

MAYOR OF LONDON

Tom Copley AM

Chair of the London Assembly Housing Committee
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA

Our ref: MGLA050619-4021

Date: 04 SEP 2019

Dear Tom,

Many thanks to you and the rest of the Housing Committee for your work to highlight the important issue of temporary accommodation (TA).

I share your concern about the growing number of Londoners spending longer in TA and, for an increasing number of households, outside their local area. It is clear that these stressful experiences often have lasting harmful impacts on families, including disrupting children's education. Like members of the Committee, I am also acutely aware of the huge pressure that securing accommodation for homeless households places on London boroughs.

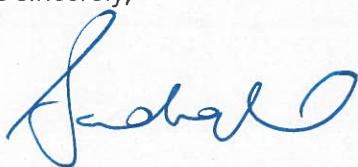
In my Housing Strategy, I committed both to support London boroughs to secure sustainable accommodation for homeless households and to tackle the root causes of homelessness, so that fewer Londoners need TA in the first place. This twofold approach is essential, and the Government must play its part.

The TA crisis that your report describes results from London's shortage of social rented and other genuinely affordable homes, the insecurity of the private rented sector, and the widening gap between rents and the help the benefits system provides.

Given this, the work that I am doing to tackle London's housing crisis – delivering a record-breaking number of homes for social rent, lobbying the Government to make the private rented sector more affordable and secure, and calling for a reversal of the welfare reforms of recent years – is key to solving the TA crisis.

Thank you again for this report. My response to each of the Committee's recommendations is enclosed.

Yours sincerely,



Sadiq Khan

Mayor of London

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The Mayor's response to the recommendations of the London Assembly Housing Committee's report *Living in Limbo: London's Temporary Accommodation Crisis*

Recommendation 1: The Mayor should liaise with London boroughs to ensure that the Homelessness Reduction Act is being fully implemented. He should also work with the London Assembly and London Councils to establish the ongoing financial support needed for these services to be provided by councils as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review. Contact with boroughs about experience of implementation.

The London Housing Strategy makes clear that the Government must adequately fund local authorities to deliver the new responsibilities placed on them by the Homelessness Reduction Act if this legislation is even to begin to deliver what the Government hopes.

My team is in close contact with London Councils regarding work they have commissioned from the London School of Economics (LSE) calculating the cost to London boroughs of meeting the needs of those facing or experiencing homelessness. I am keen to work with them to bring the findings of this assessment to the attention of the Government ahead of a Comprehensive Spending Review.

Recommendation 2: The Mayor should lobby Government to provide adequate funding to realise the changes in advice assistance and support that the introduction of Universal Credit was intended to bring through the Job Centre Plus service and work with DWP and London Councils to establish the financial support and training needed for the services provided through Job Centre Plus to be improved.

I recently wrote to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions about Universal Credit – specifically regarding the shocking impact that this benefit has had on London's disabled households, but also to voice my concern about the risk to Londoners if migration to Universal Credit is mismanaged.

Universal Credit has fallen far short of the aims of simplicity, fairness and incentivising work that its originators intended. I will continue to lobby Government to pause and rethink.

Recommendation 3: The Mayor should lobby Government to review recent changes to legal aid to ensure that people in need of temporary accommodation have access to justice and are able to challenge unsuitable placements.

I have made clear to Government – including in my Rough Sleeping Plan of Action – the grave disadvantage at which cuts to Legal Aid place those who are facing or experiencing homelessness and I will continue to do so. Homeless households' right to ask local authorities to review decisions, including decisions about the suitability of TA, is unfairly eroded if they do not have the access to the judicial system that underpins that right.

Recommendation 4: The Mayor should set up a focussed, pan-London temporary accommodation workstream to seek out and support the wider development of temporary accommodation solutions such as the Capital Letters and PLACE projects already underway and to continue to fund such solutions.

The nature of my housing budget from the Government means that I can only fund at scale capital projects, such as PLACE, rather than schemes like Capital Letters which require significant revenue funding.

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I am proud to have committed £11 million to PLACE and to have supported Capital Letters, including part-funding the feasibility study from which it originated and successfully calling on the Government to commit revenue funding. I will continue supporting Capital Letters and have offered boroughs whatever support I can to any further initiatives that seek to address the TA crisis.

I am willing to fund further projects that will deliver affordable, quality, local accommodation for homeless households. My officers continue to work with local authority and housing association partners to encourage them to submit expressions of interest to the Innovation Fund within my Affordable Homes Programme.

Recommendation 5: MHCLG and DWP should work more closely together to ensure that policies to reduce homelessness and improve housing security are not undermined by the implementation of welfare reforms, and the Mayor should lobby for this.

Changes in the assistance the welfare system provides with covering housing costs have had a particular adverse impact on low-income Londoners' capacity to secure and sustain housing, especially in the private rented sector.

I have urged the Government to review these reforms and will continue to do so. My recently-published paper, *Reforming Private Renting: The Mayor of London's Blueprint*, highlighted the need for welfare benefits to keep up with the true cost of housing to ensure the affordability of the sector. The Government must use the opportunity, created by the end of the four-year freeze on benefits for those of working age, to narrow the gap between Local Housing Allowance rates and market rents.

Recommendation 6: MHCLG and DWP should ensure that full data sharing agreements are set up in order to facilitate the work of councils in implementing their prevention and relief duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, and the Mayor should lobby for this.

Robust data-sharing agreements between the DWP and local authority services responsible for assisting those facing or experiencing homelessness are essential. As the rollout of Universal Credit shifts the administration of assistance with housing costs from local authorities to the DWP, it is vital that local authority staff can secure information on homeless households' benefits claims and awards. I am pleased to hear that MHCLG and DWP officials are currently working on this issue.

Recommendation 7: The Mayor's temporary accommodation workstream should investigate the best methods for involving people with experience of temporary accommodation in their design and management processes in order to ensure that their voices are heard.

I agree that this involvement is important, although sometimes difficult to achieve directly.

First, local authorities rely heavily on private rented accommodation when providing TA, but the design and management of such accommodation is typically outside their control.

One of the advantages of schemes such as PLACE is that local authorities and the Greater London Authority (GLA) have control of design and management. But even where the GLA and/or local authorities control these factors, it can be difficult to involve potential residents in design and management: the nature of TA means that homeless households are often resident with little warning and for short periods of time.

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However, plans for PLACE drew extensively on the experiences of households in TA, as documented in Shelter's excellent research in this area. PLACE will provide accommodation that is well-designed, of appropriate dimensions for the households occupying homes, suitable for occupation over extended periods, and local. As such, it will spare homeless households living in accommodation that is cramped and/or lacks necessary facilities, having to move away from their local area, and/or having to move frequently between accommodation.

The team delivering the PLACE initiative is also keen to seek feedback from households living in TA on the prototype homes manufactured for the PLACE initiative. Once homes are in place, it is also committed to carrying out regular consultation with residents. This will enable the team to develop and improve PLACE to better meet the needs of homeless households, as the initiative progresses.