



## No More 'Us & Them'

**A brief analysis of opportunities for cross-sector collaboration around Temporary Accommodation.**

Authors: Gill Taylor and Rebecca Towers

November 2023

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>FOREWORDS</b>	1
<b>INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT</b>	5
<b>RESEARCH BRIEF</b>	9
Aims	9
Methodology	9
Confidentiality	11
<b>WHAT WE HEARD FROM COUNCILS</b>	12
<b>COLLABORATIVE INSIGHTS</b>	13
Steering Group	13
Better TA Showcase Event	13
Lunch And Learn	14
<b>KEY FINDINGS</b>	15
Working Beyond Policy	15
Every Borough Does TA Differently	15
Is it Really 'Us vs Them'?	16
Knowledge Gaps	16
Invisibility of Protected Characteristics	17
<b>POSITIVE PRACTICE</b>	18
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE</b>	20
Support for Households in TA	20
Civic Participation is a Lever for Change	21
Building Power through Collective Voice	22
Working With Tension	23
Learning Together	24
Resourcing and Capacity	25
Discrimination and Inequality	26
<b>PROJECT OUTPUTS</b>	27
Report	27
Policy Factsheets	27
Visual Tools	28
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	29
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	30
<b>APPENDIX 1: VISUAL NOTES</b>	31

# FOREWORD: BETTER TA STEERING GROUP

As organisations that work with people living in temporary accommodation in London, we see the stark reality of the homelessness crisis every day: the uncertainty, the all-too-often horrendous conditions, and the uprooting of people's lives. We can't change this alone. We need to work with local authorities and not just on individual cases, at a systemic level where long-term change is possible.

Doing that effectively requires better understanding about how council decisions are made. From the outside, local government can often feel impenetrable - and this challenge is even greater for small organisations dealing with multiple councils.

With that in mind, this inquiry into how councils in London approach decisions around temporary accommodation is welcomed by the funded partners of the Better Temporary Accommodation initiative.

The research finds that there is huge diversity in the location, responsibility, and recency of published policies around temporary accommodation, which makes it difficult for community organisations to know where to start. And policies can only go so far.

In practice, councils are having to work outside of their formal commitments, due to the extremely limited resources and properties available to them. Concerningly, all too often this means that protected characteristics like race, gender, and religion are simply invisible in decision-making, leading to further inequalities affecting communities who already experience marginalisation, prejudice and stigma.

The findings also pose a challenge to organisations like ours. Councils describe a feeling of 'us and them' in relation to community organisations, which adds

further tension to an extremely challenging situation, and can lead to their reluctance to engage with us at all. While we will always advocate for the people we support, and challenge decisions or practices that we believe are incorrect or discriminatory, an approach that fails to recognise the pressures that council housing departments are under will only lead to resentment and defensiveness. Ultimately, this doesn't help Londoners at risk of homelessness.

We hope that this report and its recommendations will lay the foundation for collaborative future relationships between local authorities and community organisations, that ultimately help to improve the experiences of people living in temporary accommodation.

**Ilinca Diaconescu**, London Gypsies and Travellers

**Peter Ekakoro**, Positive East

**Jamie Thunder**, Z2K

# FOREWORD: CHAIR OF LONDON HOMELESSNESS & HOUSING NEEDS GROUP

The homelessness sector is facing a time of unprecedented challenge. In more than 20 years of working in homelessness, I have never seen temporary accommodation in such crisis. The pressure is enormous, with a lack of options for households, increased demand, reduced resources and recruitment and morale issues.

By fostering greater understanding between local authorities and voluntary sector organisations we are better placed to face these challenges. In the face of this emergency, cross sector working is vital, collaboration is needed between organisations who are working to support households living in temporary accommodation.

For this to be a success we must first acknowledge that we have to work with tension, not avoid it, as we won't always agree or come from the same angle. It's going to be important to open up our lines of communication and start to build and rebuild relationships.

In order to do this, local authorities need to communicate more clearly and more often, managing expectations about what we can achieve, and what resources are available. Our sector needs to be more open and transparent with information. Dialogue face to face, not paperwork, is what will generate better understanding between us.

In Newham we have experienced the richness of support that partner organisations can provide, from a range of organisations, such as the fantastic Magpie Project, and we have seen how this really enhances the local authority offer.

In my experience, proper engagement and building trust takes time but it reaps rewards in really practical ways, such as savings on time and resource, but also through the voluntary sector bringing the lived experience to the table and providing fresh insight and challenge.

On behalf of the London Councils' Homelessness and Housing Needs Group I would like to thank the Steering Group of the Better TA initiative for leading on this important work. I fully support this report and hope the recommendations can support us to develop a collective voice and work together to achieve better outcomes for households in need.

**Candida Thompson**, Assistant Director Housing Needs, Newham Council

# INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

This brief report brings together data and insights from a collaborative enquiry that took place in Autumn 2023 as part of Trust for London's [Better Temporary Accommodation for Londoners](#) initiative. Independent researchers Gill Taylor and Rebecca Towers sought to identify opportunities to build the capacity of community organisations to create change, by influencing what happens in their local area. Specifically, our aim was to explore local authority policy, practice and decision-making around Temporary Accommodation (TA) in the boroughs where funded partners work, to identify where they can have greater influence and impact on local and regional decision-making.

## **Better TA Initiative**

The Better TA initiative is a funding partnership between Trust for London and Oak Foundation. The initiative has funded 11 organisations with the shared aim to make stays in Temporary Accommodation (TA) as short, safe and healthy as possible. They seek to achieve this by strengthening the voices of Londoners with experience of TA and organisations working with them, building the capacity and connections of organisations working to create change and, by improving access to support for people living in TA.

The funded partners who make up the Better TA Initiative (so far) are:

1. South-West Law Centre/Croydon Citizens Advice Bureau
2. Golden Opportunity Skills and Development (GOSAD)
3. Creating Ground
4. London Gypsies and Travellers
5. Groundswell
6. Central Hill Residents Assoc
7. Justlife
8. Magpie Project
9. London Renters Union

10. Positive East

11. 72k

### **Temporary Accommodation is in Crisis**

This research has been conducted during a time of unprecedented pressure on temporary accommodation. The current demand for TA far outstrips available supply and this is significantly affecting the quality, cost, location and appropriateness of accommodation. Recent research by London Councils<sup>1</sup> tells a worrying story of deepening poverty and inequality in the capital:

- 1 in 50 Londoners are now homeless, which equates to 1 child in every classroom
- 169,363 Londoners currently living in TA (83,500 children)
- 781% increase in the number of households in B&B accommodation for longer than the statutory 6-week maximum (compared to the same period in 2022)
- At least 55% of London households in TA are from non-white backgrounds, compared to 15% for the rest of England.

The current supply crisis has been triggered, in part, by private landlords withdrawing their properties from the market, which allows remaining landlords to demand higher rents and to get away with poorer standards. Rates set out in the pan-London [Inter-Borough Temporary Accommodation Agreement](#) (IBTAA) and those set by Local Housing Allowance rates, have not changed since 2020 despite a significant increase in rental costs. This creates a highly challenging environment for Councils procuring TA placements. Councils are expected to fund the rising costs of temporary accommodation from their general fund budgets, with inadequate funding from central government despite the rising numbers of people in need. There is little sign from central government that change is on the way.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://beta.londoncouncils.gov.uk/news/2023/one-50-londoners-homeless-housing-disaster-unfolds-capital>



Our inquiry has sought to work generously with everyone who has given their time to talk to us, complete our surveys or meet us in person. We have sought to identify opportunities for change that reflect what is practically possible within existing budgets and with current policy and legislation.

### **Solidarity is Strength**

The current situation is so concerning that London's Deputy Mayor for Housing, Tom Copley, joined the [London Housing Panel](#) – a group of 15 voluntary organisations - and the [London Housing Directors Group](#) (LHDG), made up of senior officers from every local authority in the city, in signing an open letter<sup>2</sup> to Michael Gove, Secretary of State with responsibility for housing and homelessness. Their call to the government is clear: immediate action is needed to support low-income Londoners in insecure housing that offers them a chance to rebuild their lives.

This collaboration between London's public and charity sectors represents a united front in the face of the deepening divisions of the homelessness crisis. This report seeks to expand the possibilities for further cross-sector collaboration around TA, because bringing together diverse expertise, capacities and perspectives has the greatest chance of bringing about change. Meaningful cross-sector partnership must engage with issues around power, accountability and trust, as well as with opportunities for radical

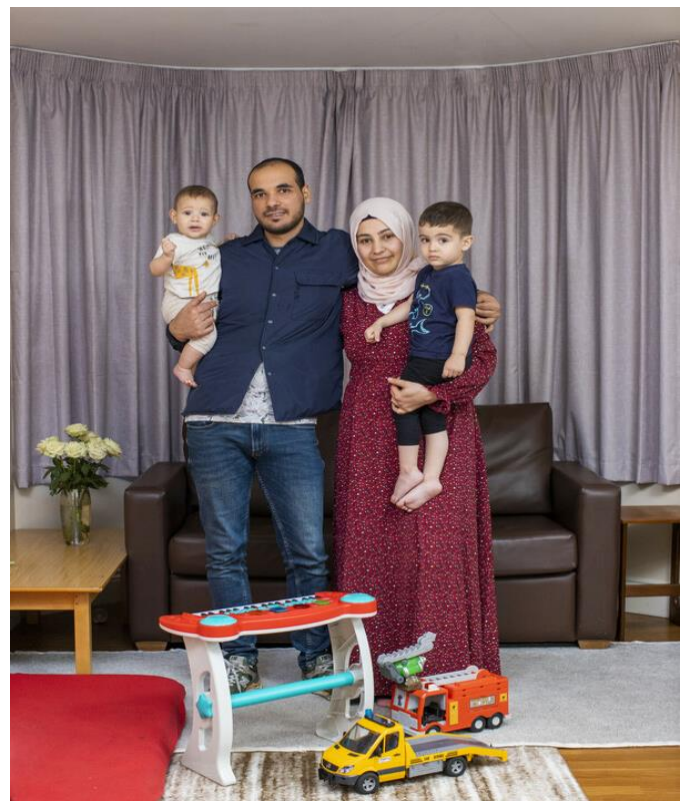


Figure 1: Liam McBurney/PA/ Centre for Homelessness

---

<sup>2</sup> [www.trustforlondon.org.uk/news/public-and-charity-sectors-demand-government-intervention-to-tackle-homelessness-crisis/](http://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/news/public-and-charity-sectors-demand-government-intervention-to-tackle-homelessness-crisis/)

honesty, knowledge-sharing and systems change.

### **Lived Experience**

This inquiry is explicitly about public sector decision-making and the relationship between councils and community organisations, not the experience of people living in temporary accommodation which has been researched and showcased extensively by our partners. Nonetheless, Gill brings lived experience of homelessness into the research and authorship of this inquiry, and we have been privileged throughout to collaborate and learn from funded partners, their volunteers and service users who have experience of living in temporary accommodation.

Notably, we were informed and energised by the lived experience insights shared in [Groundswell](#)'s peer-led research "*Improving the health of people living in Temporary Accommodation in London*"<sup>3</sup> and by the award-winning Rights, Experience, Advocacy and Change (REACH) team hosted by the [Magpie Project](#) and the 'Magpie Mums' generally. We also welcomed the opportunity to read the newly published report<sup>4</sup> by [London Gypsies and Travellers](#), describing the outcome of their *Hackney Young Travellers Homelessness Project*, highlighting the powerful role of culturally appropriate housing and support and the impact of systemic racism and discrimination against communities at risk of homelessness.

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://groundswell.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Improving-the-health-of-people-living-in-Temporary-Accommodation-in-London-Sep23.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [https://tfl.ams3.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com/media/documents/LGT\\_Hackney\\_homeless\\_report\\_21Sept23\\_web.pdf](https://tfl.ams3.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com/media/documents/LGT_Hackney_homeless_report_21Sept23_web.pdf)

# RESEARCH BRIEF

## Aims

Our research took place between August and October 2023 and the following priorities were initially identified:

- Outlining where and how decisions are made about the procurement, inspection and allocation of temporary accommodation
- Identifying opportunities for funded-partners to participate in decision-making
- Exploring the shared and unique challenges facing local authorities in securing quality TA
- Establishing how boroughs are responding to key issues such as quality
- Highlighting good practice and opportunities to strengthen it
- Understanding how issues of race and intersectionality are addressed in policy and practice

It became clear in the early weeks of our enquiry that the current pressures on TA are forcing the majority of London boroughs to work beyond their policy commitments as they try to meet their statutory duties<sup>5</sup>. It is unclear if, or when, the situation will change. This resulted in an agreement with our Steering Group to emphasise broad trends and platform opportunities for collaboration and positive practice, rather than focussing on specific policy commitments and how they are delivered.

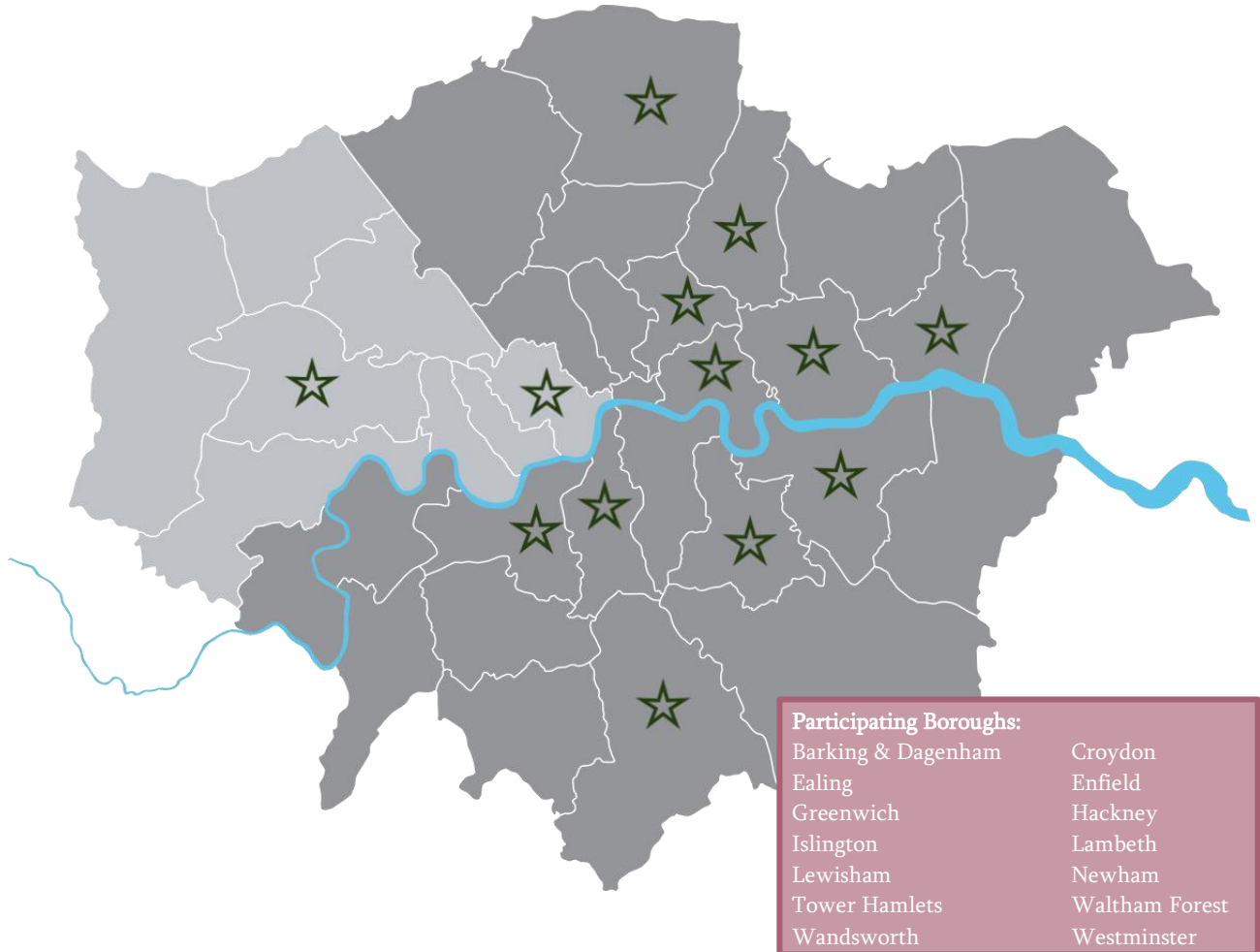
## Methodology

To identify published strategic priorities, decision-making processes, organisational structures and multi-agency approaches around TA, a key

---

<sup>5</sup> As described in the Housing Act (1996), Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) and Homelessness Code of Guidance

element of our enquiry was a targeted desktop analysis of TA policy and strategy in the boroughs where our funded partners operate.



We followed the desktop analysis with an invitation to Senior Managers and elected Members from those boroughs, to complete a short survey or participate in an informal interview with us. Interviews explored some of what emerged from the desktop analysis as well as inviting interviewees to share their reflections on cross-sector collaboration around TA in their borough, key local challenges and priorities and opportunities for community organisations to play a greater role in decision-making and strategy development going forward. Five boroughs responded to our invitation to interview, a further 3 to the survey.

In addition to borough-specific interviews, we met with London Councils, the Pan-London Homelessness and Housing Needs Group (made up of local authority homelessness and temporary accommodation managers from all 33 London boroughs) and [Setting the Standard](#).

Finally, we were invited to spend the morning visiting four in-borough temporary accommodation properties managed by one local authority. This gave us an insight into the different challenges of privately owned vs council owned TA properties, as well as an insight into the strength of leadership required from local authority officers to deliver quality in-house accommodation and support.

### **Confidentiality**

We recognise the challenges and tensions, for some public sector officers, in speaking freely about the pressures on temporary accommodation and the impact that has on local systems and partnerships. In order to enable people to speak freely about their concerns, ideas and reflections on TA, our interviews were conducted confidentially.

Any quotes and case studies used in this report have been anonymised, or shared with explicit permission.

## WHAT WE HEARD FROM COUNCILS

The following selection of quotes are taken from our conversations with Council officers and elected Members. They are included to show the depth of these conversations and to highlight the shared sense of frustration and commitment to partnership of both statutory and community partners.

Working well with community groups can be the difference between a good and bad experience for a family in TA. This work has really shown me that

Offering training to community groups about the basics of housing law has really helped relationships.

I don't think any housing officer is placing people in substandard TA because they don't care. At the moment, they don't have any other options

**We know [community groups] can offer things we can't. I just wish there was less tension in the relationships**

Having a VCS Manager has really helped make sure our community groups are kept up to date and know about opportunities to get involved in stuff.

Rallying people together with a clear focus and specific goals has helped our relationship with community groups. They can see it's not just a 'talking shop'

I can't sleep at night sometimes thinking about people; I think we all take the cases home

There's a real 'us and them' attitude sometimes. It feels like community groups are just waiting for us to make a mistake

*There's lots of green shoots and silver linings if we look for them*

*We need to hear more from people who have actually lived in TA, should they be shaping how we work with community groups?*

We try to avoid placing people in areas where there's a lot of known incidents of hate crime and we spend a lot of time looking for accessible properties. But I'd be lying if I said protected characteristics are a priority.

There's so much shame amongst councils about the numbers [of people in TA], which makes it way harder to be a critical friend to each other.

# COLLABORATIVE INSIGHTS

## Steering Group

A dedicated Steering Group supported our enquiry, meeting with us to share and test ideas, discuss emerging findings and shape our approach to the interviews, events and outputs of our enquiry. The Steering Group was chaired by Z2K and Positive East, and was made up of three funded partners and Trust for London.

## Better TA Showcase Event

In late September 2023, we were invited to participate in the Better TA Showcase Event.

The full-day event was an incredible opportunity to hear about the work of the initiatives funded partners and was attended by a wide array of cross-sector organisations, expert practitioners, council officers and elected Members.

This event was an important listening exercise for our enquiry. We were able to test our emerging findings by listening to insights from lived experience and frontline delivery as well as by speaking to attendees and speakers.

This event foregrounded the value of solidarity and the need to allow space for tension and frustration in cross-sector partnerships, as opposed to trying to

## Visiting TA

We were pleased to be invited to spend a morning in Hackney visiting four temporary accommodation properties that they own (3) or manage (1).

We were impressed by the quality of the accommodation the council owns and by the commitment, energy and insight of the managers and staff we spoke to. They shared some of the challenges and successes they have had working with private TA landlords, told us about their partnerships with local playgroups and generously answered our many questions about the experiences of TA residents, relationships with neighbours and the engagement of elected Members.

Hackney have invested significantly in buying properties to deliver more TA in-house, reflecting that not only is it better value for money than working with private landlords, it results in more responsive services for residents and better quality accommodation. Whilst TA can never make up for the comforts of a stable home the example from Hackney highlights that providing good quality TA is within reach of London boroughs if they make long-term commitment and investment.

"smooth things over for the sake of appearances".

### Lunch And Learn

A key input and output of our enquiry was the delivery of a learning event. Held in late October 2023, we hosted a lunch and learn event attended by council officers, funded partners and other key stakeholders including London Councils, Shelter and others.

The event gave us the opportunity to introduce our findings and invite attendees to discuss them, ask questions and share their ideas. The discussions in this event were rich and powerful, and were captured by a visual note taker<sup>6</sup> as an output of the project.

This visual note could be used as a poster or training and discussion tool by councils and funded partners to explore local challenges and ways of working together. You can find a full-page version at the end of this document.

Better Temporary Accommodation for Londoners seeks to ensure that stays in TA are as short, healthy and safe as possible.

HOUSING IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST DRIVERS OF POVERTY IN LONDON

One child in every classroom in London is living in temporary accommodation.

**WELCOME**

**TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION IS IN 'CRISIS'**

*the issues...*

we all have legal and policy **KNOWLEDGE GAPS!**

**GAPACITY** IS STRETCHED what can we do with the tools we already have?

Many of our employees are **BURNT OUT** under pressure and at risk of homelessness themselves.

**PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS AREN'T TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN DECISIONS ABOUT TA PLACEMENTS**

- Age
- Gender
- Race
- Disability
- Religion
- Sexual orientation
- Migration status

*and our recommendations.*

Get to know the local **LEVERS OF CHANGE** and **HOW TO USE THEM!**

**THERE IS POWER** IN HAVING A SEAT AT THE TABLE

and always listen to the voices of those with **LIVED EXPERIENCE.**

We need **BETTER RELATIONSHIPS** and **COMMUNICATION** to be able to tackle the issues further

**CONVERSATIONS TOGETHER, in the same ROOM!**

**COUNCILS CAN SEE COMMUNITY GROUPS AS AGITATORS, NOT PARTNERS.**

We need **TRANSPARENCY** and the ability to access information easily.

**no more US vs THEM!** NO-ONE CAN TACKLE THE HOMELESSNESS CRISIS ALONE

**SOLIDARITY equals STRENGTH**

<sup>6</sup> Bridget Meyne - <http://www.bridget-m.com/>



## KEY FINDINGS

### Working Beyond Policy

Boroughs and funded partners all expressed serious concerns about the current situation, with Councils sharing that they are having to work outside of their desired state and beyond their policy commitments due to demand and supply pressures. There is an overall feeling that central government needs to act to intervene in the housing crisis, specifically to control rents, increase Local Housing Allowance and to strengthen penalties on landlords for not meeting quality standards.



### Every Borough Does TA Differently

Boroughs have a range of different approaches to TA policy and strategy, as well as to where and how this work is delivered in their organisations. This results in TA policy commitments described in a wide variety of differently named documents, that are often hard to find online, out of date and 'owned' by differently named and structured teams in each authority each with slightly different responsibilities.

This variation in approach is also apparent in how boroughs engage with statutory and community partners

around TA. Some boroughs are more outward facing than others, hosting or participating in multi-agency forums, such as Temporary Accommodation Action Groups (TAAG's), and proud to talk about their attempts to meaningfully co-design policy and strategy with community partners and people with lived experience of homelessness. Others described their reluctance to meet with community groups because they will be 'shouted at' over issues they don't feel they have any control over e.g. placing people in B&B or out of borough. Some boroughs told us that they feel it is their responsibility to be visible in the

community, sharing data about the local homelessness situation, dispelling myths and building relationships. However, beyond a few notable exceptions TA data and policy feels 'hidden' on Council websites and discussions about TA are increasingly happening behind closed doors.

### Is it Really 'Us vs Them'?

Almost every London borough prioritises working in partnership with community organisations to prevent and respond to homelessness. Their strategies, websites and decision documents recognise that community organisations connect deeply with residents and are well placed to respond to their needs and experiences, especially those from marginalised groups or communities that are new to the borough.

In practice, Councils and community groups find partnership work around TA challenging and this is exacerbated by the current pressures around TA availability. There is a lot of tension in interactions, and Councils described feeling that when decisions about TA are challenged that it is a sign of 'not working in partnership'. Some boroughs are working positively with this tension (notably Tower Hamlets, Westminster and

Hackney) but there is an overall sense of 'us and them' which creates defensiveness and prevents meaningful collaboration or the best use of the unique roles that different orgs can play to enable positive outcomes.

### Knowledge Gaps

Both Councils and community organisations recognise knowledge gaps around legal literacy, local democracy and bigger picture issues, such as the housing market and welfare reform.

The complex and varying nature of local democratic processes is far from obvious, and most community organisations are unclear about when, where and how decisions are made or how they can participate. Whilst this leaves community organisations feeling 'shut out' by the Council, local authority staff often see community organisations as agitators who "don't understand", rather than trusted partners.

There is limited multi-agency training provided by boroughs around housing and homelessness, and in many boroughs there are very few forums

and meeting spaces where law and policy, local data and qualitative insights can be shared and discussed between partners. This leaves significant knowledge gaps about the local context and in these gaps there is the possibility that inaccurate advice may be given to households at risk of homelessness.

### **Invisibility of Protected Characteristics**

There is emerging positive practice in respect of how protected characteristics, as defined by Equality Act (2010), are considered in relation to homelessness and to TA placements.

We were pleased to see an analysis of TA and homelessness that considered race, gender, religion and other characteristics in a couple of published and draft homelessness strategies. Equally, we were encouraged to learn that one or two boroughs are informally considering cultural differences, risk of hate crime and distance to vital health services when making TA placements. However overall, Councils were clear that meaningfully considering a household's protected characteristics when making

TA placements is simply not possible in the context of such a severe shortage of available properties. Although boroughs could recognise the importance of housing and support that responds to individual characteristics and needs, most appeared to consider this a 'nice to have'.

It was notable during interviews that most Councils were not routinely considering how a household's protected characteristics might affect the support they want or need when settling into and sustaining a TA placement. In discussing the role of culturally-informed, accessible and inclusive tenancy support in TA, Councils recognised that community groups could play a key role in improving TA outcomes and in strengthening Personal Housing Plans. Several agreed that this type of support is worth investing in and that it would be worthwhile exploring available grants and funding for the community sector to provide additional support to people in TA.

## POSITIVE PRACTICE

There is little to celebrate about temporary accommodation in the current crisis. Everyone we spoke to expressed their frustration, and their empathy towards households experiencing the realities of homelessness in London today. More than one Council officer we spoke to mentioned the shame and dissonance that arises from working in ways that don't align with their values.

Nonetheless, we were encouraged to learn about positive practice between community organisations and local authorities that are having a positive impact on people's lives by forging new ways to work together in challenging times. We recognise that every borough has unique challenges around TA, and different resources available to tackle the problem but we hope these examples can inspire and energise those who are looking to improve partnership and direct practice with homeless households.

### **Magpie Project and Newham Public Health Team**

The Magpie Project are award-winning for a reason. Working tirelessly to ensure the voices of migrant women and their children are listened to in local government, they embarked on a social media campaign that made the health and welfare issues of families in TA and Home Office asylum hotels unignorable. London Borough of Newham's Public Health Team recognised the need to respond and began working with Magpie to maximise the support available eat healthily, play, volunteer and make connections.

Their relationship is an exemplar in *working with tension*, highlighting the importance of acknowledging and addressing power in cross-sector relationships.

### **Westminster and Justlife – TAAG**

Temporary Accommodation Action Groups<sup>7</sup> bring people together key temporary accommodation stakeholders to collaborate to improve the lives of those without a home. In a period of such significant pressure on TA, any it is

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.justlife.org.uk/our-work/national/temporary-accommodation-action-group>

highly significant that a London borough such as Westminster has made a commitment to hosting a TAAG. We were impressed to hear Westminster council officers speak about the value of listening, of being honest about the pressures and of trying to find solutions together, even if they're not always easy to find. We were also pleased to hear from members of the TAAG who spoke about how they had co-created a challenging but genuinely collaborative space.

### **Wandsworth & South-West Law Centres**

Law centres are often thrust into relationships with local authorities as they represent residents who challenge statutory decisions made about them. Relationships between councils and law centres are often tense and combative. In Wandsworth, in part thanks to the skill and tenacity of [South-West Law Centres](#) and in part because of the energy and change in direction of the current political administration, a partnership has been forged which is making a significant difference to people living in TA and the organisations who support them. By providing regular spaces for residents living in TA to come together and share their views and experiences, the Law Centre has been able to raise key issues with local decision-makers and secure commitments for change and improvement.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

The Better TA Initiative is currently funded to continue until 2025. It is hoped that the following recommendations will support funded partners in their efforts to make Temporary Accommodation stays as short, safe and healthy as possible. Each recommendation includes some examples of how it could look in practice, as well as some reflective questions that we hope can activate discussions for Councils about how they can use their system convening role.

## Support for Households in TA

A household's experience in TA is not only about where it's located, it's about the support available to settle into a new community or neighbourhood and to address the issues that led to homelessness in the first place. Community organisations are perfectly placed to offer this kind of tenancy sustainment support, and to share information with councils about issues in TA they may not be aware of, including quality issues, repairs, anti-social behaviour and safeguarding concerns. This is already happening, but often in uncoordinated and informal ways rather than through joint working agreements or referral pathways.

Community organisations are especially well placed to support households with specific requirements around language, culture and religion or those seeking gender and/or sexuality informed support. Some of the ways to do this include:

- Meet with the Council to discuss how your organisation can support households in TA and what you need to do this effectively;
- Working with Housing Officers to develop personalised and culturally sensitive Personal Housing Plans, making sure the support available from VCS organisations is seen as an integral part of the TA support offer;

- Explore how your services could enable people living in TA to better understand their housing options and the realities of the local housing situation;

*To Councils: How could you work in closer alignment with community organisations to ensure homeless households have access to targeted and culturally appropriate support whilst living in TA? How could this support positive moves out of TA? How could this aid discussions with landlords or internal repairs teams?*

### Civic Participation is a Lever for Change

Community organisations, especially smaller ones, are largely absent from local democratic processes. Given these spaces are where council policies and strategies are formally discussed and agreed, getting more involved in local democracy is a key opportunity for community partners to share their insights and data with senior leaders and elected officials, to discuss and comment on policy proposals and to strengthen connections with other relevant statutory and community partners.

Temporary accommodation and homelessness are a priority for discussion at a range of statutory forums and political meetings held in every borough, including but not limited to:

- Housing Scrutiny Panel
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Homelessness Prevention Board
- Health and Wellbeing Board
- Community Safety Partnership

Community organisations would significantly benefit from participating in these Boards, forums and meetings and from building relationships with their Chairs and members. Some ways to do this include:

- Find out who your Lead Member and Chair of Scrutiny are, contact them and invite them to visit your organisation;

- Find out when committee meetings are planned and what upcoming items are going to be discussed;
- Read the minutes from when TA was last discussed and reflect on what you could add to the next discussion about the council's priorities for action;

*To Council Officers: What can you do to make local democracy more accessible to community organisations? What conversations would you need to have, and with who, for this to be meaningful and productive?*

## Building Power through Collective Voice

The issues and pressures around temporary accommodation affect each borough differently, and each council has very different resources available to tackle homelessness and support those who experience it. However, the issues at the heart of the crisis in temporary accommodation are evidently of pan-London and national concern. Community organisations have a long history of “speaking truth to power” and of bringing about local change, but they are often small organisations with limited reach beyond their borough or the community they serve.

Community orgs have an opportunity to build power through collaboration with others. Whether in cross-sector partnerships, such as the one that came together to write the open letter to Michael Gove, or as part of long-term coalitions and networks, coming together to call for change that is powerful, bold and unignorable. Some ways to do this include:

- Connect with other organisations in your borough and meet to talk about your shared and different experiences of supporting people living in TA;
- Work together to ‘map’ the organisations working in and around TA, invite them to get together to share data and discuss common priorities and issues. Put this together as a ‘Call for Evidence’ report and share the findings with the Council;



- Make use of online tools, like Slack and Whatsapp, to keep the conversation going between meetings;
- Think about joint open letters, community events and media campaigns to maximise your collective voice;
- Think about the skills and expertise you each bring to working in partnership – how can you make use of these collectively;
- Approach statutory partners together and request a 'seat at the table'.

*To Council Officers: What can you do to spotlight local and pan-London campaigns around TA within your organisation? How can you create space for community organisations to come together around issues of priority for your borough and beyond?*

## Working With Tension

Councils and VCS organisations have different roles, powers and permissions and this will create tension and frustration sometimes. Ultimately, although Council officers don't necessarily hold power as individuals, organisations who uphold and administer legal rights and duties, who determine how public resources are spent and what issues are prioritised for action hold significant power and are accountable for the decisions they make on behalf of their communities. Community organisations are often highly frustrated by Council decisions and actions, but this is sometimes expressed in ways that feel performative and ultimately won't bring about change.

Working with this tension, rather than trying to ignore it, can be a really powerful way to get to the heart of issues that matter locally. Respectful disagreement between partners is crucial to working together creatively and constructively. Some ways to do this include:

- Consider hosting regular 'VCS Listening Sessions', inviting elected Members and local Leaders to simply listen to the concerns and ideas of VCS organisations.

- Create more opportunities for statutory and community partners to meet and talk to each other. Try and do this without an agenda and see where the conversation goes!
- Explore setting up a Temporary Accommodation Action Group (TAAG) in your borough;
- Consider hosting a regular Multi-agency Community of Practice around supporting households in TA;

*To Council Officers: How can you create space for community organisations to express their concerns and frustrations with you? How can you make local complaints, appeals and feedback processes more accessible and meaningful? What skills are needed to give and receive critical but collaborative feedback?*

## Learning Together

TA is a complex area of law, policy and practice and the impact of the housing crisis makes it a highly pressurised arena to work in. Staff retention is low, burn out and sickness is high and issues such as compassion fatigue<sup>8</sup> are a genuine concern for all organisations and sectors. Enabling all staff, regardless of organisation or sector, to participate in training and other learning opportunities together is an opportunity to strengthen partnership working, to improve positive outcomes for local residents and to tackle burn out. Some opportunities to explore include:

- Multi-agency Reflective Practice following incidents or cases of concern;
- Multi-agency training around practice such as trauma-informed care, anti-racist practice and LGBTQ+ inclusion;
- VCS training offer on the foundations of housing and welfare law, safeguarding and legal rights;
- Seminars and forums where data and insights about local homelessness trends and experiences are shared and discussed;

---

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.rcn.org.uk/congress/congress-events/compassion-fatigue>

- Site visits to TA and to local community centres;
- Shadowing days for staff from all organisations;
- Conduct a skills audit to understand your teams learning needs around law and policy.

*To Council Officers: How could the provision of multi-agency and VCS training support the work of your team? How can you involve people living in TA to shape the training that staff receive? How can you bring community organisations into your inductions for new staff to encourage relationship building from the outset?*

## Resourcing and Capacity

It perhaps goes without saying that the capacity and resources needed to work effectively to support those who experience homelessness are insufficient to meet the current pressures. People, organisations and the budgets that enable them are already under pressure and, are at further risk as another round of local authority budget cuts loom on the horizon. Councils across the country are expressing concern about the risk of bankruptcy due to the skyrocketing costs of TA.

Community organisations, who already work with highly limited resources and rely on good will and mutual aid are feeling the squeeze of increasing costs and reducing funding. They feel that their capacity to engage with strategic decision-making is limited because their resources are taken up by 'fire fighting' to support people in crisis. Working with these challenges requires creativity and ingenuity, but it also requires a concerted effort to maximise income generation opportunities and support in-kind.

Some suggestions about how to increase capacity and maximise investment in this work include:

- Councils could refocus existing VCS grant funding towards TA priorities and the organisations providing support to TA households;

- Councils could consider utilising their homelessness prevention grants to fund community orgs to deliver move-on support and tenancy sustainment;
- Community orgs could work together on joint or consortium bids for larger grant funds and initiate fundraising campaigns in coalition with each other;
- Councils and community orgs could work together to influence external funders, such as Trusts and Foundations, by speaking about their challenges and how funding might have a positive impact;
- Councils could offer free or subsidised workspace, training and other capacity building support to support VCS orgs in-kind

*To Council Officers: How could you work with colleagues across the Council to build capacity in local community organisations? Are you making use of community buildings in ways that align with TA priorities? What are your commissioning priorities as an organisation and how are these accessible to small organisations?*

## Discrimination and Inequality

Who we are shapes how we live, what we need and where and with who we spend our time. Systemic inequalities, widespread stigma and the failure of statutory institutions to respond to the discrete needs of different communities affects our experiences of safety, our access to services and the outcomes we achieve. There are clear opportunities to make sure that stays in temporary accommodation are sensitive to race, gender, age, sexuality, religion, disability and other identities and lifestyles, even if choice of property and location is severely limited or not possible.

Councils and community organisations can work together to address key issues such as hate crime and community tensions, unequal access to services and disproportionate risks of homelessness. They can also work together to develop working practices around TA that are anti-racist, trauma-informed and accessible, for example by:

- Invite community partners to comment on template letters, leaflets and posters;
- Refer and signpost to specialist services and community groups as part of Personal Housing Plans;
- Councils and community organisations to work together on local issues that affect residents in TA e.g. the impending closure of Home Office-commissioned asylum seeker hotels;
- Hold cross-sector meetings to discuss how to address local, national and global issues (natural disaster, displacement, armed conflict etc) that affect marginalised communities;
- Ask how you can get involved in Equality Impact Assessments about new initiatives related to homelessness and TA;
- Ask questions, share ideas and invite discussion in local forums about inequality, stigma and prejudice affecting homeless households.

*To Council Officers: How can you bring a more explicit focus to the impact of stigma and prejudice on households living in TA? How can you bring community organisations into conversations about these issues? What data do you hold that could shine a light on priorities for action?*

# PROJECT OUTPUTS

## Report

We hope this report is a useful tool for any organisation hoping to build or strengthen cross-sector relationships around temporary accommodation. Our aim is that it's findings and recommendations are an opportunity for reflective discussion and for the development of new ideas in collaboration; every borough will have discrete local priorities, resources and partnership approaches that informs how they work. We offer this report as a resource to start those conversations, rather than a 'how-to' guide.

## Policy Factsheets

A key element of this project was conducting desktop research into the policy and strategy commitments adopted by London boroughs around TA. This work involved desktop analysis of policy documents, analysis of minutes and notes from Scrutiny Panels and other democratic and public forums around housing and homelessness and making contact with Councils to confirm their structures, roles and key contacts.

This analysis has been turned in a series of 12 'factsheets', one for each borough. Each factsheet contains links to key documents, an overview of the priorities they outline and any upcoming opportunities to participate in decision making on key TA-related issues. They also each contain a list of key contacts, including the Chair of local meetings and forums for community organisations to make contact, introduce themselves and begin to form positive relationships.

These factsheets are accompanied by an online database, which offers easy access to key information about each borough. These resources are specifically designed for Better TA funded partners but may be useful to other organisations and indeed to local Councils seeking to benchmark their approach against their geographical or statistical neighbours.

## Visual Tools

The visual notes created from the risk discussion in our Lunch and Learn event are intended for use as a discussion tool, or as part of training and learning events.

We have also created a series of very-short narrated videos, which outline the key learning from our research in an accessible bitesize format. We hope these are visually appealing resources and useful tools for reflection for community organisations, councils and people working in cross-sector partnerships alike.

## CONCLUSION

The brief report offers a snapshot of the extensive work taking place across the city to improve the experiences and outcomes of Londoners at risk of homelessness. It's clear that just as the challenges are fraught with complexity and urgency, the opportunities require creativity and the commitment to the possibilities of solidarity.

Whilst resources may be limited and the housing crisis feels entrenched, we can make the choice to come together and make best use of the discrete resources and levers we have at our disposal. Cross-sector collaboration is not a 'nice to have'; where councils and community organisations are working together it is clearly making a positive impact on our shared priorities.

Working together doesn't mean complicity, nor should it mean relationships where challenge or disagreement are discouraged. A commitment to working in cross-sector partnership should mean a commitment to having the difficult conversations, to accountability, to changing our minds and to building trust. We do this because our shared priority is to end homelessness and, until then, to make it as safe, healthy and short-lived as possible. Meaningful partnership is built over time and requires genuine acknowledgement from Councils about how the power they hold is experienced by residents and community groups. We are seeing the green shoots of this, in the partnerships forming and strengthening in Newham and Westminster for example. Collaboration makes change possible.

Now is not the time to lose hope, our research shows it's the time to build it. Despite the challenges, everyone we spoke to demonstrated an enduring commitment to their work, their communities and the possibilities of coming together. The opportunities for change, through the development of a collective voice, are both urgent and invigorating.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With gratitude to the 11 funded partners who make up the Better TA initiative, the London boroughs and Trust for London, who generously participated in the enquiry at a time of unprecedented scrutiny and pressure. Thanks also to Bridget Meyne for creating the beautiful visual notes from our Lunch and Learn event and in advance, to Mary Carter and Leila Baker for their support in taking the work forward.

In solidarity with all those with lived experience of homelessness, whose insights and uncompromising calls for change make real the systemic failures and injustices that are the root cause of homelessness.

Images used courtesy of the Centre for Homelessness Impact and front cover courtesy of the an unknown artist who participated in the creative activity facilitated as part of the Better TA Showcase event on September 22<sup>nd</sup> 2023.

Better Temporary Accommodation for Londoners seeks to ensure that stays in TA are as short, healthy and safe as possible.



HOUSING IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST DRIVERS OF POVERTY IN LONDON



One child in every classroom in London is living in temporary accommodation.



# TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION IS IN CRISIS



*the issues...*

we all have legal and policy **KNOWLEDGE GAPS!**

**CAPACITY** IS STRETCHED what can we do with the tools we already have?

Many of our employees are **BURNT OUT** under pressure and at risk of homelessness themselves.

**PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS AREN'T TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN DECISIONS ABOUT TA PLACEMENTS**

- Age
- Gender
- Race
- Disability
- Religion
- Sexual orientation
- Migratory status

*and our recommendations.*

Get to know the Local **LEVERS OF CHANGE** and **HOW TO USE THEM!**

**THERE IS POWER** IN HAVING A SEAT AT THE TABLE

and always listen to the voices of those with **LIVED EXPERIENCE.**

We need **BETTER RELATIONSHIPS** and **COMMUNICATION** to be able to tackle the issues further

**COUNCILS CAN SEE COMMUNITY GROUPS AS AGITATORS, NOT PARTNERS.**

**no more US vs THEM!**  
NO-ONE CAN TACKLE THE HOMELESSNESS CRISIS ALONE

**Conversations TOGETHER, in the same ROOM!**

We need **TRANSPARENCY** and the ability to access information easily.

**SOLIDARITY equals STRENGTH**