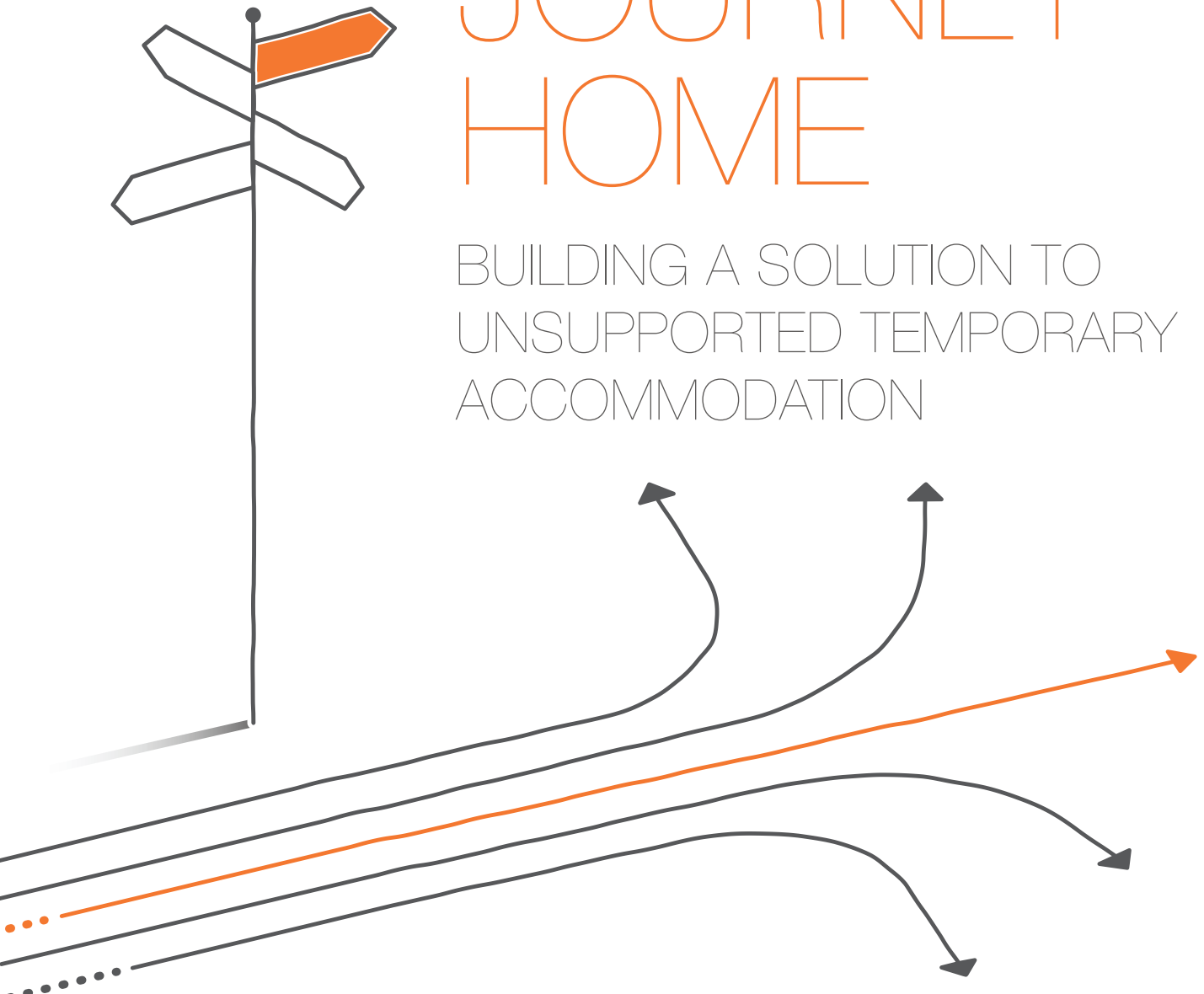


REPORT

THE JOURNEY HOME

BUILDING A SOLUTION TO
UNSUPPORTED TEMPORARY
ACCOMMODATION



Christa Maciver,
Charlotte Snelling,
Alex Fleming
and Bill Davies

December 2016
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ABOUT IPPR NORTH

IPPR North is IPPR's dedicated thinktank for the North of England. With its head office in Manchester and representatives in Newcastle, IPPR North's research, together with our stimulating and varied events programme, seeks to produce innovative policy ideas for fair, democratic and sustainable communities across the North of England.

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1. INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS UNSUPPORTED TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION AND WHY IS IT A PROBLEM?

People who are single and homeless face an uphill struggle to secure the support and services they need in order to move into a permanent and stable home. In the absence of these services, many find their only option is to move into unsupported temporary accommodation (UTA), a form of insecure housing which may consist of a private hostel, bed and breakfast, emergency or temporary accommodation, short-stay HMO (house in multiple occupation) or guesthouse.

Unsupported temporary accommodation frequently falls short of the government's decent homes standard and often impacts negatively on the health and wellbeing of its tenants, many of whom are extremely vulnerable and face severe and multiple disadvantage. Inhabitants of UTA are typically licensed to live in the accommodation, are not tenants and are sometimes considered excluded occupiers. Therefore, residents have extremely limited rights within the properties. Often the physical condition of the accommodation creates an unsafe environment and the social conditions increase tenants' exposure to risk. Therefore, a clear strategy is needed to do the following.

1. Prevent people from moving into poor quality UTA in the first place.
2. Provide immediate support when people have no choice but to move into UTA.
3. Offer ongoing support to help people cope with living in UTA.
4. Find more secure accommodation for tenants as quickly as possible.

THE JOURNEY HOME PROJECT: KEY FINDINGS

Over the past three years, IPPR North and Justlife Foundation have been working to understand the lives of hidden single homeless households living in UTA in the North West and South East of England.

The experience of UTA tenants uncovered in our research has been both eye-opening and appalling, and represents just a snapshot of a problem of UTA that persists in most towns and cities across the country. We found concerning experiences ranging from poor physical conditions to unstable social environments. Our research has also highlighted the absence of a strong national policy framework to support the many hidden single homeless households living across the country.

Many local authorities are constrained by housing shortages and governed by rules that give priority to other types of household in particular need.¹

¹ Those automatically considered in priority need include families with dependent children, pregnant women, young adults leaving care and/or under the age of 18 years, and those made homeless by emergency circumstances.

As a result, single homeless households are often left with little support in securing a place in temporary accommodation and any support they may initially access falls away once they have been ‘placed’. They find themselves living without permanent tenancy status, in uninhabitable conditions, with few rights and no structured plan or help to move towards stable and secure accommodation.

Government data reports 6,520 households placed in bed and breakfast (B&B)² accommodation in the second quarter of 2016 (DCLG 2016). Shelter found in 1997 that although the government data reported only 7,660 individuals living in B&B accommodation, the number was actually 72,550 – almost 10 times higher than the official figure (Carter 1997). We have no reason to believe that the numbers are not still worryingly high.

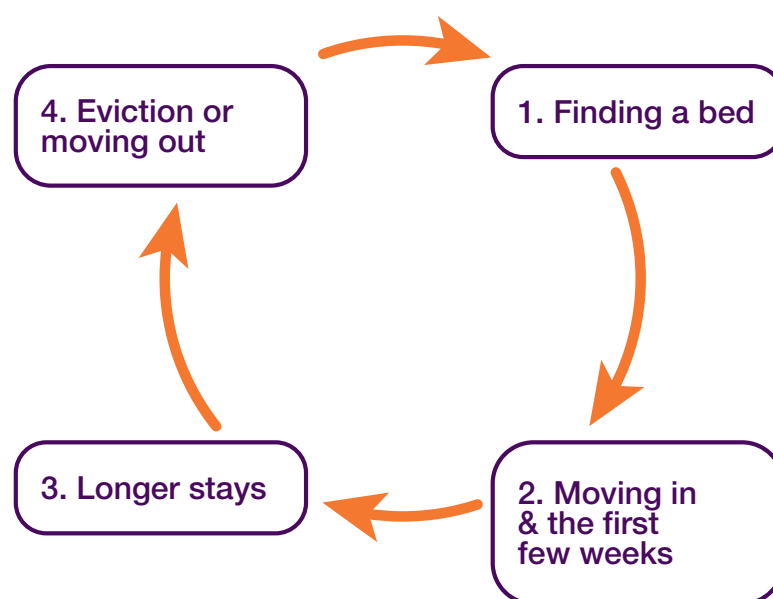
Stages in the journey through UTA

In order to affect change within a system that necessitates UTA as a housing option there needs to be a seismic shift in approach and investment. IPPR North and Justlife have identified four key stages of a person’s journey through UTA and have sought to develop a series of local measures to be adopted by local stakeholders – local authorities, voluntary sector organisations, and other connected parties – in order to begin shifting the current approach to UTA and to encourage interventions designed to break the cycle that sees marginalised individuals drifting through UTA.

The four key stages, identified by our research, experienced by individuals living in UTA are illustrated in figure 1.1.

FIGURE 1.1

A typical journey: the unsupported temporary accommodation (UTA) cycle



Source: Rose et al 2016

² Bed and Breakfast accommodation is defined by Shelter as including ‘commercial hotels, guest houses, lodging houses and private homes’ (Carter 1997: 9). This type of accommodation is included in our definition of UTA, and therefore counting those in B&B accommodation is useful for determining quantity estimates for those residing in short-term insecure accommodation overall.

The detailed context and challenges facing tenants living in this kind of accommodation, as well as a series of recommendations aimed at changing the systems these tenants must navigate, are presented in the project's first two reports: *Not home: The lives of hidden homeless households in unsupported temporary accommodation in England* (Rose and Davies 2014) and *Nowhere fast: The journey in and out of unsupported temporary accommodation* (Rose et al 2016). Both are available on IPPR's website.³

ABOUT THIS REPORT AND PROJECT OUTPUTS

This is the third and final publication from our three-year research project.

The purpose of the report is to summarise our research findings and provide recommendations. It highlights the problems found within UTA and how these experiences present significant barriers to single homeless households ultimately seeking permanent accommodation and independent living. Our recommendations then demonstrate the ways in which current practice can and should be reformed to improve the experiences of people living in UTA and how they can be supported to move into more secure accommodation.

The report provides the backdrop for a toolkit that shares ideas, resources and practical strategies for implementing the recommendations locally to improve the lives of those living in UTA across the country. The toolkit includes a handbook (on the reverse of this report) and a wallchart that will be distributed with this publication. Both will form part of a wider online toolkit of resources available at Justlife's website.⁴

- ***The journey home: A handbook to setting up a temporary accommodation board.*** This handbook highlights the steps, questions, and good practice examples that organisations and groups will need to consider when setting up their own group or strategy to help improve the lives of those living in temporary accommodation.
- ***The journey home: Visualising the journey.*** This is a visual representation, presented as a wallchart, of the common experiences of individuals as they journey through UTA, and shows how the actions of others, and recommendations of our own, might help to support tenants at various points along the path.

This report is structured as follows:

- The next section briefly summarises our recommendations.
- The subsequent section breaks down the four stages of the UTA journey, describing the challenges experienced and expanding on our recommendations in each area.
- We then present a summary of the conclusions emerging from our research and signpost to further resources.

3 <http://www.ippr.org/big-issues/housing>.

4 <https://www.justlife.org.uk/research/the-journey-home-full-toolkit/>

2. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations specific to each of the four stages of the UTA journey build on the four central recommendations for policy and practice change published in this project's second report, *Nowhere fast* (Rose et al 2016), and highlight their potential for bringing about positive changes to the lives of homeless individuals.

Below and throughout this report, our recommendations have been colour-coded to indicate where a sub-recommendation or point links to one of these central recommendations.

Create temporary accommodation boards. These would consist of new formal, local bodies, established to bring together the activities of neighbouring housing authorities, public services and the homelessness sector to gather, share and monitor information about local bedspaces and the individuals living in them, to inform referrals and signposting towards appropriate accommodation.

Establish 'greenlists' and 'exclusion' lists. Temporary accommodation boards should create and maintain live greenlists of acceptable local bedspaces and exclusion lists of unacceptable bedspaces, using the data they gather and aggregate. These lists should be available to tenants and used to incentivise landlords to make improvements.

Develop a minimum, consistent set of standards. These standards will include: an agreed minimum conditions standard for the UTA submarket; a single tenancy agreement for local bedspaces, setting out the rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords, details of services and service changes, and a named point of contact for tenants in the event that issues arise at the property; and a clear, safe and anonymous method of making complaints.

Provide appropriate in-tenancy support. Quality placement and in-tenancy support should exist to help individuals manage their stay and to prevent their cycling in and out of UTA. This should include 'warm handovers', where the person referring the individual accompanies the tenant to check the condition of their new home and provide support with paperwork and settling in.

We expand on these recommendations in the following chapter.

3.

THE UTA JOURNEY

STAGE 1: FINDING A BED

The challenges

When individuals become homeless, finding suitable accommodation, often at the last minute or late at night, is challenging, especially for single homeless households facing severe and multiple disadvantage. These individuals are often at the back of the queue when it comes to local authority support and it is not uncommon for them to be turned away by a housing team with little explanation of why and little or no support to help them address their homelessness. In research by Crisis, mystery shoppers attending local authority homelessness services received either inadequate or insufficient support in 50 out of 87 visits (Dobie et al 2014). No council wants this, but they are constrained by housing shortages and governed by rules that say they must give priority to other households in need.

These difficulties are compounded by the fact that 55 per cent of landlords say they are unwilling to let properties to households in receipt of housing benefit (Gousy 2014). Low income households are typically limited to the cheapest 30 per cent of rental properties (Clarke et al 2015), which lie at the margins of local housing markets. Therefore, the availability of properties for single homeless households with complex needs and in receipt of welfare support is even further restricted within these margins.

Options for single homeless households are therefore limited, especially when individuals are experiencing crisis. They often have no choice but to move into UTA, where conditions are extremely poor, there is little or no security of tenure and the help from local services is minimal at best. However, because this type of accommodation is unknown to the public in general, when an individual becomes homeless they will receive some type of support in finding a bed in UTA, even if it is simply in the form of information passed on by a friend. This was the case for our research participants. Table 3.1 shows how they found such accommodation.

It is also common for individuals to be placed into accommodation by neighbouring local authorities, local mental health teams and adult social care, even though we did not interview anyone placed by these organisations.

The wide variation in the journeys of tenants into UTA is problematic, not least because attempts to prevent individuals being referred to certain unacceptable forms of accommodation can be undermined when another organisation chooses to continue making such referrals. For example, there are reports that while certain local authorities were trying to limit or end referrals to accommodation deemed unsuitable, neighbouring local authorities were placing individuals across the boundary into that same

accommodation when no suitable accommodation was available in their own area (Irving 2015).

TABLE 3.1

How our research participants found unsupported temporary accommodation

Referral or signposting from...	No. of research participants
Referred by prison/probation	4
Referred by charity	5
Referred by local authority housing options team	10
Referred by local authority hospital discharge team	6
Referred by friend	5
Self-referred	8
Referred by police	2
Signposted by local authority	3
Signposted by charity	2

These challenges, combined with a ‘worker lottery’ – the significant differences seen in the quality of support between workers and the lack of choice around who can be seen – contribute to the variable nature of the information received by single homeless households. A lack of systems that accurately record the number of bedspaces in UTA also make it much more difficult to collectively identify and act in unison to address known problems. Where individuals are self-referring or are placed by the collection of alternative services and agencies working outside the local authority, there is a further lack of up-to-date, centrally held knowledge on who is occupying these bedspaces.

The evidence strongly suggests that stakeholders are not working together effectively, which then points to a need to act collectively to clean up this dark corner of the housing market. Local initiatives and activities – such as Manchester’s homelessness charter, Blackburn with Darwen’s MEAM project, and Sunderland’s environmental health officer⁵ – have begun to recognise this need for better joined-up working to facilitate coordinated activity and information-sharing.

Recommendations for reforming policy locally to support better placement

We recommend that local stakeholders collectively gather information regarding UTA such as: addresses, the quality of the accommodation, and the scale and flow of those using UTA. This information can be used to coordinate signposting and referrals in a manner that drives up standards by prioritising the highest quality accommodation, thereby incentivising other providers of UTA to improve their offer. It can also be provided to individuals referred or signposted into UTA, who require accurate information regarding the accommodation available in order to gain a greater sense of control over finding a bed.

5 Details of case studies can be found in the handbook accompanying this report.

Temporary accommodation boards (TABs)

Temporary accommodation boards are proposed new formal local bodies that would serve as place-based partnerships with the aim of improving the experience of tenants in unsupported temporary accommodation. These boards would bring together activities of neighbouring housing authorities, public services and the homelessness sector to address the challenges in finding a secure bedspace when faced with homelessness. Enactment of the bulk of our recommendations would flow out of the work of temporary accommodation boards as these bodies are central to ensuring effective local collaboration through their coordinating role. The handbook accompanying this report outlines suggested stages in setting up a temporary accommodation board and their potential effectiveness. It also provides details of a pilot board set up in Manchester.

The role of temporary accommodation boards in information-gathering should be as follows.

The first priority of temporary accommodation boards should be the gathering of intelligence about the number of bedspaces being used to provide shelter for single homeless households, recording how many homeless households are using them at any one time, and – where appropriate or necessary – recording the identity of these individuals. Local authorities will be critical players in carrying out these tasks.

Information gathered and held by temporary accommodation boards should be updated regularly and made accessible to all board members. Such information should include: the landlord's and/or managing agent's name, taken from publicly held HMO registers; accommodation type and suitability for different types of tenants; current weekly rents and service charges; property conditions; and tenant feedback. Much of the data collected and stored should already be publicly accessible. Due to potential data protection issues, storing tenant feedback or other sensitive data should be done only with agreed consent and signed data protection forms. Information should only be shared publicly if agreed by the board.

Once gathered, information should be used to help individuals involved in signposting and referral processes to make informed decisions about where to send people. As such:

Greenlists of accommodation that meets required standards should be compiled from the information held by temporary accommodation boards and shared among signposting agencies. At the same time, exclusion lists of unsuitable bedspaces should also be created, maintained and shared, in order to discourage agencies from using these properties as destinations for single homeless households.

STAGE 2: MOVING IN AND THE FIRST FEW WEEKS

The challenges

The first month of living in UTA is particularly challenging, especially in circumstances where individuals arrive at the accommodation on their own, without support and without any onward plan. Our research found that for most individuals the most help they received towards moving in was little more than a piece of paper with the accommodation's address and sometimes money for a bus pass.

Tenants arrive at their accommodation often to be greeted by a room not ready or fit for habitation. Many research participants reported issues of damp, poor hygiene, uncleanliness and infestations – all of which were noticeable within the first 24 hours. There were complaints of no bed, broken windows, soiled carpets, and blood or other stains on walls or mattresses. Safety was also an immediate concern for many, with 23 of our 45 research participants reporting having no lock on their door. This reality is made worse by the fact that tenants are often arriving to live in these environments for an unspecified amount of time and therefore struggle to see an end to the problems presented by their new accommodation.

In addition to the physical conditions, when tenants arrive they are faced with additional problems in setting up their accommodation. Many of our research participants raised the following issues:

- Confusion over having to sign 'a piece of paper' that appears to set out neither their rights nor responsibilities as tenants.
- Uncertainty from the outset about the cost of the service charge, and what exactly it covers.⁶ Respondents were paying between £0 and £35 per week, with that range sometimes found within the same property. There was a fear that if they did not pay, the accommodation offer could be withdrawn. Only five tenants reported having personally challenged the charge.
- Upon identification of a problem, not knowing who to contact when and where, other than another tenant in possession of the landlord's phone number.
- Signing housing benefit forms that had been already filled out by landlords or managers and not being clear on their rights over their financial support.

A tenant's feelings of insecurity are fuelled when they arrive in such a place: typically alone, with no support, and no one with whom to talk through things they need or to help them access the items that the accommodation might lack (often basics such as clean sheets or a towel). Rarely is there the opportunity to discuss with either the landlord or management the things that need to be addressed in order to make the room habitable. In our research, more than half of our participants – 27 out of 45 – felt that issues raised with the landlord would not be addressed, because the landlord 'never fixed anything'. This context makes reporting issues that need addressing all the more difficult.

⁶ The service charge is an additional charge usually levied on top of weekly rent (typically paid for out of the tenant's local housing allowance) to cover costs for items such as utility bills, breakfast, cleaning and laundry.

These issues, coupled with the reality that UTA has a high concentration of people with complex needs – including many individuals already experiencing stress and anxiety – all contribute to tenants feeling they have limited control over their environment. Even during these early weeks, those we spoke to reported a decline in their mental health and wellbeing.

Recommendations for reforming policy to improve support for the first month

A new approach to the placement of tenants is needed, especially as a majority of single homeless households moving into UTA are unrecorded and unknown.

We recommend that referring or signposting agencies should hold responsibility for the individual moving into UTA, ensuring there is proper support in place for the move itself while also making sure the responsible enforcement agency is aware of any substandard conditions identified in the property. Any issues of concern should also be reported to the temporary accommodation board.

In cases where tenants need immediate support or items, or have questions, these should be addressed at the time of bedspace allocation, and where necessary the referral or signposting organisation can prevent the placement from occurring where the property is clearly inappropriate. Acting in this way has the additional benefit of guaranteeing a more regular routine of checking that conditions meet stated standards.

As such, we recommend:

Wherever possible, those placing or signposting individuals to UTA should accompany the tenant in a ‘warm handover’, to ensure that a tenant has the basic things they need for their stay and access to ongoing support and information should they need it.

Each tenant should have a designated point of contact or support worker, depending on their needs, to facilitate this process.

The process of ‘warm handovers’ will also help to provide the temporary accommodation board with the critical information it needs to: inform greenlists and exclusion lists; inform property managers of the location of unacceptable conditions; and, where necessary, inform Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)⁷ enforcement decisions. We make the following recommendations.

The individual responsible for the ‘warm handover’ should confirm that the property is in an acceptable condition, using a set checklist, and that agreed licence agreements and paperwork are being used.⁸

⁷ The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) is a method of assessing housing conditions. It employs a risk assessment approach to enable risks from hazards to health and safety in dwellings to be minimised. The system applies to all dwellings, regardless of ownership.

⁸ Resources can be found online at ‘The journey home: The full toolkit’ on Justlife’s website: <https://www.justlife.org.uk/research/the-journey-home-full-toolkit/>

Where any specific issues with the accommodation are identified, these should be inputted into a database maintained by the temporary accommodation board, and fed back to relevant enforcement agencies and departments and to the landlord in question.

Temporary accommodation boards should be responsible for collectively designing a clear, standardised licence agreement for all local UTA. This standard agreement should be the only acceptable form for receipt of housing benefit, and should outline a clear set of rules and responsibilities for tenants and landlords.

STAGE 3: LONGER STAYS LIVING IN UTA

The challenges

Time spent living in UTA is rarely ‘temporary’. At the time of our research, most of our participants had lived in this type of accommodation for at least 12 months; one had lived in UTA for 36 years. However, the comparatively long duration spent in UTA does not tend to lead to stability, due to the poor conditions, constant concern about who else is living in the accommodation, poor management practices and insecurity of tenure. These problems are further compounded by systemic challenges within housing standards frameworks and enforcement powers.

An individual’s overall wellbeing is known to worsen where there are unsanitary conditions, buildings in need of repair and modernisation, and insufficient or substandard cooking or washing facilities. Our research participants frequently reported living without heating or hot water, damp caused by ignored leaks, and sharing their accommodation with rats and bedbugs. The stress of such an environment contributes to the deterioration tenants’ health; of the 45 tenants we interviewed, 38 reported deteriorating mental health and 21 worsening physical health.

Tenants living in UTA find themselves constantly concerned about the others living with them. Many have complex needs and are living with others with equally complex needs. This can mean life in UTA is chaotic with theft, violence and endemic drug and alcohol use. For tenants living without a working lock on their door, these factors make their situation even worse. Twenty-eight of our research participants reported being a witness to or experiencing violence. Individuals with histories of addiction found managing their addiction more challenging as a result of living with others who are drug- or alcohol-dependent. Thirteen of our research participants reported increasing their drug use while living in UTA, while 38 of the 45 reported that other people’s substance misuse was a nuisance.

Landlords and managers of UTA often also contribute to the difficulties of living in UTA. As discussed above, many tenants are subject to service charges of up to £35 a week, which are often arbitrary. These can place a significant financial burden on tenants, particularly those staying for prolonged periods of time, contributing to their financial marginalisation. Often landlords and managers are also seen to be bullying tenants, seeming to care about money only, and to disregard maintenance issues. There are limited opportunities to hold landlords to account, make complaints, or to feed back information. This results in

a further loss of control over tenants' own accommodation experiences and can lead to unsuitable properties and landlords continuing to be used without improvements being made.

The market does little to address these issues. Local authorities are concerned that, instead of improving conditions, clamping down on landlords will lead accommodation to close or, conversely, to improve to such a level that it will be let out at higher rents to a different, less vulnerable clientele. Both situations would significantly reduce the number of places available to single homeless households and so intensify the struggle to house these individuals. Unfortunately, even where there is a will among local authorities to take action on these issues, they may find themselves lacking the resources needed to enforce standards and inspection practices fully (Battersby 2012; Crisis 2014; Lucas et al 2013). Licensing fees, for example, can be used only to fund administration, not to pursue stronger inspection regimes.

The standards framework is patchy for housing generally, but especially so for UTA. All housing is in theory covered by the HHSRS, which allows councils to implement enforcement action when properties pose a risk to either tenants or neighbours (Davies and Turley 2014). What exists is largely technical in nature – i.e. refers neither to the tenant nor to the social environment – while the enforcement of HHSRS standards is limited, reactive and informal (Battersby 2012).

Tighter rules exist for houses in multiple occupation (HMOs). For instance, there are strict rules about HMO fire safety and it is the responsibility of the landlord to ensure that these conditions are met, subject to HMO licence conditions. However, enforcement of standards in HMOs, hostels and B&Bs is again minimal. Evidence from Shelter reported only 487 landlord prosecutions in 2012 among a population of 1.2 million (CLG Committee 2013). As this is a largely unregulated environment, it would be useful to agree a common set of standards for accommodation. This could be achieved by temporary accommodation boards working with landlords to agree and apply a set of minimum standards expected of temporary accommodation both to improve conditions directly, through setting clear expectations, and to signal to landlords that where they fall repeatedly short of these standards, no further tenant signposting or referrals will be forthcoming.

It is therefore concerning that, as a whole, UTA fails in providing the stable and secure living arrangements that encourage individuals to establish local connections and make long-term plans such as securing employment or building relationships in a given location. Their lives retain an element of transience as a result.

Recommendations for reforming policy to strengthen inspection regimes and improve conditions

Crucial to improving conditions is a more effective system of licensing, inspection, and enforcement. This research, therefore, reinforces previous recommendations from IPPR North regarding area-wide licensing schemes (Davies and Turley 2014). We build on these to recommend the following:

Restrictions on the use of funds from licensing fees should be lifted, to finance not only schemes' administration but also inspection and enforcement procedures. For example, it should be possible to direct funds towards over-stretched environmental health teams.

Within the 'fit and proper' test,⁹ landlords must be expected to disclose any previous criminal offences while any landlords failing to meet necessary standards will need to transfer the management of the dwelling to a management agent approved by the local temporary accommodation board. This should minimise the chance of a property leaving the system.

A clear and straightforward complaints procedure is required that is easily accessed – for example, utilising existing local authority housing phone lines, free of charge, and anonymous.

Temporary accommodation boards must define minimum standards for service charges and use greenlists or exclusion lists to recognise where these standards are being met.

Central to making these processes work, tenants must be supported to play a key role in the activities of the temporary accommodation board. This can begin through the encouragement of tenant groups, which will provide a forum in which issues can be raised and discussed, experiences shared – both positive and negative, and information fed back to the temporary accommodation boards.

STAGE 4: MOVING OUT AND MOVING ON

The challenges

Only four of our research participants had no desire to move out of UTA, and of these just one called the accommodation 'home'. The vast majority of UTA tenants aim to find more secure and stable accommodation that they can consider 'home'. Unfortunately, all too often tenants have little control over this process.

The insecurity of tenure, lack of clarity over rights and an inevitable sense of powerlessness can negatively impact on individuals' mental health and make the experience of living in UTA even more distressing (Credland 2004). It is common for evictions to be made without warning, for unsubstantiated reasons and with immediate effect, although in the case of some of our participants, they were evicted for seemingly legitimate reasons, such as substance misuse or behavioural issues. However, often decisions are made on arbitrary grounds or relating to unavoidable illnesses, and even in response to tenants having made complaints or reported physical problems with the property. Eighteen of our 45 research participants said they were in constant fear of eviction. One participant had been evicted 13 times over a 16-month period, to be housed repeatedly in UTA. Tenants were also frequently moved

⁹ The 'fit and proper' test is a condition of HMO licensing, designed to 'ensure that those responsible for operating the licence and managing the property are of sufficient integrity and good character' (DCLG 2010: 24). Examples of 'wrong doings' that could prevent a licence from being granted include unlawful discrimination, contravening landlord and tenant law, committing offences involving fraud, violence, drugs, or sexual offences (ibid).

between various UTA, or once evicted fell into a cycle of sofa-surfing and rough sleeping before returning to UTA. All these factors exacerbate the multiple disadvantages individuals already face, and thus create obstacles to their securing a longer-term housing option.

Individuals seeking to move out of UTA by their own choosing, into a more suitable long-term option, therefore, continue to face the same challenges that led them into temporary accommodation in the first place. The private rental sector, for example, usually demands both a deposit and advance rent, plus references, credit history and proof of employment in order to agree a tenancy. Such demands, especially in the context of significant rent inflation, can make private renting simply not an option for these tenants.

Compounding these barriers to moving out of UTA are the practical difficulties encountered in finding and expressing interest in alternative accommodation options. Having regular access to the internet, for example, is important for searching for properties and keeping in contact with potential landlords and agents. Housing benefit restrictions imposed by landlords can also exclude many people from applying for particular properties. Figures vary but there are suggestions that as many as 55 per cent of landlords are reluctant to let their accommodation to individuals receiving housing benefit (Gousy 2014).

Social housing offers an alternative but the chance of securing a place can be quite remote due to declining local authority stock, growing waiting lists and the fact that many households often accumulate rent arrears, which prevents individuals from accessing further social housing. The priority and banding process in theory should support those most in need to access social housing and yet single homeless households, as compared to families with children, often believe their likelihood of being housed is so small that they do not bother to register.

Support workers have also reported that individuals with complex needs can be prevented from applying for social or supported housing in cases in which their support needs – for example, substance misuse – are ongoing or considered too great a risk to successfully maintain their accommodation. Yet remaining in unsupported temporary accommodation can often hinder rehabilitation efforts, as described above.

With appropriate support, however, individuals can secure more sustainable and appropriate accommodation. Of the 45 participants in our research, by the end of the research period two had moved into housing association accommodation, seven into housing in the private rental sector, and nine into supported accommodation. The experiences of our participants suggest that such moves are nearly always made through accessing the help of voluntary-sector support agencies. However, the voluntary sector is reporting significant challenges, with a large backlog of cases, limited resources, and issues with the supply of available accommodation options (Homeless Link 2014, 2015). Of our participants, there are also 27 for whom more secure and supported accommodation has not been found, demonstrating the struggles still being faced.

Recommendations for reforming policy to support sustained and positive outcomes

Policy must address both the problem of UTA tenants experiencing frequent evictions and the obstacles tenants face when trying to move out of the system and into secure, long-term housing.

To reduce the insecurity of tenure, which remains a key feature of England's UTA, we recommend the following:

No eviction should be carried out without a pre-eviction written warning being issued. This should be sent both to the tenant and the tenant's named support worker so that both are aware of the landlord's concerns and can devise a plan for changing the unwanted behaviour accordingly. Where the warning appears unjustified or the tenant wishes to challenge an accusation, this procedure will provide an opportunity for discussion ahead of any eviction, with the support worker available to facilitate this where necessary. This should be written into the locally agreed, standardised tenancy agreement.

Where landlords are found to be repeatedly issuing evictions without a pre-eviction written warning, or without legitimate complaint, they should be added to local exclusion lists.

Supporting tenants to pursue and sustain a place in alternative accommodation makes an important contribution to the tenant's journey as they seek to gain more control over their housing situation. Therefore, we recommend the following:

Tenants should be able to access support from a support worker for up to six months after leaving UTA, to gain advice on managing accommodation budgets and responsibilities, and the help of early interventions where potential problems are identified. The aim is to help prevent a tenant returning to temporary accommodation.

Local housing associations should be included on temporary accommodation boards to involve them in decision-making and the design of services offered to single homeless households.

4.

CONCLUSION: BUILDING A SOLUTION

Over the course of this three-year research project we have witnessed some positive steps in supporting UTA tenants, which, as case studies of good practice in the handbook accompanying this report demonstrate, present lessons to inform further improvements to services. However, the reality is that 16 of our 45 research participants are still yet to move into secure accommodation and the number of single homeless households nationally is increasing (Fitzpatrick et al 2016). The amount of current provision and its nature are simply not sufficient to address ongoing concerns about the accommodation options available to single homeless households and the lived experiences of tenants in UTA.

Experiences of homelessness vary from person to person, and individuals' journeys in and out of UTA are unique reflections of personal circumstances, the local support on offer, and their initial interaction with services, which can determine the path their journey follows subsequently. This research has nevertheless identified four key stages which all individuals are likely to go through. At each of these stages, there are practical solutions that at the very least can improve people's experiences – both in terms of the processes and the accommodation on offer – while in the longer term, they can help break the UTA cycle of drifting in and out of the system, unable to find a permanent and stable home. These solutions can be adapted and enacted at a local level to address the opportunities and challenges specific to particular geographical areas, and draw on the resources, contacts and expertise of homeless charities, local authorities and other agencies through partnership working.

Central to this work is our recommendation of the creation of temporary accommodation boards. These will facilitate the coordination of partners across a local area as well as the involvement of UTA tenants themselves in working towards the ultimate aim of improving the UTA journey. Involvement of all parties, including tenants, is vital in ensuring all aspects of experiences of UTA are addressed – from safety and security to hygiene, from physical and mental wellbeing to financial guidance. It is also crucial that tenants are empowered through this process to retain as much control as possible over their lives and accommodation in challenging circumstances. Through temporary accommodation boards, further recommendations can be implemented to support the development of greenlists and exclusion lists, minimum standards and appropriate in-tenancy support programmes.

FURTHER RESOURCES

The 'Journey home' toolkit provides the guidance and information organisations will need to set up their own temporary accommodation board, drawing on examples from areas where these structures and practices are starting to become established and are having a positive impact. Central to this toolkit are a new handbook on setting up a temporary accommodation board and a wallchart that provides a visual representation of an individual's journey in and out of UTA and the stages at which interventions can be made. Both of these accompany this report, while further resources – such as a move-in checklist, templates for letters to landlords, and example license agreements – can be found online at: <https://www.justlife.org.uk/research/the-journey-home-full-toolkit/>.

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