

CAW Brief

Temporary Accommodation

“ **The Government must take immediate action** ”



Westminster

The lives behind the numbers

Over the past year, the massive problem with Temporary Accommodation in London has been increasingly noted in the press and researched by numerous agencies and associations. The crisis has increased to the point that one in fifty Londoners are currently homeless and living in Emergency or Temporary Accommodation—that is, if they can get it.

1 in 50
Londoners
are
homeless

What is Emergency and Temporary Accommodation?

Temporary Accommodation is housing provided by the local council after an applicant's case has been reviewed and the council decides it has the responsibility to provide housing. Until such an approval is issued, the applicant may be placed in Emergency Accommodation or remain homeless. Emergency Accommodation is not meant for long term stays as there is seldom access to cooking and washing facilities; often, Emergency Accommodation is in a hostel, hotel room or private B & B. However, the current backlog of applicants for Temporary Housing means that many people are stranded in Emergency Accommodation for weeks or months, even when they are eligible for Temporary Accommodation.

Why is there a shortage of Temporary Accommodation?

This is a supply and demand issue. Since 2000, the general availability of social housing has dropped by 10% in London, and the current cost-of-living crisis in Britain has led to a further depletion of housing stock. Since the pandemic, there has been a 41% reduction in rental housing in London, and landlords are now charging, on average, 20% more than they did in 2020. Freezes in subsidies available to local councils mean that there is a desperate search for cheaper (and therefore lower quality) Temporary Accommodation. Councils do not have enough housing to offer people, and private landlords are not offering affordable housing either. More people are priced out of the housing market, increasing the need for Temporary Accommodation and social housing. CAW has seen an 87% increase in the number of client issues related to actual homelessness from April 2023 to January 2024 compared to the same period for the previous year. This increased level of demand means that it can take months or years for people to be offered Temporary Accommodation—and then many more years before they are offered Permanent Accommodation. What Temporary Accommodation is available is often little better than Emergency Accommodation, leaving individuals and families trapped in unsafe, unhygienic and unsuitable “homes.”

Living in crisis...

Sarah's Story

Sarah has been housed in Temporary Accommodation outside of Westminster for six years, awaiting Permanent Accommodation. Her flat is in a poor state of repair, and her landlord resists making improvements. Sarah would like to move to escape these issues, but she is worried that the council may assign her to even more distant housing, away from her daughter's school and the network of students to whom Sarah provides music lessons for income.

Michael's Story

Michael has been in Emergency Accommodation for over eight months. He has provided medical evidence to show his need for housing, but the council has not responded. Michael has not seen his son for almost a year because the Emergency Accommodation is not a safe place for a child.

Maryam's Story

Maryam and her four dependent children have spent over four months in Temporary Accommodation in a hotel, despite the fact that councils are not allowed to place families in hotels or B&Bs for more than six weeks. There are no kitchen facilities, and the family of five is living in one room. They have been regularly ill due to the closeness of their accommodations.

George's Story

George, who is severely disabled and has limited English skills, is homeless and relies on his sister in Westminster for care. His mental health support is also in Westminster. He's been offered housing in East London, far away from his support network, risking the loss of housing rights and exacerbating his mental health challenges if he declines.

*Names have been changed to protect client confidentiality

While the statistics clearly show the scope of the problems, it's our clients' stories that reveal the dramatic and disturbing impact of the housing crisis on Westminster's people.

Lena's Story

Lena, her 11-year-old son and 16-year-old daughter have been housed in a single hotel room since October of 2022. There are no cooking or washing facilities. There has been no communication from the council, and their case worker has left and not been replaced. All members of the family are suffering from mental health issues due to their cramped conditions and lack of privacy.

Amir's Story

Amir has very limited mobility and yet has been placed in Temporary Accommodation on the 4th floor of a building without a working lift. He is therefore unable to leave the property safely and independently. The Council agreed he should move over three months ago, but no options have been offered since then. Amir is unable to attend medical appointments and his condition is worsened by the damp in the unit in which he is effectively trapped.

What needs to be done?

- The government **must** take **immediate** action to enable Councils, and therefore people, to access affordable and safe accommodation for those in need;
- Legislation **must** be enacted to guarantee that "levelling up" is more than a political slogan;
- Councils **must** improve the quality of Emergency and Temporary Accommodation and hold consistently to the rules around the length of time people can remain in these situations;
- Individuals and families **must** not be forced to accept accommodation that is inappropriate for their circumstances and unsafe for habitation;
- Councils **must** communicate clearly and openly with people and the local agencies that support them as we work together to solve the housing crisis.

What is CAW doing?

We are working closely with partners across Westminster as part of the Temporary Accommodation Action Group. Our goals are to help improve the quality and quantity of accommodation and to improve communications with the Council for people living in Temporary Accommodation.

CAW is also working to raise awareness of the plight of families and individuals whose lives are so negatively impacted by the current housing crisis.

To support our temporary accommodation campaign, contact socpolicyresearch@westminstercab.org.uk to find out how.