- Doorstep works with a majority of people from a **black and minority ethnic background** and seeks to embed anti-racist thinking into an understanding of homelessness.

We were told about very limited supply of refuges in the West Midlands and nationally, with more women turned away than able to be housed, just 21%, apparently. Yet these are the only single-sex accommodation available. Unlike hostels, there are often very few rules – mostly about safety and

respecting each other – no curfew and no ban on alcohol, just bars for problematic alcoholics. Women “do not want to be frightened in their beds at night,” a support agency told us.

Hotels did not feature very much in interviews. It was generally negative when we did hear about them. With cramped conditions, no cooking facilities and sometimes limits on bringing in your own food and no visitors allowed. Sometimes there are no staff present, so not as secure, with domestic abuse an issue. Also, the cost can be as much as specialist family units.

“When I see people living in a hotel room for ten months or a B&B and they haven’t got any cooking facilities – that is not good enough for the children that are growing up in this country.” (support agency)

A few local authorities told us about family units, including three blocks for families in Walsall, Barry Jackson tower in Birmingham and Frank Walsh house in Coventry. There is 24/7 security in some of these, though not all, support workers coming in and dedicated space for sessions, plus space for children to do homework. In Barry Jackson tower, for example, you can also cook there. A drawback of these units is a concentration of problems, potentially with a younger age profile, one stakeholder stated.

Most stakeholders we spoke to described dispersed TA as the preferred option. This is stock, usually LA or housing association owned, that is mixed in with wider housing. These blend into local neighbourhoods, that do not “stick out like a sore thumb”, virtually eliminating any stigma attached to them as TA. Property conditions tend to be “half decent”, one interviewee said, often in an area that better suits families, such as closer to friends and relatives, work or places of worship. One local authority said dispersed properties were most common for larger families with more children. There is also the potential – and the reality for a few – to flip these TA properties into longer-term secure tenancies. This is happening and there’s further appetite to do this. “A madness not to”, one housing provider said, setting people up with the best opportunity to succeed, akin to the Housing First model.

“It is better for the family. You’ve got a new start virtually. You’re not in a refuge or in a room just waiting for somebody to try to get them into a house somewhere else.” (WM TA lead)

GOOD PRACTICE: Dispersed housing

- Coventry have **bought six family homes** and entering into other arrangements instead of using B&Bs.
- WHG provided **six dispersed properties** at the start of the first lockdown, both houses and flats, and since moving to 12 units, including three-bedroom houses. These are scattered across the borough and but not in pockets so do not drawn attention to them.

- Walsall are looking at a dispersed property pilot to **flip them from TA into general needs** homes, if tenants' behaviour is good and rent is being paid. This is great to minimise disruption to children's schooling.
- Shropshire Towns and Rural Housing do **flip properties** already.

Impact of Covid

“Really difficult time for” families (WM TA lead)

Although this project has not focused on Covid, the pandemic has had a major impact on all our lives, in TA too. Some local authorities spoke about having a similar number of presentations as before Covid, even with a drop in families at the first national lockdown. For families in TA themselves, some interviewees felt it was considerably worse for some, such as moving quickly at the beginning, “shifting around the system”. It was a tough time for some, including if you had belongings in storage but could not access them. Not seeing family and friends and therefore feeling isolated has impacted everyone but these may be even starker for those in cramped TA conditions. If people were visiting the TA, this could lead to threats of losing the accommodation by breaking the rules on number of visitors.

Several stakeholders feared a big rise in homelessness cases once the evictions ban was lifted; many interviews were in March and April 2021. They were fearing possessions actions starting up, with lots of Section 21 notices being issued. “We’re waiting for the tsunami,” one WM homelessness lead said, or “expecting an avalanche,” said another. A saving grace, some believed, was the huge backlog of legal cases to get through courts, therefore spreading out the challenges of housing families that become homeless. One interviewee raised the challenge for private landlords, who may also be facing financial difficulty, especially if the rent was not being paid. As well as evictions, some stakeholders felt that family and friends who had accommodated relatives during lockdowns would start asking them to leave. There was also the possibility of people starting to raise the alarm from domestic abuse that had been hidden during lockdowns, with few chances to engage with services.

“The pessimistic in me thinks it is going to be an absolute nightmare and we’re going to end up in a situation where numbers increase.” (WM homelessness lead)

In contrast to pessimistic views about Covid, Nuneaton & Bedworth had turned some of its own stock into self-contained TA units, while Coventry was holding voids open in anticipation of this wave of homeless families. In Sandwell, there was a good relationship with schools, with housing staff helping to deliver education packs to families in TA. One stakeholder believed that Covid had highlighted health inequalities, such as the increased risk of Covid from housing conditions like overcrowding, multi-generational families and being at risk of homelessness.

Suggested solutions

During interviews and through this research project we have looked for good practice. We have woven examples throughout this report. Stakeholders have also suggested wider solutions to addressing the impact of TA on families.

Several spoke about dealing with homeless families quickly and moving them on quickly, including using the private rented sector. A strong case management focus in TA and regularly reviewing such families can make a difference, some believed.

One local authority wanted more accommodation centres than B&Bs, while some spoke about moving more families in TA to dispersed stock rather than hotels and then flipping that property into secure tenancies. Splitting larger families across two units is another option, whereas bringing empty properties back into use can deliver extra units.

“Everyone has the right to a home. Every family, every adult, every young person has the right to a roof. That is a basic Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. It is a basic fundamental right. And we’re not getting it right in this country.” (support agency)

Some felt that local authority allocation policies needed to be changed. Examples include allowing people priority awards but remaining at home, as happened in Leeds, so putting out the message that there is no benefit in your banding of moving into TA, not a “stepping stone” to local authority housing. One local authority was also looking at its allocations policy, another questioned restrictions on local connections, while some wanted a greater push to discharge their duty into the private rented sector.

A greater, or better, focus on prevention is needed, some told us. Ideally, stakeholders want more work done upstream, avoiding families becoming homeless in the first place. This includes earlier referrals from other agencies (including the Home Office, for example), working sooner with landlords and identifying domestic abuse earlier.

“Best outcome is people to sustain their current tenancies” (WM TA lead)

More work with the private rented sector seems increasingly necessary with the lack of social housing. We have already seen plenty of examples of this. Sandwell was planning another such service, including incentives to landlords with insurance that covers missed rent and malicious damage, free window restrictors, gas safety checks and safe and well checks from the Fire Service. They were going to provide support officers too, so not “just running away” once families are housed.

“Good housing results in better health” (health stakeholder)

Several stakeholders painted different support options. Several spoke about specialist support on domestic abuse, with proper case management to deliver outcomes that are “vastly improved,” “life-saving, life-changing”. Earlier intervention in domestic abuse would be ideal, though the criteria for intervention is currently too high, we were told, with interventions only at crisis point. Away from domestic abuse, one interviewee suggested navigators to work with families and help them through the complex system. Another said there should be more choice and agency in where families end up, not just a “conveyor belt of decisions” – legal documents, decisions, final offers. Elsewhere, a few wanted more sustained long-term funding for flexible, person-centred support, not too short-term and too narrow.

“Invest in infrastructure, which includes affordable housing” (support agency)

Family voices

A large part of this research project has been to hear from families currently living in TA, as well as a few other families who have so far managed to avoid TA. We start with the reason for being homeless, then move onto life for families in TA, including support provided, finishing with families' views about future housing.

All names have been changed throughout this section.

Reason for being homeless

During our conversations with families, we heard about a wide range of reasons for being homeless. The private rented sector came up several times. This included poor quality housing, reported by a few interviewees. For example, Angela described being unable to get work done to control damp and mould growth in the flat, but the nothing was getting done. "My landlord just wouldn't do anything. I threatened to withhold the rent and he gave me 6 months' notice to quit," she said. Mike said something similar. The heating was not working in his private rented property. After complaining to the local authority the landlord replaced the boiler but then they received a letter to quit. Louise, somebody currently on a Section 21 notice to quit her property, also spoke about poor property conditions. She said she had had three private sector tenancies that have been problematic due to the poor condition of the property and the failure of landlords to carry out repairs.

CASE STUDY: Poor quality private rented housing

Moya described poor property conditions in her previous housing. The walls were damp, there was a vermin problem and there were problems with the sewage system. Understandably, Moya said it was "very distressing". During Covid, the children were shielding but living in damp conditions. "We went without proper heating for a whole year. We could not have visitors because the house was embarrassing." Her GP was concerned that the living conditions would impact on the physical health of the children.

Initially the landlord agreed to do the repairs, but appointments got cancelled and boiler repairs were completed without proper certification. She felt intimidated by the landlord. Most repairs remained undone.

Moya contacted Environmental Health to help her to get the repairs done, but she feels they did not do enough to force the work to be done. She felt they did not understand or have empathy for the impact of the conditions on her children's physical health. She says it is too easy to be a landlord and there is no adequate protection for tenants in poor conditions.

The landlord gave her two months' notice to quit the tenancy and later changed the locks while the family were out.

As well as poor property conditions mentioned by families we spoke to, others spoke about arrears building up, another factor leading some into homelessness. A few families had fallen into arrears after employment had been affected by Covid. For example, Jack's employer stopped trading just before Covid so he lost his job and quickly fell into rent arrears in his private sector tenancy. He says he took the loss of his job badly and did not cope very well. He did not ask anyone for help and tried hard to find another job. "I was in the army for 5 years and worked for the same company for 15 years. I didn't know how to cope with it, and I've never not worked, and it was hard. I should have asked for help earlier but I didn't know I could get help". This led to Jack and his family's homelessness. Another example of arrears was with missed mortgage payments for Emily, who was unable to keep up the bills when her husband left, so forced to sell the house to pay off the debts.

Domestic abuse and wider threats of violence was another reason for homelessness among the families we spoke to. Jenny was referred to the local authority homelessness service by the police due to domestic violence. She was compelled to give up the local authority flat she had lived in for the previous eight years because it was not safe for her to return home. Kim also left her home because of domestic violence, moving to a neighbouring authority to escape the threat of violence from her ex-partner. But when she applied as homeless, she was told she had no local connection and so they were not able to help her.

"Safety and security are a big issue for me. To have a nice home, be normal and have my girl back. By normal I mean my health and not to worry and not dreading a call to move me into temporary accommodation again." Kim

We were also told about being asked to leave by friends and family, one of the top three reasons for homelessness recorded in the data collected by local authorities. Sonia moved in with her mum after her own relationship broke up but that relationship also became very strained, she said. We heard of particular strains because of Covid, when people had to stay indoors for even longer than they normally would, making overcrowded housing even more unbearable. For example, Naz and her four children had been living with her brother and his wife and their four children, but the arrangements with her brother broke down due to overcrowding and she was asked to move out. Alex is another example, living with relatives along with his wife Jane and their two children, before moving into a friend's house. "But it was a problem," Alex said, "and that's why I contacted homeless".

CASE STUDY: Asked to leave by family

Gemma was living in a private rented property for five years. But three years ago, the landlord increased the rent from £625 to £750 per month. Gemma was a single parent at the time and moved in with her mum because she could not afford the increased rent. Three years later Gemma was still living at her mum's place, with frustrated attempts to secure social housing.

“There were six of us living at my mum's. There were times [due to the Covid lockdown] when we were all in the house and we were overcrowded. Things were getting very strained. One day it came to a head. And we were asked to leave. We had nowhere to go to, so all four of us ended up sleeping on a mattress on the floor in the living room at Lee's parents' house. Within two days the local authority allocated temporary accommodation for us.”

Another repeated factor leading to homelessness was seeking asylum or visa issues. For example, Peter and Faye were given leave to remain by the Home Office in January. After four years in Home Office accommodation they were given 28 days to leave their accommodation, leading to their homelessness application and current TA placement as they could not find their own housing in this limited time.

CASE STUDY: Visa issues

Jean had been living in a social housing tenancy but when her visa was overturned, she was not entitled to public funds and had to leave the property. With the help of a social worker Jean was able to resolve the visa problems and access funds to pay rent.

We also heard of other experiences of living in insecure accommodation and moving around from some of the families we spoke to. Kim is a powerful example, shown below.

CASE STUDY: Unsettled housing

Kim became homeless when she was forced to move because of domestic violence. At the same time a family bereavement after a short illness pushed Kim to lean on alcohol and consequently her daughter was taken into care.

Kim was homeless and living in insecure housing for over three years. She spent time moving from one friend to another. At one point she was faced with the option of sleeping on the streets or in a friend's car. She chose to sleep in the friend's car. It was tough for her and she was always worried about where she was going to stay that night. She was suffering from depression and anxiety. “I wouldn't want to leave the house but now I'm a lot better. I go out. I go to the doctor's and chemist on my own.”

Kim felt she was being “pushed from pillar to post”. She felt that no one would help her. Eventually she contacted her MP for help and was offered a room at a hostel. “It was ok, but a lot of drug users live there.” Kim was still drinking and says she was at risk of making herself homeless again. The hostel was not a good environment for her. Kim moved on to a one-bedroom flat that was part of a large house that had been converted into apartments. She stayed there for about three months.

We heard from one family about the impact of the rent cap on affordability. The cap effectively ended the link between a family’s assessed need and its entitlement to benefit.

CASE STUDY: Impact of the Rent Cap on large families

Tracy is a single mum to 5 children. Tracy and her family became homeless when she could no longer afford the rent. She was living in a housing association property but when the rules changed so that only the first 3 children are taken into consideration for rent purposes, she found that she had an £80 per week shortfall. “I could not pay it. They wanted me out, so I did not have any choice. “I lost everything. I had to start from scratch”.

Life in TA

“It is pretty scary when you have children to be homeless.” Sonia

Some of the families we spoke to had lived in very short-term emergency accommodation. Maria, for example, moved into an emergency one-bedroom flat after sustained threats of violence from a neighbour. She stayed there for a week before moving into another TA placement. Fleur stayed longer in emergency TA, for two months, after fleeing domestic abuse. After resolving visa issues, Jean was initially housed in a hotel for a week. She said the stay there was “horrible”, so noisy that she could not sleep. There was a shared kitchen but she had to book two-hour sessions because of Covid restrictions. This worked out, thankfully. Moya describes being housed in an emergency hostel in one room with three beds.

“I was really tense and depressed. What is the right decision?” Fleur says being homeless “has a domino effect – it effects everything”. “I have to start again. I had to leave my things behind. I only finished paying for the washing machine two months ago and I can't have it.” “I sometimes think about just going back [to her abusive partner].” Fleur

Linked to this is the number of moves some families make between different TA placements. Fleur, for example, spent six months in one placement, another six months a one-bedroom property and was about to move again to another TA placement while she looks for a private sector property. For

Peter and Faye, their current one-bedroom TA flat is their fourth home in five years, including Home Office accommodation. Tracy was in temporary housing for two years and says they were moved about a lot, with the constant moves aggravating her anxiety. Alongside frequent moves, one or two families told us about long placements in TA.

CASE STUDY: Long TA placements

After a “nightmare” accommodation of a hotel, Jack was relieved to be offered a temporary two-bedroom flat. “I was told we’d be here for two weeks – but we are still here two years later.”

Jack says the flat was not the best condition even though it had been cleaned before they moved in. The beds were not comfortable, so they got the children’s beds out of storage, a friend’s garage. They have tried to get the local authority to pick up the beds that were provided but have not been able to get them picked up. “They are still out on the balcony.”

Although many families are grateful of the support received and the roof over their heads, families have also voiced issues with TA placements. A few complained about house rules in family accommodation units, for example. Sonia’s experience is in the case study below, such as limits on when you can do the washing. For Maria, it was about not being allowed her dog in the placement.

“It feels a bit like a prison.” Mike

“We are sharing a washing machine and only have two hours to do the washing. This has been difficult during Covid. We have to wash the children’s clothes more regularly when they are at school to help prevent Covid.” Peter

“It is lovely and big but just does not suit me because I can’t have the dog here. I’ll go and pick her up and drop her at my brother’s and that has a big impact on me. I’ve had her with me for 12 years. Pets are a big part of people’s life and I asked but was told you’re just not allowed to have the dog there. If the dog caused damage, then fair enough but my dog has never caused any damage. Their dog means a lot to people.”

Maria

CASE STUDY: Rules in TA placements

Sonia has been living in a temporary one-bedroom accommodation for 5 weeks. There are many rules associated with staying there that she finds difficult. She is not allowed any visitors, which is quite hard and makes her feel isolated. Residents are only allowed to use the garden when staff are on site so her and her children cannot use it after 4:30pm or at weekends. “It is ridiculous, especially in the school summer holiday. I do not understand why, and it does not make sense.”

While Sonia had done her best to make it homely, she says she is not allowed to put up curtains or hang pictures on the wall. The blinds were provided but they do not fit well. Having to share one bedroom with three children is challenging.

The communal laundry also has difficulties. Families at the accommodation have a three-hour slot per week to do the washing. However, recently her youngest child's bedding was soiled, and she needed to do some washing immediately. She was allowed to do this but was not allowed to collect it afterwards as it was late. Staff told her she would have to wait over the weekend until Monday.

Two of the families we spoke to explicitly stated issues with wifi access, leaving them digitally excluded. Coupled with the lack of privacy in the one-bedroom accommodation in a dedicated family centre, for one family it left the older children reluctant to return home from school, having an impact on everyone's mental health. Maria also lacks wifi in her two-bedroom TA flat and cannot get it set up as she is only staying on a temporary basis. However, this is limiting her ability to bid on social homes through the choice-based lettings system, relying on family to bid on her behalf. Also, there was no printed guide with phone numbers for important contacts such as Healthy Minds or the Housing Benefit office.

“As I do not have internet access it makes bidding for a new house hard.” Maria

Others spoke about poor conditions in TA. Still with Maria, she found that the washing machine and fridge were both broken and the wallpaper was ripped in places. She found it difficult at first, as if she had been dumped there. While Bella appreciates the space, a two-bedroom flat, she feels that it is in poor condition.

“I have OCD. The place is driving me wild. Do not want to even put my feet on the floor.” Bella

For some families, it was the overcrowding within the TA placements that was the issue. This was especially difficult for some of the larger families we spoke to who were accommodated in one- or two-bedroom accommodation. Many were obliged to sleep on sofa beds for extended periods of time. Others spoke of how tough it was to deal with overcrowding particularly during lockdown. For example, Angela had been living with her three children in a 1-bedroom flat for 4 months when we spoke to her, just as Adana is a single mum and was living in a one-bedroom temporary flat with her four children for the last 6 weeks.

CASE STUDY: Overcrowding

Jack and Ellie are married and have 5 children aged between 16 and 2 years old. Jack says, “Me and my wife are still living out of suitcases because there’s no space for a wardrobe”. The five children share the two bedrooms and Jack and Ellie share the sofa bed in the lounge. “It’s been hard, and we want to make a new start. The two older girls can’t get privacy from the little ones. Lockdown and school being out - that was tough – we have been on top of each other. We were happy when lockdown ended. There’s only so many times you can go to the park”.

“But me and three children in 1 bedroom – we’re on top of each other. My eldest daughter runs away a lot.” Angela

CASE STUDY: Poor conditions in TA

Emily has been in a two-bedroom ground floor, TA tower block flat for three months but has faced challenges. The flat was not clean when they arrived and despite a lot of scrubbing and cleaning it still looks dirty. Wallpaper is hanging off the top of walls in some rooms. It needs decorating but Emily cannot afford the paint and as is only temporary. The flat is furnished but some of the equipment does not work properly including the fridge freezer and electric cooker. Following some water damage in the foyer of the flats the smell in her son’s bedroom is awful. Emily has had to arrange to have dead rats removed from underneath her son’s bedroom window.

Impact of TA

The above section has already touched on the impact of life in TA. We heard a lot more about this and how it affected families. Mental health was one of the biggest issues. Several interviewees spoke about pre-existing conditions such as anxiety and depression. Tracy’s mental health and that of her children were badly affected, she told us, especially as one of her children has learning difficulties. Tracy was prescribed anti-depressants, which have helped. She says was going to visit a therapist but it got cancelled when lockdown happened. Restrictions on the use of gardens in family units and no privacy for parents or children also affect the mental wellbeing of the whole family. For Emily, her depression and anxiety have “rocketed” while living in TA. “I’ve never spoken to the mental health duty team before I moved here but I have been on the phone to them a lot,” she says. In contrast, for Jack, his depression has been getting better since he started working again in the building trade.

CASE STUDY: Mental wellbeing

Peter and Faye are currently in a one-bedroom TA flat after leaving Home Office accommodation. Last week, they received an email to advise that a high-rise flat was available. Peter was worried as every bid he had previously made was for a house. He says he was hoping for “something that

is more suitable for kids and my wife [who has an ongoing physical health problem]. Its stressful. I am worried about it”.

“I want to get the future sorted out because it affects the development of the kids.”

“I have to be strong. I do not know what's going to happen now. It is not in our hands – I have to be positive.”

We also heard from Bella about the isolation she felt at having to move a long distance to avoid a violent partner. She also told us that she found it difficult to be away from places that met her cultural needs.

“Stuck in a place where we do not know anyone...I’m of Caribbean heritage and I just can’t get the foods I usually eat and hair products here.” Bella

Several families mentioned the disability of a family member, sometimes the parent, sometimes children. For example, several families spoke about children with autism or other special educational needs. This also has implications for finding longer-term housing. For example, Tav and Anika were offered a two-bedroom house but it was too far from school; they are reluctant to change their sons’ primary school as he has been doing well there. They are unable to accept an offer of a flat because of the impact this would have on their son. “He is independent and can go to the garden. He does not like to be with a lot of people. We need the space for him. A flat wouldn't work for him. It helps him to be outdoors.” Other also spoke about the impact of TA on schooling, particularly long journeys. For example, Naz was initially accommodated in a supported housing scheme for a couple of weeks – her youngest child is a wheelchair-user – but it was a long way from schools, and they had to leave the accommodation at 5am to get to school on time. On a positive note, Jack said that despite their current situation and Covid, “the kids are amazing.” The eldest child did not want to change schools and coped with getting two buses to her school and did exceptionally well in her GCSEs.

CASE STUDY: Children with SEND

For Jean, her daughter’s SEND needs meant she attended a school outside of the local authority within which they lived so they moved to temporary housing closer to school earlier this year, a positive.

Jean says she tries not to let her daughter see the impact this has had on her: “If she sees me like that she would be upset”. Jeans has to provide a lot of reassurance to her daughter about the changes to where they live and tries hard to make everything safe in the flat.

For Maria, it is her own learning disability that is affecting her, as shown below. For a few parents, a physical disability has been challenging in TA. For example, Emily is disabled and is living with her two children in a two-bedroom ground floor, tower block TA flat. While the flat is designed to be accessible, Emily has found that the bathroom frame recommended by the OT cannot be used because the bathroom door opens on to the toilet. The situation is affecting her pre-existing depression and anxiety. The need for an OT assessment has also been holding up her move to more permanent housing. For Naz, it is her youngest child who has physical disabilities and uses a wheelchair. But there is not enough room to move about in their two-bedroom flat in a family centre close to school. This is also delaying their move-on. While a few properties have been suggested, none has been suitable for a wheelchair. Naz also hopes they can be close to children's schools.

CASE STUDY: Challenge of a parent's disability

Maria found the whole system difficult to navigate after fleeing repeated threats of violence at her previous local authority flat. "I have a learning disability and sometimes I get mixed up." The legal notice required to terminate a tenancy was not made and so rent continued to be charged at her previous flat. As Housing Benefit cannot be paid on both flats, Maria found that arrears accrued at her current accommodation. Maria said it was a stressful time. Maria has had support to help resolve the errors and she hopes the issues will be resolved soon. "It's left me with a big debt if it does not get sorted out".

Maria said she was starting to get to know the area she is now living in. "I didn't know it at first. I'm far enough away from the neighbour but I'm further away from mum. Mum is helping me".

Living in TA affects families in other ways too. Tracy described how some of her placements meant a journey to school involving two buses, affecting her children's attendance, even though it had been 100% before they became homeless.

"I never understood why we had to move around so much. It affected my children's school attendance." Tracy

Support provided

Having set out some of the reasons for homelessness and how this has affected families living in TA, this section looks at support offered to families.

CASE STUDY: Valued support

"I was receiving support from a support provider but that ended when the main duty ended." Fleur said she had "fantastic support". Fleur valued the approach of the support agency that was

“empathetic and they really explain things to you. They would come sit with me and talk to me and show me what to do. I had a female worker who had time to check on me and the kids, just to chat and created a rapport and when I had a problem, they would call me straight away. They made me feel safe. I could discuss things with them”.

Jean spoke positively about a social worker who had helped resolve problems, such as with her visa and accessing funds to pay rent, helping to house her quickly. Angela’s daughter has a children’s social worker who is “on the phone if I need her”, although it can sometimes be hard to get hold of her. Angela also has a support worker who is someone to talk to and who is helping her to apply for a new house. She also spoke warmly of her housing officer: “he’s really good and helpful. If he can help you, he will.” For Emily, her GP referred her to a social prescriber who also put her in touch with a mental health charity who helped her to complete a homeless application. “I was in a bit of a mess. I hadn’t got a clue.” This is especially as she has lost her established support networks having moved to a new area. Gemma said she appreciated the health and wellbeing check at the door from the local authority. The officer was friendly and “we had a good chat and she asked how we were getting on. That was nice.”

“I haven’t got a clue when it comes to the local authority. I’ve been private rented accommodation since I was 16.” Angela

“Where I used to live had a few friends that I rely on, but they do not drive. They used to just pop round”. Emily

CASE STUDY: Support on rent arrears

Lisa had been working for an independent living landlord when her job was reduced to part-time hours during Covid, which saw her earnings fall dramatically. At the time there were a lot of delays and backlog in getting her Universal Credit claim sorted and she quickly fell into rent arrears. “I’ve never not worked. I could only afford to pay half of the rent.” It was a very worrying time and in due course she received notice to quit from her landlord when the rent arrears reached almost £2,000. Lisa was worried that she was going to lose her home, a two-bedroom, private sector maisonette. “My daughter goes to school just round the corner so I was getting worried about what would happen if we needed to move.”

Lisa approached her local authority for help, which contacted the landlord and paid off the rent arrears so the notice was withdrawn. Lisa described it as “a great relief”. She was delighted with the support she received and felt that they had really listened to her concerns. “They explored every avenue to help me.” She says she cannot thank them enough.

Lisa is now looking forward to getting a new job and has job interviews the week we spoke to her.

“It is OK. Everything's electric – but it is not a forever home.” Moya

Although much of the experience of living in TA has been described negatively, we also heard positive things about TA. Alex says he has no complaints about his TA, for example. “The flat is quite bright ... It is a nice house. The furniture is not at its best, but I have no complaints. The area is wonderful. It has green spaces and a park which is great for the kids. School is five minutes’ walk. We are hoping to not have to change schools”. He also spoke positively – and with “surprise” – about how quickly TA was found for them. For Jean, it was the speed at being offered permanent housing, just a few months. “I thought it would be a long haul. I was surprised. They offered me a lot of properties to choose from so I can’t complain. That was super good. The new property is a local authority property. I wanted the security. It is on a bus route so it is good.” For Moya, the TA location was fine and near to school. “We do not have a garden, but the area is green and a bit better.”

“The temporary accommodation has allowed me to continue at university, submit assignments and pass which I could not do in the other property.” Moya

CASE STUDY: Better TA than feared

Gemma is in a two-bedroom ground floor TA flat. She says that it is of a good standard “but to be honest, I’m obviously not happy about being homeless and being in emergency accommodation.” “But the last two to three months I’ve accepted it now. I’m happy with the flat. It is suitable and comfortable. A bit small but you hear horror stories of shared kitchens and bathrooms and places run down; but its clean, not broken, and suitable. Not luxurious but I’m so grateful. It could be a lot worse. It is a lovely close, it is quiet and we do have everything we need.”

CASE STUDY: Safe in TA

Kim says the housing officer calls often and checks she is ok. “I’ve got a support worker.” She is very happy with the support and likes the TA. “I feel very safe. It is close to the shops and chemist and there is buzzer system to get in the building so anybody can’t just walk in the block”. It’s helped me. I’m not so anxious here. I do not panic so much. One step at a time I can now leave the house on my own; before I was too scared to come out of the house.”

Future housing

“I just want that stability for my children – where they belong, where their safe place is. It is gone on so long and I'm just a bit worn out with it all now.” Gemma

“I want to get out of here. We want to get settled and get our house the way we want it.” Mike

“We just want somewhere on a permanent basis.” Alex

“I want to be settled so I do not have to move again.” Kim

Families also told us about their longer-term plans for housing, some quite hopefully. Like many stakeholders told us there was an aspiration – and sometimes expectation – of getting a good social rented house, usually with a garden. For example, Alex said: “We would love to live in a three-bedroom house and because we have two kids a garden would be great. We love it here now. It is nice and quiet and peaceful. Would be great if we could stay near to school. Not good to be moving schools. The area is very safe.” For some of the families we spoke to, this was happening, they were being offered a three-bedroom house with a garden. Angela, for example, had been offered family housing in a neighbouring authority because of the connection to the children’s father who lives there. It is a new three-bedroom property with a garden. Angela and her children are looking forward to a new start. Her daughter is looking forward to starting a new school. Angela says, “she will have her own bedroom and will be the girl she used to be”.

“It would be better for kids to have a garden.” Jenny, with children aged 3 and 8

CASE STUDY: Moving on and looking forward

Moya and family are looking forward to living in a long-term tenancy with a social landlord. On Friday she is picking up the keys to a three-bedroom house. The children are looking forward to having their own space. “One’s into tick tock and one’s into Fortnite so there’s a lot of arguing. The kids can actually have a social life and invite friends to come to visit them.”

Moya is looking forward to being happy at home and going into her third year at university.

We heard about challenges gaining priority for housing or bidding for homes. Jenny, only recently living in TA after fleeing domestic abuse, said she had been bidding for seven years to move out of the top floor flat but never had any priority. Gemma registered with the local authority’s Homefinder service as soon as she moved out of expensive private renting and in with her mum. But she says:

“Every Thursday I logged on to Homefinder and bid for a property. I could be first or second but by Friday I'd be 40 or 50 in the queue. I just wasn't getting anywhere. I bid

on everything and anything. When you see how far down the queue you are its heart-breaking. It does take its toll. You just think I'm never going to get anywhere.” Gemma

A few of the families we spoke to have been told that the local authority will bid on properties on their behalf. While one or two are happy to receive any sort of long-term housing, other families begrudgingly feel they have no other choice.

Several families were considering the private rented sector, including some who had lived in such housing before. A concern for these, however, was its affordability. For example, while both Gemma and her boyfriend Lee work, he has agency work that is not secure, so could lose this work at any time. Kim also continues to look for a more permanent place to stay. She found a private sector property but the private landlord wanted £1,100 up front, money she did not have. A few of the families even questioned the affordability of their current TA placement, especially if they start work. Mike has recently been offered a full-time job paying £8.91 per hour, for example, but he is concerned that he will not be able to afford the £241 per week rent at the TA. He is also concerned about the cost of private renting, another option. As seen earlier, several local authorities were offering support with private renting, as families agreed, with things like the helpful support and advice to access a deposit and rent in advance that Peter received.

“I need to pay [private] rent from Universal Credit and its unaffordable.” Adana

CASE STUDY: Housing affordability

Gemma and Lee are looking at private rented housing. The local authority has agreed to pay a bond if the accommodation is affordable. “It is not just the rent, it is local authority tax, utilities etc. We are not eligible for any support as we are just over the threshold for everything. We are running a car for school runs and getting to work and Lee is making regular payments to support his children. Private rent is through the roof. I have sat there for hours looking for properties on Zoopla and Rightmove and all the other sites for rent and seeing two-bed houses for £900 and they were not anything special.”

“I applied to another local authority a bit out of the way, but she said sorry, but you do not qualify for social housing because we earn too much”.

Issues with furniture emerged during some of our interviews with families. When moving into TA, Tracy ended up having to leave her furniture behind because she was not aware that a storage fund may have been available. “I lost everything. I had to start from scratch.” Because Emily was not allowed to take her furniture to temporary housing, she has her furniture and possessions in storage. Angela was able to store some of her furniture in sheds belonging to friends but was unable to store her sofa fridge, washing machine and wardrobes. “It is really difficult especially as I've worked hard to

get it all.” Kim was looking forward as her TA was furnished, she was building up possessions to furnish her permanent home.

“Storage is costing me a fortune. £350 per month. It was the cheapest I could find.”

Emily

One family had so far avoided TA, though they still did not have long-term prospects for longer-term housing. They live in an area that is being regenerated and their private rented property is scheduled for demolition. They had received a Section 21 notice to quit the tenancy and given until the end of the year to leave. However, Louise has been advised that they will not be considered homeless until 56 days before the notice ends. At the time of interview, they had a Band D priority for social housing, which will increase to Band B at this 56-day point.

CASE STUDY: Refusing housing offers

Having fled domestic abuse, Fleur has been offered a few permanent properties but she has declined them, so the local authority said they had ended their duty to accommodate her. She feels she had reasonable grounds for not accepting the properties offered. She did not feel safe in one location because it was a known area that her violent ex-partner frequented and, in another area, she did not feel safe because of a recent shooting in the area.

In addition: “I was offered private sector accommodation, but it was not suitable and there was nowhere for the children to play. The conditions were bad. The whole house was dark, and one window had a net curtain with mould everywhere. I could not stand the conditions. My support worker said to take the kids back to the temporary accommodation.”

CASE STUDY: Happier in permanent housing

Tracy is a single mum to five children. For the last 10 months they have been living in a three-bedroom house which is permanent social housing. Tracy says the house is large enough to meet their needs and has a garden for the children to play.

Tracy is happy that they are now a lot closer to school. One child is in her final year and the younger children are moving to a new primary school. “I’m in a bigger house, a nice house, its lovely. The kids like it. My daughter fell in love with it and of course she has the biggest room. I’ve come out the other end. My rent is paid. I am with an agency who are helping me look for work. I really need the social contact and financial stability. I am not thinking too far ahead. One step at a time. My next goal is to get a job. Hopefully before the kids to get back to school. I say hello to the neighbours.”

Preventing homelessness

The majority of the families we spoke to were in temporary accommodation and homeless, however we did speak to two families who managed to avoid homelessness and the need to move into temporary accommodation. For Louise and Rob, the local authority successfully negotiated with the landlord to prevent eviction whilst they sought suitable permanent accommodation for the family to move into. For Lisa, the local authority paid off her rent arrears caused by delays in Universal Credit during the covid restrictions.

CASE STUDY: Homeless prevention

Lisa is in her early 30's and is single mum to her 7-year-old daughter. Lisa had been working for an Independent Living landlord when her job was reduced to part time hours which saw her earnings fall dramatically. At the time there were a lot of delays and backlog in getting Universal Credit claims sorted and Lisa quickly fell into rent arrears. "I've never not worked. I could only afford to pay half of the rent." It was a very worrying time and in due course she received notice to quit from her landlord when the rent arrears reached almost £2000. Lisa was worried that she was going to lose her home, a two-bedroom, private sector maisonette. "My daughter goes to school just round the corner so I was getting worried about what would happen if we needed to move". Lisa approached her local authority for help. They contacted the landlord and paid off the rent arrears and the notice was withdrawn. Lisa described it as "a great relief". She was delighted with the support she received and felt that they had really listened to her concerns. "They explored every avenue to help me". She says she cannot thank them enough.

Conclusions

This research project set out to better understand the lives and impact of living in TA for families in the seven constituent WMCA local authorities. We have pulled together evidence from a wide range of sources to paint that picture, to give voice to these families themselves and pull out examples of good practice from the region and further afield. This points to policy and practice suggestions, though these need to be taken further by decision-makers and those managing TA across the West Midlands.

Profile of families and typical journeys into TA

Our snapshot from 1 March 2021 showed that there were 3,518 families with dependent children living in TA across the seven constituent local authorities, some 14,008 people and 8,240 children. At a regional level, the number of families living in TA compared to the wider population is second only to London. The scale of the challenges within the seven constituent local authorities is acute, especially in Birmingham, which accounted for 84% of all these families in March 2021.

The profile of families living in TA often reveals their journey into TA. Poverty, debt and rent arrears are common features. This is often in the private rented sector and sometimes with a history of ASB – with the end of an AST accounting for 29% of the reason for homelessness in the snapshot data, although that was in March 2021, when the eviction ban was in place. The examples we heard from support agencies of families not having enough money to buy food or children sleeping on a mattress but no bedframe shows the stark levels of poverty for some families in TA. The high levels of rent arrears are another sign of financial distress, sometimes exacerbated by job changes and redundancies during Covid and, for some, the impact of the welfare system (e.g. two-child limit, problems with Universal Credit).

Women fleeing domestic violence is another key group, with two-thirds of families in the snapshot data headed by a woman and 58% a single mother household. The relatively high proportion of Black / Black British African in some authorities revealed the higher level of former asylum seekers, refugees and those given leave to remain in the UK, notably in the Home Office dispersal areas of Birmingham, Coventry, Sandwell and Wolverhampton.

Different types of TA used

The use of bed and breakfast, hostel and hotel accommodation is low across the seven constituent local authorities, accommodating just 18% of families in the March 2021 snapshot. Local authority

housing was much more common, accommodating almost half of families in TA at that point, with PRS leased housing the next most common (29%). Again, we see variations across the seven authorities.

Dispersed units were preferred by both families and stakeholders, particularly for blending in, so reducing the stigma of living in a family unit or hostel, for example. However, security was often better at the latter two types of TA. Yet rules in family units, even stricter during the Covid restrictions, added stress to such living conditions. Ideally, families want enough space for all household members, properties close enough to school, to minimise disruption to children's education, and indoor and outdoor space for children to study or play.

Impact of living in TA

A really big gap appears with the total length of stay in TA, something also highlighted by several interviewees – something to avoid. The shortest average time in the current placement was in Sandwell, at just 36–42 days at the March 2021 snapshot. At the other end of the scale is Birmingham, with an average stay in the current placement of 498–504, the equivalent of almost 1½ years. From talking to families, we know that it is common for them to be moved from one TA placement to another, so the total time in TA can be even longer. In contrast, families we spoke to who have been moved quickly into permanent housing were pleased and sometimes surprised at this speed. This is good practice to copy.

The uncertainty of how long families will live in TA coupled with some long lengths of stay was adding to anxiety and stress for parents and children alike. This came through from the existing literature as well as our engagement with families in the region. Stakeholders told us that larger families and those with a disabled household member tended to remain in TA for longest, as it was hardest to find large enough or suitably adapted properties, respectively. Depending on where the TA was located, it can be far from schools, which makes it harder to get to school so can affect attendance, including for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) who attend specialist schools.

The impact on mental health came through in many of the interviews with families, sometimes building on pre-existing conditions like anxiety and depression as well as past trauma suffered through domestic abuse or, for migrants, fleeing a war-torn country. Life in small, cramped TA is challenging. Living away from friends and family, traditional support networks, is tough. Extra restrictions because of Covid have made things harder, especially where rules limited families' ability to carry out everyday activities like washing clothes or made them feel more isolated from limits on visitors. This affects a key protective factor for families. When property conditions are also poor, it is no surprise that

spending lots of time in such properties has been challenging psychologically for families. In contrast, when the property condition is decent, families are happier.

Domestic abuse also has a profound impact on families living in TA. It often leads to uprooting yourself from existing social networks, sometimes children moving schools or leading to school refusals, and worrying about your safety and security daily, wherever you live.

With poverty, debt and arrears a reason for becoming homeless, it also shaped the lives of some families living in TA. One stakeholder described stark situations of some families barely having a mattress for children to sleep on; some parents themselves spoke about sleeping on a sofa bed in TA. The need to maximise incomes, particularly through claiming welfare benefits, was important for many families, though longer term work on money management is also being delivered by in-house and external support agencies. Linked to this, lacking furniture, including for some families who have fled domestic abuse but with no possessions, was delaying the move-on for some families.

Families were grateful for the accommodation, though, and we heard a lot of praise for the support received throughout the TA journeys, whether from a housing officer, support worker or social worker. For some families, living in TA felt safer than previous housing, including some mums who had fled domestic abuse.

Families longer-term housing needs

Families told us about their longer-term plans for housing, some quite hopefully. Like many stakeholders told us, there was a lot of aspiration – and sometimes expectation – of getting a good three-bedroom social rented house, usually with a garden. We did speak to some families who had or were about to achieve this goal. But others were accepting of the private rented sector, albeit fearful of the cost and insecurity of tenure. Support with deposits, rent in advance and even using DHPs to cover past arrears are all helpful in this respect.

Good practice

Across our research, we have found lots of examples of good practice, included throughout this report. We heard fewer examples of preventing homelessness, although we have focused our research mostly on those currently living in TA, so this is to be expected. Delivering a quick response and an ongoing focus on moving on for families helps; starting with an exit strategy, one homelessness lead said. Providing dispersed TA was widely praised, even going one step further and then flipping the home into a general needs property.

Some local authorities have been working hard to open up the private rented sector to homeless families, including work to prevent homelessness in the first place. This demands an acceptance by local authorities of discharging a housing duty into the private rented sector, albeit with support provided to families. Financial incentives to landlords can help, as can an intermediary role between landlords and families, a gap authorities can fill. We also heard some good preparation for post-lockdown changes, notably around the expected “avalanche” of homelessness applications once evictions were allowed. This includes holding void properties empty in order to accommodate expected families. Throughout, providing support – including specialist services – can help families before, during and after life in TA.

Recommendations

Some of the challenges noted in the report are structural and therefore require structural responses and some may be more amenable to changes in local practice. There is a role for the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce as a lobbying body seeking to influence investment and policy decisions nationally, regionally and locally.

The biggest structural problem is the lack of affordable housing for families, made worse for larger families and those with a disabled household member. This demands continual investment into building enough homes of the right size, in the right locations and the most suitable tenures. While outside the immediate remit of the WMCA’s Homelessness Taskforce, this adds weight to this argument, particularly by showing the stress and wider impact on families living in TA.

Poverty is one key element, another larger, structural challenge. Again, the Homelessness Taskforce and the wider WMCA can have a role to promote learning and employment opportunities, support childcare to allow parents to access such services and lobby at a national level around the impact of the welfare system. Once families are in debt and building rent arrears, there are points in time to address this before landlords serve notice. However, families and landlords need to know that such initiatives exist. Help to ensure families are receiving the welfare benefits they are entitled to and support to manage money also play a role. Local authorities also need to be pragmatic about the use of the private rented sector in discharging their housing duties.

For families already living in TA, providing decent housing and with more space for all household members can alleviate some of the stresses of living in temporary housing. While family centres allow a concentration of services, families prefer and prosper better in dispersed units. Dealing with backlogs, particularly in Birmingham, and focusing on the exit from TA from the outset will help to minimise the time families live in TA. This also demands support, which should be provided during a

family's time in TA and for some time afterwards, whether in-house from local authorities or by specialist agencies that address particular issues such as debt, domestic abuse, trauma or mental health. Yet a careful balance is also needed between providing support where needed but not losing sight of family autonomy.

There is a role for more upstream prevention of homelessness in the first place. This includes ongoing multi-agency working – and greater responsibility from partners – to address issues that may lead to a family becoming homeless. This may be where debts are starting to mount or where there are earlier signs of domestic abuse. For migrants given leave to remain in the UK, a more coordinated approach with the Home Office and local authorities would help a steadier passage into longer-term housing for such families. Sharing information between agencies, with consent, is a part of this. More widely, a change to allocations policies to encourage staying homeless at home – and gaining a higher priority – should also be encouraged, thereby minimising time in TA.

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