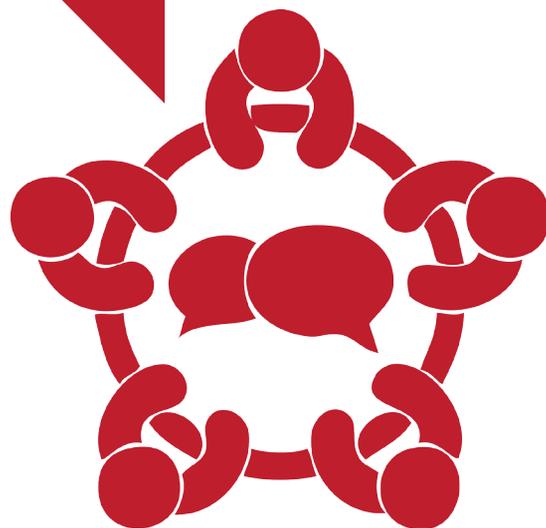


Not Home:

A summary of findings from conversations with the hidden homeless in North West and South East England.



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The research story so far...

Since 2013 Justlife has been talking with the hidden homeless, to find out what life is really like for them. These people are single homeless residents living in unsupported temporary accommodation, (B&Bs, private hostels and HMOs). The number of people living in this accommodation type is

not recorded in official statistics, but is estimated to be worryingly high. The number of statutory homeless households placed in B&Bs stood at 4,700 in Q3 of 2014. The actual number living in unsupported temporary accommodation is likely to be five to ten times more than this.¹ This document takes a look at the findings from group conversations with the hidden homeless

in South East and North West England. These discussions are a small part of a three year research project, funded by LankellyChase, investigating the long term impact on health and wellbeing of single homeless households living in unsupported temporary accommodation. We would like to thank Homeless Link for their support and guidance with this element of the project.

When asked about the positives and negatives of living in unsupported temporary accommodation, this is what tenants said...

The management

Unsupported temporary accommodation residences are provided by private landlords. These landlords and companies often house vulnerable individuals with multiple and complex needs. They are often meeting a need for accommodation for people who have found it difficult to access the mainstream residential market. We recognise that some landlords and management companies make a concerted effort to keep properties to a satisfactory standard, in fact, tenants told us that one landlord had installed CCTV at the B&B 'just last week', which was already making tenants feel safer. But, overall there are problems and all participants identified poor management practices.



When you spoke to the reception desk at the place they didn't speak to you like a person, they treated you like a minion or something.

And you can't say nothing, because if you complain to them they kick you out. You just have to take the shit. You are kicked out if you complain. So you can't complain.

You know the landlord asked me to be the manager in the house there? She told me that she will pay me every week, so I asked her how much, she said £10 a week. I was like "no way".

But the manager that there is in there is no good. If you approach him, he is not interested, if you have got a problem with your room, he is not interested. All he wants is to knock on your door and ask for money.

Conditions

The quality of unsupported temporary accommodation has been a clear issue from the outset of this research. Although some tenants were more content than others, everyone raised issues of substandard conditions in these discussions. Worryingly the impact that poor conditions are having on mental and physical health are significant: one participant attributed the depressing environment to a suicide attempt, at least three had been admitted to hospital because of the effects of damp and others were suffering with a declining state of mental health.



The rooms and the hygiene in the place just go right down. It damages your health, and your mental health.

No hot water, no heating. The room we were in, we had the settee in there and it was white with damp. And it was pointed out to them, and they said they would sort it out, but it wasn't, it was just left. Rats as well, there were rats.

The rats are the size of cats, you can see them. I heard the noise in my bin bag so I put my mobile phone on. The light from my mobile caught him and he ran.

Low expectations

Although the participants were vocal about the poor quality of the accommodation, they did not have high expectations. There was a general feeling amongst all residents of: 'at least it is a roof over my head' and a feeling that they can't really complain all the time because 'at least it is off the streets.' Prior knowledge, through others or first hand experience, often meant that they knew what they were going to before arriving and were not surprised.



I was two weeks on the streets, I needed somewhere. But they warned me from the beginning, that place is bad

It is a roof over my head and I am not living on the streets.

It's somewhere isn't it?

Rights

During both discussion groups, there were heated conversations about rights and entitlements. Many did not feel they knew what their rights were as tenants or even what type of contract or agreement they had, if any. Even when participants claimed to know their rights we found that they had been misinformed. There was much confusion about the level of rent being paid the amount that people paid in service charge – even in the same premises, it varied greatly. Other people's stories and rumours about eviction fed a paranoia that meant people felt even less sure about their rights. What was worse is that no one really knew where they could find information to help them.



One step out of line and you're out. No help, no support. No contract.

There isn't any contract or agreement or anything in these places.

You don't know what protects you in the law, this is the disadvantage. They [the landlords] know the law and they can ignore the law and they have the means... You can't go to a lawyer because you can't get legal aid for such matters.

When you look at things, you're saying it is £119, he pays £59.38. What? Bob is also paying £119. Enrique pays £119 too. It's a fiddle... He claimed for us both at £119 and we were in one room!

The council just one day wrote to me and said that they are gonna chuck me out, for no reason of my own behavior. They are just gonna chuck me out. All lies!

Isolation

All participants cited isolation or loneliness as an issue in their accommodation. In general other residents in the premises are unsociable or if they are friendly, it is often to get money, cigarettes or other items. This means that tenants wanted to keep themselves to themselves – so as not to cause problems or get in with the wrong people. No one is allowed visitors in their unsupported temporary accommodation. Isolation led to rapidly deteriorating mental health.



You get depressed... You just want to stay locked in your room or in my case, before I had a TV I would lie in my room, staring at the ceiling, 4-5 hours in a row, just thinking about my life.

Everyone just seems to keep themselves to themselves. I think that they are in the same state as I am. Feeling not secure, but feeling like you are in a prison really.

So we are suffering from the isolation, which makes you feel depressed.

No visitors: not even your family, mother or father, brother or sister. It is not

1. For further information, see page 4 of Rose A and Davies B (2014) Not home: The lives of hidden homeless households in unsupported temporary accommodation in England, IPPR North.

We asked the tenants of unsupported temporary accommodation to lend their experience and expertise and give advice to others living in or moving into accommodation of this type.

Here are the top 3 pieces of advice from the South East and North West:

Advice from tenants in the South East...

1. Find out.

Know what help is available before you reach crisis point. Ideally before you ever end up in unsupported temporary temporary accommodation.

2. Get help.

Get the support of a trusted and independent organisation or charity as soon as you can. You will need their advocacy to help you navigate through the system and make sure that you get what you are entitled to.

3. Keep busy.

Take advantage of activities that are available to get you up and out of where you are living, otherwise you will get depressed.

Advice from tenants in the North West...

1. Get up.

You will need to get up and find your own help as there is no support in the accommodation. Find somewhere, a charity or support service where you are able to use the phone for free. You will have to make a lot of phone calls.

2. Get out.

Don't sit around in your room all day and try not to mix with other people at your place who are drinking or doing drugs, this will make any problems you have worse. Stay out as much as you can and find activities and drop ins to go to where you can make positive friendships.

3. Don't treat this as a long term solution.

The accommodation will not be good quality and no one there will help you. Life will be hard. Don't expect to be satisfied there. Do all you can to get out and move on.

What's next

This is the latest publication from our three year research project. To read the most recent full report please visit the Justlife or IPPR North website and download: *Not Home: The lives of hidden homeless households in unsupported temporary accommodation in England*. Alongside IPPR North, Justlife will continue to lead discussions about unsupported temporary accommodation and make policy and practice recommendations to address urgent issues.

Over the next few months we are planning:

... To share, by organising round table events across the UK to present our research findings and the share the voices of tenants of unsupported temporary accommodation and to discuss potential ways of reforming policy and practice to address issues with practitioners and policy makers.

... To write, launching a 'guide to unsupported temporary accommodation', written by the tenants of unsupported temporary accommodation.

... To keep learning, by continuing conversations with tenants of unsupported temporary accommodation through interviews, groups and journals.