

***These views are those of the individual members of the Time for Change Core Group, which is hosted by Shelter Scotland. Time for Change is an approach of involving people with lived experience of homelessness or bad housing, in order to better inform the work of the organisation, identify local issues and take action to improve practice in the sector.***

## **Section 1: About your experiences**

### **1. When you first became homeless were you given access to temporary accommodation immediately by your council if you required it?**

There were differing experiences of this depending on the local authority area people went to for help; most people were given temporary accommodation straight away when they presented to their council, but several recounted issues with being refused accommodation, especially if they had been away and re-presented or caused any type of issue at any point and had a label of “Do Not Accommodate” (DNA) put on them. Participants were aware of people who “were DNA” and who had had no option but to sleep rough. Participants said that where they were referred to the night shelter because there was no accommodation available, this was particularly intimidating for women as the shelters tended to be male-dominated spaces.

*“Issues were [that] LA just doesn’t want to accommodate, even though they should by law”.*

For those who were accommodated, some spoke of being given accommodation in different local authority areas and being put in a taxi without knowledge of where they were going, which was extremely distressing. Otherwise, the women in the group reported little problem with accessing temporary accommodation but knew of men who were in the assessment centre who were being turned away without accommodation, or being handed a sleeping bag. While the men in the group thought it was fairly reasonable that women should be given preference for accommodation ahead of them, this suggests that some local authorities still have a version of priority need in place and are not able to cope with demand for temporary accommodation.

*“I feel I was only helped because I was a young single female, if I was a man I may not have been”.*

## **2. What type of temporary accommodation were you placed in? (B&B, hostel, furnished flat etc)**

Again, the group had differing experiences of this, with most staying in a B&B or hostel as soon as they presented as homeless, followed by a temporary furnished flat. There was agreement that a temporary furnished flat was the best type of accommodation but there was sometimes quite a wait for this, and men in particular were unlikely to be allocated one. However, some participants felt that there was a role for hostels in meeting needs, especially at a time in people's lives where they didn't want to manage their own flat and gave the example of the Talbot Hotel as being a well-run example of this.

Regardless of the type of accommodation, there was the feeling that it was known in the local community as the "homeless flat" etc., and there was a strongly stigmatising aspect to this.

Concerningly, the group said that even when you were allocated a temporary flat, problems remained and one of the biggest issues was not being allowed to have family stay over.

*"I was isolated, I wasn't allowed my family to stay, even though I had extra room".*

## **3. What do you need from temporary accommodation to make it suitable for you?**

Participants reflected on the definition of suitable accommodation as set out in question 6 and used this as the basis for their answer. These standards were that people:

- Are housed where people in your household can access schools and medical services in the local area
- Have adequate bedrooms for members of your household
- Have exclusive use of toilet and washing facilities for members of your household
- Have access to your own or shared cooking facilities and use of a living room.
- Can stay in the accommodation at all times, with no curfew and are allowed visitors

While participants agreed that the current definition was fairly conclusive, they emphasised how important it was to be placed in an area familiar to them, where they had support networks (especially if they had a physical or mental health issue). They also felt that proximity to existing education was extremely important for families with children and acknowledged that some local authorities paid for taxi services between a family's temporary accommodation and the child's school if it

was more than a certain distance away. Overall, the group were keen that children were not uprooted, which would make the overall experience worse for them.

*“Imagine the trauma in taking kids out and in different schools”.*

Lastly, participants felt that there should be better assessment of individual needs, and people were often allocated temporary accommodation and “left to it”. For people with mental health issues, they felt this was particularly concerning and unacceptable, but extremely difficult for the individual to challenge or get access to support.

*“You're not a human anymore”.*

*“I was made to feel less than other people, I still feel like that now”.*

#### **4. How many different temporary accommodations were you placed in? Why was this the case? What impact did this have on you?**

Again, this varied between people – some said they had been placed straight into a “homeless flat” i.e. temporary furnished flat and stayed there until they got a permanent offer, while others were bounced around “hundreds of accommodations”. This was due to a mix of factors, including a lack of accommodation, leaving TA and then re-presenting later, or the person being at a very chaotic time in their lives. It was felt that the perceived circumstances of the person seeking TA impacted very much on what they were offered, and again like the gender issue outlined in question 1, there was often not parity of treatment.

### **Section 2: Unsuitable Accommodation**

#### **5. We are making changes to the Unsuitable Accommodation Order so no-one has to stay in 'unsuitable' accommodation for more than 7 days. What does unsuitable mean for you?**

People felt that there was no question that the Order should be applied to everyone and cited examples of where men were in terrible conditions and this exacerbated their poor mental health, to the point of describing them as “crumbling” and being on the verge of suicide.

#### **6. Legally, suitable accommodation currently means that you:-**

- **Are housed where people in your household can access schools and medical services in the local area**
- **Have adequate bedrooms for members of your household**
- **Have exclusive use of toilet and washing facilities for members of your household**
- **Have access to your own or shared cooking facilities and use of a living room**
- **Can stay in the accommodation at all times, with no curfew and are allowed visitors**

**Is there anything else you would add to the above list or take away?**

Participants emphasised and prioritised the importance of individuals and families being close to established health and education networks. Despite acknowledgement of this in the list, examples were given of where local authorities had told families that they could not guarantee that they would be close to schooling, and it was agreed that it should be a top priority not to uproot children from their school.

The group strongly felt that there should be an additional requirement for necessary support to be provided, for example for alcohol, drugs, and mental health needs. It was felt that current provision for this in many places was not sufficient, and a participant grimly noted that the main interaction between staff and residents in temporary accommodation was when staff knocked on doors to check the person was still alive, known as the “death check”.

Additionally, people felt that there was a need for a single point of contact at the council for each person who would remain in proactive contact and be responsible for forward planning and planning a route out of temporary accommodation, bearing in mind individuals’ needs and desires.

**7. In your experience how common is it to stay in unsuitable accommodation like this?**

A) Very common

B) Quite common

C) Not common

It was the group’s experience that the use of unsuitable accommodation, i.e. accommodation which did not meet one or more of the criteria set out in question 6

was **very common**, and if they themselves had not experienced it, they could easily call to mind friends or family who had experienced it.

## **8. What types of accommodation are more likely to be unsuitable?**

**A) Bed and Breakfast**

**B) Hostel**

**C) Furnished Flat**

As outlined in the response to question 2, furnished flats were generally seen as the least likely to be unsuitable, and bed and breakfasts to be mostly unsuitable.

There was the sense in B&Bs and hostels that your life was on hold, you couldn't go about your life in the normal way and you were stuck in limbo, having to abide by unusual and arbitrary rules (such as curfews) or risk being excluded.

*"Places are too rigid with rules (curfews etc)"*

*"No life and not allowed to get on with your life".*

## **9. Would you change the description of suitable accommodation in any way?**

See response to question 6.

**10. Currently the Unsuitable Accommodation Order means that local authorities must not house families and pregnant women in unsuitable accommodation for more than 7 days. Do you think that this should be changed so that everyone is covered by the Unsuitable Accommodation Order?**

Yes, see response to question 5. The group strongly felt that everyone should be covered by the Order, and men were extremely likely to be offered unsuitable accommodation and this should no longer be the case as they are also negatively impacted by it.

### **Section 3: Standards in Temporary Accommodation**

#### **11. We want to improve the standards in temporary accommodation across Scotland.**

##### **Thinking about your experience(s) of living in temporary accommodation, what types of things would make/have made your stay more positive or pleasant?**

The group agreed that there was a low awareness of rights, poor communication from council officers in terms of keeping people informed of the progress of their application and lack of support. They agreed that these three things would have a huge impact on their experience of temporary accommodation, as not knowing what was going on or how long they would be in temporary accommodation was very stressful.

It appeared that councils were not forthcoming in telling people about their rights and expected people to know what to do, and as a result, people were left in limbo in poor quality accommodation for a long time.

There is generally no onsite support staff at B&Bs or hostels, and support and housing staff from the council rarely visit. Therefore, it was hard for people to access the support that was needed. It was felt that it was a matter of luck where you applied as homeless, or whether you got a “good” officer, and this shouldn’t be the case. Many participants were able to recall instances of downright hostile staff, both when they tried to apply as homeless and when they were allocated temporary accommodation.

*“The local authority rely on people going to them for updates etc, most people just won’t approach them”.*

*“People don’t know what the council are doing”.*

Further to this, many people thought that the rules around curfews and visitors were too strict and changing this to be more flexible would allow them to get on with life as much as possible.

#### **12. How would you compare the standard of temporary accommodation with the standards of any permanent accommodation that you have experienced?**

The group generally felt that permanent accommodation was of a better standard, but this varied between local authorities. The fact that many permanent accommodation was not furnished to any degree was frustrating as people felt that it would be hard to turn it into somewhere homely.

**13. How easy was it to raise any issues or problems about the standard of your accommodation and get things fixed?**

**A) Very easy**

**B) Quite easy**

**C) Not easy**

Members of the group who had stayed in temporary accommodation stated that it was very hard to raise issues, from conditions to cost. They said that staff in B&Bs and hostels were not trained council staff, but hospitality staff with no experience of supporting people, but rather “jannies”. There was the sense that people were asked to leave hostels for small things, and there was very little awareness of rights.

*“There is a huge difference between accommodation that you are supported in and emergency accommodation. This usually comes down to the staff as certain hotel/B&B just don’t have nice staff”.*

The lack of onsite support meant that in these accommodation types, there was very little flexibility or understanding of what people needed and the rules were very rigid. Individuals also said that they relied on outreach services to raise any issues they had with their accommodation, or with accessing support services.

*“I was told to shoosh, no one to tell, no one to listen”.*

**14. Would having a set of Scottish Government standards for temporary accommodation help you raise any problems you face with your accommodation?**

No answer provided for this question.

**15. Do you think councils should be penalised (for example, through a fine) if the accommodation they provide does not meet these standards?**

No answer provided for this question.

**16. As a first stage, we want to put the standards into a refreshed Code of Guidance, which local authorities are expected to follow. These will be known**

as **Advisory Standards** and will allow us to do something quickly. The second stage will be to introduce **Enforceable Standards** but this will be a longer process as we need to consider all of the existing legislation that covers permanent housing standards to make sure that temporary accommodation meets all of these.

**Do you have any comments about this approach?**

No answer provided for this question.

**17. We propose that standards cover the following areas:**

- **Physical: safe and secure, access to proper cooking, washing facilities, suitable for disabled people, clean, enough living space etc.**
- **Suitability: affordable and meets your needs.**
- **Located near services: schools, medical facilities**
- **Support: you can get the support you need from a range of services**
- **Management: your possessions are protected, you have a written occupancy agreement, you are involved in discussions about your stay and there are processes for moving in and out, you get a rent statement**

**Do these cover the right areas to improve standards in temporary accommodation? Is there anything missing?**

The above standards cover a lot of what the group felt were necessary elements of good accommodation, and particularly emphasised the need to be able to stay connected to existing supports, or to be linked in with support services in the locality.

**18. We will set up a Working Group to develop the new standards framework for temporary accommodation. Is there anything you think this group should do or take into account as they do this?**

No answer provided for this question.