

Unsuitable: People's experiences of temporary accommodation in Wales



Our vision

Shelter Cymru's vision is that everyone in Wales should have a decent home.

We believe

- a home is a fundamental right and essential to the health and well-being of people and communities.
- there must be major changes to law, to the culture and delivery of services and the level of resources if homelessness and housing need are to be finally eradicated in Wales.

Our values

Independence

We work for people in housing need without fear or favour. We will constructively challenge to ensure people are properly assisted and to improve practice and learning.

Respect

We work as equals with the people who use our services. We provide information, advice and support to help people identify the best options to find and keep a home and to help them take control of their own lives.

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Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Executive summary | 1 |
| Introduction | 7 |
| Stuck in limbo | 7 |
| Ensuring that accommodation is suitable | 9 |
| Amenities | 12 |
| The availability of support | 12 |
| The length of time in temporary accommodation | 13 |
| Ensuring that accommodation is affordable | 14 |
| Controlling the costs of temporary accommodation | 15 |
| The role of Private Sector Leasing | 16 |
| Young people and families | 19 |
| Pets | 20 |
| Conclusions | 21 |
| Recommendations | 23 |
| Appendix 1 | 24 |

Executive summary

Background

Temporary accommodation (TA) is designed to give homeless households a safety net whilst acting as a bridge onto more settled accommodation. In 2014/2015 there were 3,910 households leaving temporary accommodation in Wales. Of these almost a fifth (19.8 per cent) 'voluntarily ceased to occupy accommodation.'¹

This report seeks to better understand people's experiences in TA in order to positively influence service provision and improve households' chances of being provided with settled housing.

Our findings are based on a review of previous research, a Freedom of Information request looking at the costs of TA, and a series of 25 interviews and two focus groups with people who are either past or current tenants of temporary accommodation.

Stuck in 'limbo'

Uncertainty over length of stay, coupled with a lack of up-to-date information, can lead people to be stuck in a kind of limbo where they have very little control over their situation².

The nature of TA meant that people never felt that they could settle as they may have to be moved out at short notice. While this experience was less extreme among those in TA properties such as flats and houses – rather than B&B and hostel settings – the general feeling was that it still was not a place that they could call home, personalise and lay down roots. This impact was especially marked amongst families with children.

However, we also found that for some participants, TA fulfilled its function well and allowed them a period of stability that was lacking when they were faced with homelessness. This was most common when participants felt that they were housed appropriately, within reach of support networks and with minimal upheaval to their old life.

The positive experiences we heard about suggest the potential for good practice to be adopted more widely.

¹ StatsWales. (2015). Households leaving temporary accommodation by reason for leaving and length of time. Available at: <https://statswales.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Housing/Homelessness/Temporary-Accommodation/householdsleavingtemporaryaccommodation-by-reasonforleaving-lengthoftime>.

² Campbell, J (2012) *Citizens engagement on Welsh homelessness services and legislation*, Shelter Cymru and Cymorth

Ensuring that accommodation is suitable

Very few of our participants agreed that their temporary accommodation was suitable to their needs.

Many participants felt that their needs were not properly assessed and that their wishes were not listened to. This was often most acute for disabled applicants.

This lack of sufficient needs assessments led to many being housed away from their support networks and public transport links, leaving them feeling isolated and lonely which in some cases directly contributed to deterioration in mental health.

Where TA worked best for the participants was in an environment of open discussion and negotiation with the authority. rather than being placed somewhere without any choice, people were happiest when they felt like their concerns were being listened to.

Amenities

A common theme among participants in our study was a lack of appropriate amenities. Several spoke of conflicts that resulted from having to share kitchens and toilets with other people, which often led to threatening and violent behaviour. Arguments over cleanliness and time spent using the facilities often meant that problems escalated quickly, leaving people having to live in environments of fear and bullying.

Some spoke of the cleanliness of the accommodation that they were offered. Visible body fluids, waste, filth and infestations were found in numerous types of TA and in most instances it was left to the tenant to make the accommodation fit for habitation.

The availability of support

The ability of people who have been through homelessness to maintain a tenancy may depend upon the support they receive to address any underlying issues or support needs. Participants in this study who were housed in supported accommodation were pleased with the level of support that they were offered. However, we also found that most participants who were housed in unsupported B&B and accommodation managed via a Private Sector Leasing (PSL) scheme felt abandoned during their stay and felt that it was only through their own perseverance that things moved forward.

Length of time in TA

Participants in this study spent widely varying lengths of time in TA. Although some had spent less than the national average of 111 days³, the majority had stayed for more than five months and the longest for four years.

Some participants moved between different types of TA, moving from supported to unsupported accommodation or from B&B to PSL accommodation. Many participants said that the length of time they spent in the initial accommodation depended on how much they 'pestered' the local authority, sometimes with the assistance of third sector advocates.

Ensuring that accommodation is affordable

By law, local authorities must have regard to whether TA is affordable⁴. However, our research found that people still struggled financially while in TA.

The costs of living in TA can often far exceed the costs of living in settled accommodation. In certain TA rents may include additional charges such as management fees, utilities, food, and costs of staff and support. The costs of food can be significantly higher where there is inadequate food storage and cooking facilities, or where house rules require people to leave the accommodation during the day.

There was also a common perception among participants that being in TA represented a barrier to employment, due to the risk of losing their Housing Benefit entitlement and becoming liable for a high rent, as well as having to cover other additional costs, such as transport, childcare and the loss of other state benefits⁵.

Controlling the costs of temporary accommodation

Our study found that local authorities are spending widely varying sums on the provision of TA. Based on our findings we estimate that in 2014/15 Welsh local authorities spent more than £2.8 million on TA⁶. On average, just over £1,100 was spent on each household in TA but some authorities were achieving far less value for money: in fact three authorities spent in excess of £3,000 per household⁷.

³ Based on data provided by 18 authorities under the Freedom of Information Act 2000

⁴ S.59(2) of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014

⁵ Neale, E & Thorp S (2006) The effects of high rents in temporary accommodation Evidence Paper No. 9, Community Links

⁶ Based on data provided by 18 authorities under the Freedom of Information Act 2000

⁷ Total net expenditure for 2014/15 divided by numbers of households leaving TA during 2014/15

TA costs authorities far less if it is provided by a social housing provider or leased from the private sector via PSL schemes, where rents are generally set at Local Housing Allowance (LHA) level⁸.

Our research found that B&B is by far the most expensive form of accommodation. During 2014/15 local authorities spent up to £490 per room, per week. Rent levels can be similarly high for privately rented accommodation that is not managed via a PSL scheme. Although many authorities are able to negotiate rents with private rented sector (PRS) landlords to LHA levels, we found that in some cases authorities were subsidising the cost of rents that far exceeded LHA levels.

The role of Private Sector Leasing

PSL schemes operate by leasing properties from private landlords for a contracted period of between three and five years. Even though this TA has to comply with all existing legislation on standards in the PRS, there are no statutory standards for PSL accommodation above and beyond the legislation that applies across the whole of the PRS.

Our case work has highlighted a number of unmet needs tenants have faced when moving into this type of TA, including no carpets, curtains or white goods.

Additionally lack of clear roles and responsibilities between the property owner and the managing agent can result in accommodation issues not being addressed in a timely manner.

Some properties in PSL schemes had such serious issues with cleanliness and disrepair that study participants described them as uninhabitable. In a number of cases participants said they were not allowed to decorate properties even though it was clear they were in need of upkeep.

Young people and families

Independent children aged 16-17 are not recorded in official statistics in Wales. However, a recent BBC Wales investigation found that over the past five years 750 people aged 16/17 were sent to B&Bs in Wales⁹. Of those more than 100 stayed in B&B for longer than the statutory six week limit, even though 'B&B is not normally regarded as suitable for families with children, pregnant women and 16 & 17 year olds'¹⁰.

One participant in our study was a young care leaver who was housed in a B&B for more than nine months without adequate support, which he directly linked to his mental breakdown.

⁸ Under current legislation rent can be charged at 90% of the LHA rate for the size of the property plus £60 management fee

⁹ *Week In Week Out: Who is sleeping in the Next Room?* 2015, BBC1. Tue 16 Jun

¹⁰ Welsh Assembly Government Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness (2014)

Study participants who lived with their families had a mixed experience in TA. Those who were housed in specialist family units were the most satisfied and praised the staff, the support and the accommodation. However, others in specialist family hostels were less satisfied.

Furthermore, families who were housed in B&B or hotel accommodation felt the accommodation was unsuitable. They spoke of the fear of not knowing who they were housed next to, and they worried that their children were being unnecessarily exposed to people who should be in specialist units.

Pets

Pet owners consider their pets as one of the family and when they become homeless so do their animals. There have been some well documented cases where people have refused TA due to having to give up their pets¹¹¹². Though none of our study participants went this far, some said they were traumatised by having to give up 'one of the family'.

Temporary accommodation survival guide

As part of this study, a group of participants and peer researchers developed a 'Temporary Accommodation Survival Guide' leaflet which gives advice to households newly in TA. The aim of the leaflet is to provide general advice on how to handle the challenges of living in TA, as well as signposting to sources of further help.

We are happy to offer this leaflet as a resource for others to use. The 'Temporary Accommodation Survival Guide' is available on our website for local authorities, advice agencies and others to distribute.

Download the Temporary Accommodation Survival Guide from
<http://sheltercymru.org.uk/temporary-accommodation-survival-guide>

Recommendations

- Despite reductions in use over recent years, bed and breakfasts (B&Bs) remain a drain on public resources. Our research found that people's experiences of B&B

¹¹ Mail online. 2013. Available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2439231/Maidstone-family-6-living-tent-refused-council-house-wont-pets.html>.

¹² Mirror. 2015. Homeless woman who lived in car with two dogs finally finds new home - in kennels. Available at: <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/homeless-woman-who-lived-car-5770363>.

were overwhelmingly negative. We recommend that the Welsh Government continue to strategically reduce usage of B&B across Wales, investing in alternatives to ensure that public money is used more effectively.

- We also recommend the Welsh Government sets a target for a total ban on placing independent 16-17 year olds in unsupported B&B. This could be achieved by an expansion of specialist supported accommodation and an active promotion of alternatives such as volunteer host schemes, which are currently only offered in a handful of Welsh authorities. In the meantime the Welsh Government should be monitoring the numbers of 16-17 year olds in temporary accommodation (TA), broken down by accommodation type.
- Local authorities provide more temporary accommodation places than Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) despite only owning around two-thirds the amount of stock. We recommend that authorities work closely with RSLs to increase their contribution.
- The Private Rented Sector's (PRS) contribution to TA provision has increased in recent years and our research suggests that this is largely positive. However, more needs to be done to ensure that Private Sector Leasing (PSL) schemes are more responsive to the needs of tenants. We recommend that the Welsh Government work with PSL scheme managers to develop a set of consistent customer service standards. These standards should include clear processes and timescales for dealing with disrepair and maintenance issues. We also recommend greater use of furnished tenancy schemes and better links with local furniture recycling schemes.
- In order to manage the cost of PSL, scheme managers should ensure that agreements with individual property owners are clear about responsibilities for meeting repairs and maintenance costs.
- The official data on temporary accommodation use needs to be clearer in order to understand how effective provision is at preventing repeat homelessness. We recommend that the Welsh Government should revise the way that outcomes are recorded so that it is clear when households leave voluntarily or are evicted. We also recommend that these figures should be published broken down by accommodation provider.
- Some authorities need to do more to assist homeless families to keep their pets. This may mean stronger links to local animal shelters or fosterers.
- We welcome the widespread adoption of the Personal Housing Plan approach among local authorities, which should help to ensure that support needs are taken into account at an early stage. Local authorities should offer support to all households entering temporary accommodation. Support should be available from day one until an agreement between all parties is made that this should end.

Introduction

The human right to adequate housing is more than just four walls and a roof. It is the right of every woman, man, youth and child to gain and sustain a safe and secure home within which the possibility to live in peace and dignity can be attained. These rights are relevant to people housed in temporary accommodation (TA), who for various reasons have found themselves needing housing temporarily until more a more permanent solution to their homelessness is found.

Accessing TA is a crucial step away from homelessness. It is designed to give households a safety net whilst acting as a bridge onto more settled accommodation.

In 2014/2015 there were 3,910 households leaving temporary accommodation in Wales. Of these almost a fifth (19.8 per cent) 'voluntarily ceased to occupy accommodation,' a trend which has remained consistent over the past four years¹³. Worryingly, 10 per cent of those who had been in TA for more than six months left their accommodation before a more permanent solution could be found.

The official data collected by the Welsh Government and local authorities does not allow a more in-depth understanding of these figures. As such this report seeks to better understand people's experiences in TA in order to positively influence service provision and improve households' chances of being provided with settled housing.

Our findings are based on a review of previous research, a Freedom of Information request looking at the costs of TA, and a series of 25 interviews and two focus groups with people who are either past or current users of homelessness services.

Stuck in 'limbo'

Quality of housing has a huge impact on people's wellbeing. Inadequate housing increases the risk of severe ill health and disability; it can also lead to poor mental health, unemployment and poverty¹⁴.

The long term effects of inappropriate housing can impact on children's education limiting their opportunities into adulthood¹⁵¹⁶. Rose & Davies (2014) found that 86 per cent of participants stated that their health had been affected by damp and poorly maintained conditions of their TA while 77 per cent thought that their mental health had significantly worsened whilst living there¹⁷.

¹³ StatsWales. (2015). Households leaving temporary accommodation by reason for leaving and length of time. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://statswales.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Housing/Homelessness/Temporary-Accommodation/householdsleavingtemporaryaccommodation-by-reasonforleaving-lengthoftime>.

¹⁴ Smith, S, Alexander, A & Easterlow, D (1997) *Rehousing as a health intervention: Miracle or mirage?*, Health and Place

¹⁵ Credland, S & Helen Lewis, H (2004) *Sick and tired: The impact of temporary accommodation on the health of homeless families*, Shelter

¹⁶ Shelter (2004) *Toying with their future*, Shelter

¹⁷ Rose A and Davies B (2014) *Not home: The lives of hidden homeless households in unsupported temporary accommodation in England*, IPPR North

These factors are compounded within TA where uncertainty of the length of stay, lack of up-to-date information on the individuals' cases and where they will be moving to next can lead people to be stuck in a kind of limbo where they have very little control over their situation and have a feeling of being 'dumped'¹⁸.

Widespread evidence details the negative impacts that living in TA can have on people's health, education and employment opportunities. The uncertainty of people's situations, combined with often poor living conditions impacts both physically and mentally on individuals and families. People in poor quality TA are often more likely to display depression and falling levels of self-esteem, while children can be vulnerable to medical conditions such as bronchitis and asthma.

Our study found that the uncertainty surrounding future living arrangements weighed heavily on many participants' sense of wellbeing. Even though all of those interviewed were owed a full duty by the local authority none had been made aware of any move-on plans into more settled accommodation and found that their interactions with the local authorities were usually a frustrating experience.

'It has had a big impact on my life, it was mentally exhausting and draining and I am always worried about what will happen to me and David¹⁹ if I didn't get re-housed.'

The nature of TA meant that people never felt like that they could settle in their accommodation as they may have to be moved out at short notice. While this experience was less extreme among those in TA properties such as flats and houses, rather than B&B and hostel settings, the general feeling was that it still wasn't a place that they could call home, personalise and lay down roots.

'It is not good. I have nothing and because I can be moved on at any time I cannot buy the things we need because I have nowhere to put them.'

'It's really getting me down and it's so difficult to live somewhere that doesn't feel like home for so long.'

Families with children experienced a heightened sense of helplessness. Not only did they feel they were responsible for the upheaval to their children's lives, they also felt that they were not in control of when the situation will come to an end. Many participants said that this sense of a lack of control contributed to their mental health problems. The majority of participants spoke of either their own mental health or that of their partners being adversely affected by the move into TA, with issues becoming more acute the longer they stayed.

'It's caused me more depression because I feel unstable to settle'

'There has been a massive impact on our lives, when we were in temporary accommodation my partner became very paranoid and agoraphobic. She was scared to go out because she didn't know the area or the people who lived there.'

However, we also found that for some participants, TA fulfilled its function well and allowed them a period of stability that was lacking when they were faced with homelessness. This

¹⁸ Campbell, J (2012) *Citizens engagement on Welsh homelessness services and legislation*, Shelter Cymru and Cymorth

¹⁹ Name changed to protect identity of the child

was most common when participants felt that they were housed appropriately, within reach of support networks and with minimal upheaval to their old life

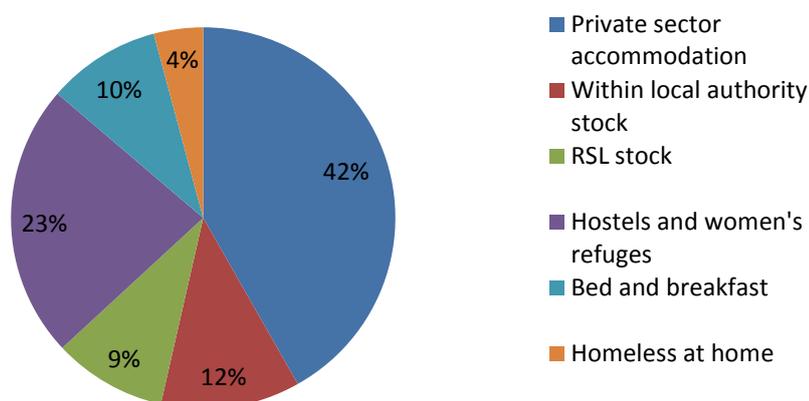
'Once we were out of the B&B it was a good experience and it gave me time to become independent and settle into my own routine with my son. Yes it was a positive experience and I felt that my mental health improved.'

Another participant found the local authority was very helpful and understanding and they felt they were listened to when they had concerns. These positive examples were rare but when there was mutual cooperation and the participant felt they had some semblance of control over their families' lives, the outcome was more positive.

Clearly, it is possible for TA to be provided in a way that meets people's needs and reinforces, rather than diminishes, their sense of wellbeing and control. The positive experiences we heard about suggest the potential for good practice to be adopted more widely.

Ensuring that accommodation is suitable

Figure 1: Types of TA in Wales 2014/2015 by percentage of use²⁰



TA is provided in a variety of settings including local authorities, housing associations (RSLs), and the voluntary and private sectors (see figure 1) and as such there are varying and complex rules governing physical standards. However, in determining whether any TA is suitable the local authority must take into account a number of factors²¹, including:

- the specific health needs of the person
- the proximity and accessibility of family support
- any disability

²⁰ StatsWales. 2015. Households accommodated temporarily by accommodation type and length of time. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://statswales.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Housing/Homelessness/Temporary-Accommodation/householdsaccommodatedtemporarily-by-accommodationtype-lengthoftime>.

²¹ Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (Wales) Order 2015

- the proximity and accessibility of medical facilities and other support services which are currently provided for the applicant and their household; and are essential to their well-being
- the location of the property and any disruption to employment, caring responsibilities or education of any household member
- the proximity of alleged perpetrators and victims of domestic abuse.

If any of these factors are not taken into account then the TA can be deemed unsuitable for that particular household, in which case alternative accommodation should be sourced.

Our research suggests that local authorities and service users may often have very different ideas about what constitutes 'suitable' accommodation. Very few of our participants agreed that their temporary accommodation was suitable to their needs.

Good practice is to undertake a needs assessment of each household to identify where best to place them to limit the disruption to their lives. This should take into account the wider family and include proximity to support networks, schools, work, and doctors and so on. It should also look at physical and mental disabilities and whether placement in certain types of TA will be detrimental to a person's wellbeing.

However, very few participants felt that a full needs assessment was undertaken and those who did have felt that it was a 'box ticking exercise' and their wishes were not listened to.

'You're in the worst situation you could ever find yourself in and it gets made worse by councils being negligent with your needs. Neglecting you as a human being and you as a family. It's actually soul destroying the worry and fear that you live with on a daily basis.'

The impacts of this were often most acute for disabled applicants. Two participants who had limited mobility were placed in upstairs flats or in properties where the bathroom was on another level. When one complained, the local authority threatened to discharge their duty thus potentially making them intentionality homeless.

Another was placed into TA that hadn't been adapted and had to spend their limited income on additional items that assisted them to bathe with dignity.

'It was difficult as I have IBS and mobility issues and two of the properties they offered me had upstairs bathrooms which are just no good for me. I had to accept it and then I was eventually allocated a ground floor flat but it was a struggle that first month.'

'I am disabled but I was given a three bed house with just a bath to wash in which I struggled to use. I was told I could not refuse it as I wouldn't be offered anywhere else to live. I had to buy a bath chair and other things so I could wash. The water pressure was terrible so whenever I wanted to wash I had to plan ahead.'

This lack of sufficient needs assessments led to many being housed away from their support network, in some instances in rural accommodation where they had no local connection, an irony not lost on some who pointed out they needed a clear local connection to get assistance in the first place.

This left many participants feeling isolated and lonely which directly contributed to deterioration in mental health. In times of high stress and uncertainty, which is often a result of homelessness, the need to be around family and friends is of the utmost importance.

'I was in a mother and baby unit which was a guest room in a bungalow on a farm owned by a couple. I was nowhere near my friends or family and I was living with the couple who owned the house but I felt uncomfortable and a bit in the way. I was very lonely and there was no one to talk to and nothing to do.'

'I hated it; it was a bungalow in the middle of nowhere. The nearest shop was 45 minutes away; there was a bus stop near and a bus to Carmarthen every hour. My family was three bus rides away, and about three hours each way. I felt really isolated because there was no one to talk to.'

Being housed away from public transport links added to these feelings of isolation. Similarly, having to use public transport to maintain links to support networks added considerable strain to some participants' budgets which added to the stress they already experienced.

Others spoke of difficulties they had maintaining a sense of normality for their families. Being placed miles away from children's friendship circles and schools added to the burden and upheaval participants experienced. They spoke of trying to hide their feelings of depression from their children while trying to maintain a positive outlook for the sake of their families. This was made more difficult by the distances they had to travel and the inevitable challenges this made.

One participant was housed at least 45 minutes away from her support network, her children's school and her job. She asked the local authority if she could be rehoused somewhere closer but was told this was not an option. As a result of the distance and the poor public transport links she had little option but to pass guardianship of her daughter to her parents to minimise disruptions to her schooling. She eventually lost her job as she couldn't get to work on time and left TA as a result.

'It is too far from the schools and is very hard getting them to school and picking them up every day and working in between. It's a lot of buses and costing me a fortune at the same time. All the time you have to keep yourself calm and hide your fears, the children just don't understand the situation and I don't want them to.'

'We were placed in a studio apartment the first time around and then a three bed house the second time. Both properties were in terrible state and awful neighbourhoods and were too far away from family.'

Some participants spoke of how they felt their concerns about location were ignored by the local authority. This led to an air of mistrust and a feeling of being dumped 'out of sight and out of mind'.

Where TA worked best for the participants was in an environment of open discussion and negotiation. Rather than being placed somewhere without any choice, people were happiest when they felt like their concerns were being listened to. Where the authority had placed people within reach of support networks, this created a greater sense of resilience and ability to cope.

'I had told the council that I had the two kids and depression and really needed to be near to my family. They did listen and made sure I was placed near my mum. It had really good transport links; there was a bus stop outside the place. It made such a difference as things would have got so much worse without her support.'

'Initially I was to be placed in a hotel but I have a young family and it was just not right for us. I was placed in the hostel; it was good because only mums and families are put in there. It was fine and better than I expected. I asked if I could move to be closer to my family and he council did listen and made sure I was near my family.'

Amenities

A common theme among participants in our study was a lack of appropriate amenities while in TA. Several spoke of conflicts that resulted from having to share kitchens and toilets with other people, which often led to threatening and violent behaviour. Arguments over cleanliness and time spent using the facilities often meant that problems escalated quickly, leaving people having to live in environments of fear and bullying.

Some spoke of the cleanliness of the accommodation that they were offered as TA. Visible bodily fluids, waste, filth and infestations were found in numerous types of TA and in most instances it was left to the tenant to make the accommodation fit for habitation.

'It was one room with only a bed and chest of drawers in there. The bed was soaking wet with urine and it took the hostel a week before they gave me a new bed. I had to wrap the bed in plastic and put two duvets on top but I still didn't like to sleep there.'

'The hostel was covered in these silverfish; in some rooms you could actually see the floor move. The employees didn't care; they didn't have to sleep there did they?'

The availability of support

The ability of people who have been through homelessness to maintain a tenancy may depend upon the support they receive to address any underlying issues or support needs. It is recommended by Shelter Scotland that housing services are shaped by need and a comprehensive needs assessment undertaken by professionals²².

However, our own research for the Welsh Government in 2012 found existing support provision was too hit-and-miss and that low-level support was seen as difficult to access²³.

Our casework shows that access to appropriate and good quality support varies greatly. While households in hostels often have dedicated onsite support workers, those housed in other TA including B&B and Private Sector Leasing (PSL) schemes may be left with none and as such tenants can be left feeling isolated and abandoned.

²² Clarke N (2010) *Guidance on standards for temporary accommodation* Shelter Scotland and CIH Scotland

²³ Campbell, J (2012) *Citizens engagement on Welsh homelessness services and legislation*, Shelter Cymru and Cymorth

Participants in this study who were housed in supported accommodation were pleased with the level of support that they were offered. One participant spoke of how hostel support staff had assisted her in pulling her life around. Another spoke of a number of courses and activities that were offered while in the hostel that helped her gain some skills, improve her confidence and alleviate her boredom.

However, we also found that participants who were housed in unsupported B&B and PSL accommodation generally felt abandoned during their stay and felt that it was only through their own perseverance that things moved forward.

'(We were offered) none, we needed a lot (of support) though, we actually begged for anything. Financial advice and benefits advice would have been really helpful as would have some emotional support or a family support worker to have supported us through that time.'

'We were not at all listened to and our needs and baby's needs not considered. I wanted some support, anything to assist me but nothing. When I complained I was told to get a job and we could afford somewhere better.'

Length of time in temporary accommodation

Participants in this study spent widely varying lengths of time in. Although some had spent less than the national average of 107 days in TA²⁴, the majority had stayed for more than five months and the longest for four years. One participant who had dependent children stayed in B&B accommodation for more than three months which exceeds the six week recommended time limit for a higher standard B&B.

During their time in TA some participants moved between different types of TA, moving from supported to unsupported accommodation, or from B&B to PSL accommodation. Many participants said that the length of time they spent in the initial accommodation depended on how much they 'pestered' the local authority. A number of participants resorted to getting third sector advocates to move their cases along.

'I was put into a hostel and was there for three months, then assigned temporary accommodation (two bed flat), was there for a year. I truly believe that if it wasn't down to my persistence, in both properties, I would still be in temporary accommodation.'

'After a year in that hostel and having no luck with my case it is funny that as soon as I got Shelter (Cymru) involved they magically moved me into a flat and then into a house of my own.'

²⁴ Based on data provided by 22 authorities under the Freedom of Information Act 2000

Ensuring that accommodation is affordable

By law, local authorities must have regard to whether TA is affordable²⁵. Applicants may be expected to pay a reasonable sum towards the costs of TA provided that the accommodation does not become unaffordable as a result.

However, our research found that people still struggled financially while in TA. The costs of living in TA can often far exceed the costs of living in settled accommodation. The rent may include additional charges such as management fees, utilities, food, and costs of staff and support. The costs of food can be significantly higher where there is inadequate food storage and cooking facilities, or where house rules require people to leave the accommodation during the day.

'When we were in the B&B we couldn't eat in our room and there were no cooking facilities, we had to eat out all the time and it was so expensive. It was a little better when we were moved into a shared house but when you have a few families all wanting to use the kitchen at the same time and your kids need eat and to go to bed for school early we again ended up having to spend more on takeaways and ready meals, any money I tried to save for a new house was used on trying to feed us.'

'We weren't allowed to have toasters or microwaves in our rooms so the only option was to travel into town for a meal or eat sandwiches at home. Travelling with my child was a nightmare, sometimes having to go two or three times a day as the food wouldn't last in the room and I couldn't leave my child there alone. The travel costs alone were a fortune but then to add in the cost of food...'

There was also a common perception among participants that being in TA represented a barrier to employment, due to the risk of losing their Housing Benefit entitlement and becoming liable for a high rent. Some talked about this as a significant disincentive which prevented them from returning to work. This effect can be compounded by the additional costs facing people taking up employment, such as transport, childcare and the loss of other state benefits²⁶.

With stricter rules and harsher sanctions being introduced through the UK Government's welfare reform programme, our research participants were left feeling 'stuck between a rock and hard place'. Either they find work and have to pay more rent, or they fail to find work and have their benefits sanctioned.

Our study found that participants who were in work struggled financially while in TA. One participant said she had to give up work because she was asked to contribute more to the utilities than those who were on full Housing Benefit. Ultimately the rent arrears she had amassed resulted in mental health issues that contributed to her leaving employment.

Another participant told us how the arrears accrued by her and her working partner meant that she was now effectively trapped in TA until she could reduce the debt:

²⁵ S.59(2) of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014

²⁶ Neale, E & Thorp S (2006) The effects of high rents in temporary accommodation Evidence Paper No. 9, Community Links

'When we moved in my partner was working, he wasn't paid a lot, about £500 per month. The rent was £550/£600 per month so it was really tight. I thought my partner was paying the rent but he was only paying some of it and we ended up with over £2,000 worth of arrears. I also had arrears from my last council flat which was added to that so in total we owe over £3,000 in rent arrears. My partner no longer lives here so I pay £20 a week towards the arrears. I've been banned from bidding until I pay some of the arrears off, which means I will just be in here even longer.'

In such cases where the accommodation is unaffordable it should be deemed unsuitable by the local authority and rent levels negotiated down to a more manageable level. This was a rarity in the study although where it did transpire it had a positive impact.

One participant explained that the rent took up almost their entire monthly wage and would result in their family having to go without some basic necessities. After they approached the local authority their rent was reduced to a more manageable amount which allowed them to not only get their finances under control, but also to move out of TA more quickly.

Controlling the costs of temporary accommodation

Our study found that local authorities are spending widely varying sums on the provision of TA. Based on our findings we estimate that in 2014/15 Welsh local authorities spent more than £2.8 million on TA²⁷. On average, just over £1,100 was spent on each household in TA but some authorities were achieving far less value for money: in fact three authorities spent in excess of £3,000 per household²⁸.

TA costs authorities far less if it is provided by a social housing provider or leased from the private sector via PSL schemes. In these cases rents are generally set at Local Housing Allowance (LHA) level which means that depending on the tenant's circumstances the rent can be covered in whole by Housing Benefit²⁹.

However, when people are housed temporarily in B&B or hotels the local authority has less scope to negotiate rents to LHA levels and the providers can ask for whatever they deem appropriate. It is down to the local authority to negotiate rent levels but where there is a desperate need there is very little they can do other than to accept the costs.

Sometimes the difference between LHA levels and the actual nightly tariff can be vast and some identified for this study were up to seven times the LHA level. These additional costs have to be met by the authority and can amount to hundreds of thousands of pounds annually.

Rent levels can be similarly high for privately rented accommodation that is not managed via a PSL scheme. Although many authorities are able to negotiate rents with private rented sector (PRS) landlords to LHA levels, we found that in some cases authorities were subsidising the cost of rents that far exceeded LHA levels.

²⁷ Based on data provided by 18 authorities under the Freedom of Information Act 2000

²⁸ Total net expenditure for 2014/15 divided by numbers of households leaving TA during 2014/15

²⁹ Under current legislation rent can be charged at 90% of the LHA rate for the size of the property plus £60 management fee

Our research found that B&B is by far the most expensive form of accommodation. During 2014/15 local authorities spent up to £490 per room, per week. This is creating an industry where private enterprises are getting vast sums of money from local authorities - money that would be better spent on alternative accommodation.

The role of Private Sector Leasing

According to the Homeless People's Commission, standards within hostels in the UK have improved steadily over the last decade, moving from shared 'dormitories' to the establishment of self-contained units/rooms within the building³⁰. However, the Commission states that hostels are often thought of as unsafe and remain unpopular with some of the homeless population, especially families. For this reason local authorities across the UK have increasingly utilised the PRS. This allows a more flexible approach to the location of the properties, is more financially viable and allows a more seamless move on into more permanent accommodation with less of a disruption to family life. In Wales 42 per cent of people housed in TA in the last year were housed in the PRS³¹.

PSL schemes operate by leasing properties from private landlords for a contracted period of between three and five years. Landlords are offered a guaranteed rental income for the duration of the contract, paid quarterly in advance. The rent offered is generally lower than the market rent, but this reduction is countered by the fact that the rent is guaranteed to the landlord.

Accommodation let via PSL schemes has to comply with all existing legislation on standards in the PRS. The Welsh Government recommends that each property should be inspected before it is first offered to an applicant, and then re-inspected before it is offered to a different applicant if it has been occupied since the previous inspection³². Landlords should ensure that properties are free from defects before allowing a tenancy or license to commence.

However, there are no statutory standards for PSL accommodation above and beyond the legislation that applies across the whole of the PRS. This is in contrast with other forms of TA such as B&B.

People moving into TA are often in times of crisis and may have very little in terms of provisions that can help make a house a home. Our casework has highlighted a number of unmet needs tenants have faced when moving into this type of TA, including:

- No carpets or curtains
- No beds or sofas
- No white goods
- No cooker or only access to a microwave.

³⁰ Groundswell (2011) *The Homeless People's Commission*, Groundswell

³¹ StatsWales. 2015. Households accommodated temporarily by accommodation type and year. Available at: <https://statswales.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Housing/Homelessness/Temporary-Accommodation/householdssaccommodatedtemporarily-by-accommodationtype-year>.

³² Welsh Assembly Government Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness (2014)

Additionally lack of clear roles and responsibilities between the property owner and the managing agent can result in disrepair not being addressed in a timely manner. Our clients have been left without heating when the boiler breaks down, sometimes for months at a time, while others have been left in properties with severe damp or condensation issues that are not rectified.

Stakeholders interviewed as part of our study felt that some local authorities had set up PSL schemes without taking the time to make roles and responsibilities sufficiently clear, meaning that major maintenance costs have fallen on the authority. Some authorities are now tightening up their agreements with private landlords with the aim of reducing the TA bill.

'We have renewed our lease arrangements this year with our landlords, with a new lease which has put more responsibility on the landlord regarding the maintenance of the building and remove some of our responsibilities regarding fixtures and fittings (flooring/decoration etc.) so this should reduce our budget spend.'

The biggest complaint among participants in our study was lack of amenities. Many PSL-managed properties didn't have basic white goods such as washing machines and fridges with some also not having cookers. Tenants had to supply their own furniture and white goods, in many cases on a high interest repayment basis from retailers such as Brighthouse.

The day after one participant had her baby she was told that the local authority had found her a flat and she had a week to move out of the hostel. The new flat had no carpets and no furniture and they did not have enough time to apply for any financial assistance. The participant had to go a number of weeks in the property without basic furniture, all the while looking after her new born baby.

'There was only a cooker in the house so I had to buy a washing machine and a fridge freezer. I could only afford to get them from the catalogue which means that I paid loads for them and am still paying it off. It was just more debt.'

'There wasn't any furniture in the property so I had to buy my own. I had to get my furniture through the 'buy now pay later' scheme which was really expensive. I also had to get it in my daughter's name as I didn't have an address.'

Another participant mentioned that her local authority helped them apply for Discretionary Housing Payments to buy furniture and white goods, and though it was initially refused it was eventually accepted, although the delay did cause some hardship.

In other local authorities vouchers were given to tenants for high street shops such as Argos to purchase white goods, which were strongly welcomed by participants since they had more scope to purchase what they needed and were left with no additional debt.

Some properties in PSL schemes had such issues with cleanliness and disrepair that study participants found them uninhabitable. A number of participants said they were not allowed to decorate properties even though it was clear they were in need of upkeep and one participant had paint peeling off the walls.

'The place looked and felt dirty. I wanted to give it a lick of paint but I wasn't allowed to. I couldn't have friends over and I was stuck looking at the minging walls and floors. I just retreated into myself over the year and it has taken me a long time to feel myself again.'

Some local authorities offered paint vouchers so that tenants could decorate. While this appealed to a number of other study participants, one felt that painting the accommodation should not be their responsibility.

'Why should I paint the walls of the place? ... I had no choice where to go and now I have to decorate the place as well. I may be moving out in a week...'

Many study participants also experienced problems with disrepair. Damp and mould were found in numerous properties with one participant explaining that though the property appeared in good condition to begin with, it became apparent that the fresh paint in the rooms was only there to hide the damp which quickly started to appear after moving in.

'In every room there was damp. I complained but I was told I was told to leave my windows open, it was the middle of winter!'

'I had black marks in the bedrooms from water coming in. I got a cough from it and when I mentioned this to the housing person they said they would deal with it but it took months and loads of visits. It was still not sorted by the time I moved out.'

A number of participants spoke about problems with central heating. One felt that the property was inadequately heated with insufficient numbers of radiators. When this was highlighted to her Housing Officer she felt the response was indifferent and the suggestion to buy extra heaters was inadequate, especially as the additional outlay would have stretched her already tight budget.

Another participant talked of having no heating or hot water for more than four months as there was dispute between the landlord and the property owner as to whose responsibility it was to fix the boiler.

'Yes I complained about the water pressure in the flat. The system needed a pump and also a combi boiler but the landlady wouldn't pay for it so nothing got done.'

'I have complained about the boiler, it's been broke for months and six different people have been out to see it but nothing has been done. That means we have no heating and hardly any hot water...'

Other highlighted problems included stairs without banisters, windows that would not close, loose windowsills and broken window seals, overgrown gardens with rubbish and broken glass tangled in the bushes, unsafe brickwork around the property and doors and windows without locks. No participant reported having these problems satisfactorily dealt with.

Young people and families

There were around 1,454 dependent children leaving TA in Wales in 2013/14. Of these, around 315 children had stayed in TA for between six months and one year, and a further 204 children had stayed for longer than one year.

Independent children aged 16-17 are not recorded in official statistics in Wales. However, a recent BBC Wales investigation found that over the past five years 750 people aged 16/17 were sent to B&Bs in Wales³³. Of those more than 100 stayed in B&B for longer than the statutory six week limit. The programme also found instances where young people were left without support in TA alongside people whose risk assessments had not been undertaken, leaving them potentially open to exploitation.

Other research has found that teenagers were spending an average of 16 weeks in B&B and that 'a significant number' had been approached by other residents trying to sell drugs, or for sexual exploitation.³⁴

The Select Committee on Education recommended an 'outright ban' on the use of B&B accommodation for young homeless people, but despite the Department of Education's assertion that 'Bed and Breakfast accommodation is not considered to be suitable', it continues to be used across the UK³⁵.

The homelessness charity, Centrepoint, has supported a ban on using B&B hotels for homeless 16 and 17 year-olds for some time³⁶. More recently a coalition of Welsh charities has called on the Welsh Government to ban using B&B for children³⁷.

In Wales, though 'B&B is not normally regarded as suitable for families with children, pregnant women and 16 & 17 year olds,' the law permits it for up to six weeks depending on whether the accommodation meets certain standards (see appendix 1)³⁸.

One participant in our study was a young care leaver who was housed in a B&B for more than nine months without adequate support, which he directly linked to their mental breakdown. The B&B room was damp and there was noticeable mildew and disrepair. The participant was exposed to drink and drugs and felt the experience was directly responsible for the substance and alcohol problems that he experienced in later life. He also found it difficult feeding himself as there were no kitchen facilities and he had to purchase a microwave to eat ready meals, which was 'not exactly nutritious and ended up costing me a fortune'.

'It was totally traumatic; in fact traumatic doesn't cut it. I actually ended up feeling suicidal and completely at a loss for what to do.'

³³ *Week In Week Out: Who is sleeping in the Next Room?* 2015, BBC1. Tue 16 Jun

³⁴ *Stop putting teens in B&Bs, say charity*, Housing Today, 9 July 2004

³⁵ House of Commons Education Committee (2014) *Into independence, not out of care: 16 plus care options: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2014-15*, House of Commons

³⁶ *Centrepoint sounds alarm over fate of teenagers as B&B priorities shift*, *Community Care*, 1-7 July 2004

³⁷ <http://www.llamau.org.uk/news/i/814/>

³⁸ Welsh Assembly Government Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness (2014)

Study participants who were housed with their families had a mixed experience in TA. Those who were housed in specialist family units were the happiest and praised the staff, the support and the accommodation. They said that the accommodation allowed them and their family to 're-set' after the trauma of being made homeless and that without it their family would have broken up. Participants said the rooms were adequate for their family's needs and that they were allowed enough autonomy to maintain an independent lifestyle.

'The managers and the staff were so nice and supportive. After the trauma of being evicted it was so nice to have a calming and friendly place to live while we got ourselves back on track.'

However, some in specialist family hostels were less satisfied. They thought that the converted building was not suitable to fulfil its function. The rural setting of some hostels made participants feel isolated and bored. Some said the rules were restrictive and there were not enough amenities to satisfy demand which caused a great deal of friction.

Families who were housed in B&B or hotel accommodation felt strongly that the accommodation was unsuitable. They spoke of the fear of not knowing who they were housed next to, and they worried that their children were being unnecessarily exposed to people who should be in specialist units.

'I was afraid of who we were living next to. You could smell the drugs in the place.'

'There was one person there who really needed to be in hospital or somewhere. He was just not right and I felt so guilty that I had to expose my children to these things.'

Pets

Pet owners consider their pets as one of the family and when they become homeless so do their animals.

There have been some well documented cases where people have refused TA due to having to give up their pets^{39,40}. Though none of our study participants went this far, some were unhappy with having to give up 'one of the family'. Some direct access hostels have the capacity to accommodate pets but this is the exception rather than the rule.

One study participant said that the local authority that she presented to had a link with a local animal shelter that took in the pets on a free board basis as long as food was paid for. This allowed them to keep their dog while in TA.

'I don't know if I could have given up my dog, I have had her longer than my children!'

³⁹ Mail online. 2013. *Family-of-six left living in a tent in friend's garden after being refused a council house because they won't give up their budgies and dogs* Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2439231/Maidstone-family-6-living-tent-refused-council-house-wont-pets.html#ixzz3m4rwSBYW> Follow us: @MailOnline on Twitter | DailyMail on Facebook. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2439231/Maidstone-family-6-living-tent-refused-council-house-wont-pets.html>.

⁴⁰ Mirror. 2015. Homeless woman who lived in car with two dogs finally finds new home - in kennels. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/homeless-woman-who-lived-car-5770363>.

'Giving up my dog was awful. I felt like I had lost one of the family. Seriously I felt like I was in mourning.'

Conclusions

This study has found that it's possible to provide temporary accommodation (TA) in a way that meets people's needs and reinforces, rather than diminishes, their sense of wellbeing and control during a time of instability.

Some of our study participants spoke of their TA in glowing terms – as a safety net that actively improved their mental health by giving them time to become independent and settle into their new life.

But we also heard from many others who felt that their stay in TA represented yet another period of adversity and yet another series of challenges to overcome. The fact that negative experiences were so common among our participants goes some way to suggest why so many people leave temporary accommodation before the local authority has discharged its duty.

Shoddy and dangerous properties, inadequate support, isolated accommodation and high rents all led to people feeling lonely, unsettled and unable to move on with their lives. Lack of interaction with the local authority meant that many saw no end to their situation. In the most extreme cases, the experience was a threat to the physical and mental health of participants and their families.

Although B&B usage around Wales is reducing, in some areas it remains worryingly high and is clearly still a major financial drain on local authorities with rooms costing up to nearly £500 per week. Our study suggests that B&B is not only a poor use of public resources but may also be incapable of providing the degree of security and support that the majority of homeless applicants need, particularly those who are young or vulnerable.

The Private Rented Sector (PRS) can be a good alternative to B&B, particularly for tenants who have low support needs. For both local authorities and tenants it is a cheaper option and creates a more familiar environment.

If Private Sector Leasing (PSL) schemes are set up well, with clear responsibilities set out from the beginning, then it offers positive solutions to property owners, local authorities and tenants. For the property owner it provides a constant income stream and passes responsibility of managing the property to an external party. To the local authority it provides more flexible TA at a cost that is negotiated to LHA rates. And to the tenant it provides a semblance of normality in a 'proper' home.

However, our study found some major issues with the quality and suitability of accommodation provided via PSL schemes. Unfurnished and poorly maintained properties were just some of the problems that participants spoke of. Having to go without heating and hot water, or living in a property with no furniture or carpets is a deplorable situation that people who are already vulnerable as a result of homelessness should not have to experience. A key recommendation of this report is that more needs to be done to ensure

that PSL schemes are more responsive to the needs of tenants, who are likely to be vulnerable and may find it very difficult to assert their rights.

We also suggest that more work could be done to increase registered social landlord (RSL) provision of TA. Local authorities provide more TA places per year than RSLs despite owning only around two-thirds the amount of stock.

Since April 2015, Welsh RSLs have new duties to cooperate in the prevention of homelessness. We recommend that local authorities should enter into negotiations with RSLs to increase the amount of TA they provide. There may be potential to utilise larger properties that have become hard to let as a result of the under-occupancy penalty.

The suitability of accommodation is paramount for the success of TA, and though constraints on public expenditure and lack of affordable housing make this challenging there are still very clear guidelines laid out in the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (Wales) Order.

For two participants who felt that their TA allowed them the respite to get their lives back on track, it seems that this was because the correct needs assessment was performed and was based on open and honest dialogue, seeking the consent of the applicant wherever possible.

All our study participants had become homeless prior to April 2015, when Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 came into force. Since that time, Welsh authorities' approach to needs assessments has changed with the widespread adoption of Personal Housing Plans. These are based on a more participative philosophy and, although the law does not require homeless applicants to consent to the measures identified in their plan, applicants do need to be closely involved in their development.

Monitoring of customer experiences will be necessary to establish what difference the new approach has made, and this is a potential area of future research for our programme.

Finally, our study has found that the availability of support is an important factor in improving people's experiences and should always be offered to those entering TA. Support should be flexible and needs-led regardless of the type of accommodation in which people are housed.

For some applicants such as young people aged 16-17 support may need to be constantly available, while for others this may be something as simple as a leaflet giving practical advice.

As part of this study, a group of participants and peer researchers developed a Temporary Accommodation Survival Guide leaflet which gives advice to households newly in TA. The aim of the leaflet is to provide general advice on how to handle the challenges of living in TA, as well as signposting to sources of further help.

We are happy to offer this leaflet as a resource for others to use. The Temporary Accommodation Survival Guide is available on our website for local authorities, advice agencies and others to distribute.

Download the Temporary Accommodation Survival Guide from
<http://sheltercymru.org.uk/temporary-accommodation-survival-guide>

Recommendations

- Despite reductions in use over recent years, bed and breakfasts (B&Bs) remain a drain on public resources. Our research found that people's experiences of B&B were overwhelmingly negative. We recommend that the Welsh Government continue to strategically reduce usage of B&B across Wales, investing in alternatives to ensure that public money is used more effectively.
- We also recommend the Welsh Government sets a target for a total ban on placing independent 16-17 year olds in unsupported B&B. This could be achieved by an expansion of specialist supported accommodation and an active promotion of alternatives such as volunteer host schemes, which are currently only offered in a handful of Welsh authorities. In the meantime the Welsh Government should be monitoring the numbers of 16-17 year olds in temporary accommodation (TA), broken down by accommodation type.
- Local authorities provide more temporary accommodation places than Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) despite only owning around two-thirds the amount of stock. We recommend that authorities work closely with RSLs to increase their contribution.
- The Private Rented Sector's (PRS) contribution to TA provision has increased in recent years and our research suggests that this is largely positive. However, more needs to be done to ensure that Private Sector Leasing (PSL) schemes are more responsive to the needs of tenants. We recommend that the Welsh Government work with PSL scheme managers to develop a set of consistent customer service standards. These standards should include clear processes and timescales for dealing with disrepair and maintenance issues. We also recommend greater use of furnished tenancy schemes and better links with local furniture recycling schemes.
- In order to manage the cost of PSL, scheme managers should ensure that agreements with individual property owners are clear about responsibilities for meeting repairs and maintenance costs.
- The official data on temporary accommodation use needs to be clearer in order to understand how effective provision is at preventing repeat homelessness. We recommend that the Welsh Government should revise the way that outcomes are recorded so that it is clear when households leave voluntarily or are evicted. We also recommend that these figures should be published broken down by accommodation provider.
- Some authorities need to do more to assist homeless families to keep their pets. This may mean stronger links to local animal shelters or fosterers.
- We welcome the widespread adoption of the Personal Housing Plan approach among local authorities, which should help to ensure that support needs are taken into account at an early stage. Local authorities should offer support to all households entering temporary accommodation. Support should be available from day one until an agreement between all parties is made that this should end.

Appendix 1

Bed and Breakfast (B&B) standards

Within the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (Wales) Order 2015 B&Bs and shared accommodation are split into a 'basic' or 'higher' standard depending on a number of factors.

| | Basic | Higher |
|--|---|--|
| Type of requirements covered to meet each standard | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meets all statutory requirements Inc. fire and gas safety, planning permission and HMO licensing (where required). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal room standards Location of cooking facilities Number of people per room Specific food storage, preparation and cooking facilities Specific rules regarding toilet and washing facilities Security of unit doors and windows Communal areas size. |
| Management requirement covered to meet each standard | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property is managed by a fit and proper person. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property is managed by a fit and proper person Tenants must have access to written house rules Tenants must have access to information on how to operate installations Tenants must have access to an official complaints procedure Tenants must have access to facilities and rooms at all times. |
| Length of stays for those who are priority need* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> B&B accommodation should not be occupied for longer than two weeks Local authority or RSL owned shared accommodation should not be occupied for longer than two weeks. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> B&B accommodation may be occupied for up to six weeks Local authority or RSL owned shared accommodation may be occupied for up to six weeks. |