



The Impact of inadequate housing on educational experience: *A Pilot study in Newham*

Dr Penny Bernstock
Andrew Holt
Debbie Humphry
Frankie Webb-Huseyin

citizens^{UK}

Citizens UK
Jacquard Point 1 and 3
Tapestry Way London E1 2FJ
Registered Charity: 1107264

June 2024

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Introduction

The housing crisis is worsening year by year, month by month and day by day and is now better understood as a housing emergency that is impacting more and more people, including those who previously would have found it relatively easy to secure a home on the open market. The COVID-19 pandemic brought into stark contrast disparities in the quality of housing and the importance of well-designed/spacious homes with access to green space. In 2020 as we entered lockdown TELCO (The East London Citizens Organisation) were working on a film about the housing legacy of London 2012 with schools and community groups in the four legacy boroughs and it was clear that the housing crisis was having a severe impact on the lives of children and young people.

For example:

“One family living just a Couple of hundred yards from here, father and mother, and a youngster aged 5 living in one room. They had a second child who had died, and it was pretty clear that it was because of the awful circumstances of their housing. They both worked for the NHS and yet they cannot afford an adequate home for themselves.”

Stephen Timms MP

“The problems we see are around temporary and emergency accommodation and very poor-quality accommodation in the private rented sector. When people say temporary that is a bit of a misnomer, what temporary means is unregulated accommodation, so they can't put down roots, they don't know whether to change their children's school from the borough which they came from or their GP (general practitioners) because they literally don't know whether they are going to move tomorrow or in three years- time. We have families of up to 4 or 5 people in one room the size of a single bedroom. There are high levels of asthma, nowhere to play, children are learning to walk on the bed because there is no clear floor space, they are missing the crawling phase of development because they are not having enough tummy time on the floor.”

Jane Williams, CEO, Magpie Project

Research Aims

In 2021 TELCO (The East London Citizens Organisation) decided to extend the research by undertaking a more in-depth pilot project aimed at understanding the impact of inadequate housing on children and young people's educational experiences and wellbeing in one of the legacy boroughs. We decided to focus on Newham because it has some of the highest levels of housing need in England.

Specifically, the research aimed to offer insights into:

1. How inadequate housing affects early child development/educational experience of children and young people from 0-18.
2. How inadequate housing impacts the emotional and physical wellbeing of children and families.
3. What kinds of strategies and policies could be put in place to mitigate the negative impact of poor housing on children and young people's educational experience.

Key Findings

1. This project has explored the impact of inadequate housing on early childhood development/educational experience in Newham, but its findings are applicable to children and young people across the country.
2. Children and families living in Newham are at the epicentre of the UK's housing emergency and bearing the brunt of decades of failed housing policies. This means that too many children are growing up in housing that is not fit for purpose. This is having a detrimental impact on many aspects of their lives including their ability to play, learn, study, socialise with friends and more generally thrive in their home.
3. Overcrowding emerged as a key issue, which negatively affected all family members, limiting privacy and space and impacting their emotional wellbeing. The lack of housing means that it is not unusual for a parent and child or indeed a whole family of four to share a bedroom.
4. Asylum seeking families were living in very unsuitable/substandard housing, often sharing facilities with other families. Their housing was subject to a different regulatory regime.
5. Families in housing need felt abandoned by statutory authorities, often bidding for several years without viewing a property. The choice-based lettings scheme¹ was a source of frustration and did not appear to be fit for purpose.
6. Schools, voluntary and statutory organisations are playing a vital role in supporting infants, children and young people and their families living in inadequate housing.
7. School based social workers/support workers can play a vital role in supporting children and their families with a range of difficulties including housing.
8. Central Government and local authorities are currently spending substantial amounts of money on housing benefit and temporary accommodation with limited return on investment and poor outcomes for children and young people. Investing in new socially rented homes would result in a saving of £180,000 per unit across a 30-year period.²
9. The UK is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC). Article 27 states that every child has the right to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social development. In many instances the standard of housing provided was inadequate and therefore may be in breach of Article 27.

1 Click on this link to find out more about choice based lettings [Shelter Legal England - Local authority choice based lettings schemes - Shelter England](#)

2 See Fletcher, C. (2021) Investment in council housing will save public money in [Local Government Chronicle](#), 13th October

Recommendations:

For Central Government

1. The government should work with the London Borough of Newham to radically increase the amount of socially rented housing that is built in the borough.
2. The government should work with the London Borough of Newham to ensure that there is a limit to the amount of time that children spend in inadequate and temporary accommodation.
3. The government should ensure that Local Housing Allowance rates are adequate to enable families to access housing that meets their needs.
4. The government should ensure that there are consistent regulatory standards that apply to all children and families living in the Private Rented sector, irrespective of immigration status.
5. Families with children should be placed in self-contained accommodation with their own separate facilities.
6. The government should introduce good practice guidance for local authorities that sets out how they can support the additional needs of children and young people living in inadequate housing in a holistic way.
7. The government to ensure there is a whole family support practitioner for every school to work with young people and their families to identify and unpick underlying causes of persistent absence. Whole family support practitioners have the time and skills to 'dig a little deeper' into wider issues like inadequate housing and target or signpost support to alleviate barriers to school.
8. In March 2024 the government updated its Homeless Code of Guidance and stated that housing would not be suitable if there was not enough space for a cot for each child under 2. This guidance is welcome, but the government needs to ensure that this is fully implemented.

Recommendations:

For London Borough of Newham

1. The London Borough of Newham should work with Central government and the Greater London Authority to radically increase the amount of socially rented housing in the borough.
2. The London Borough of Newham should continue to work to raise housing standards in the social-rented and private-rented sector.
3. The London Borough of Newham should ensure that relevant statutory guidance is fully implemented.
4. The London Borough of Newham should establish a time-limited Children and Young people led task group to develop a set of recommendations to support children and young people, aimed at minimising the negative impacts of inadequate housing on educational experience.
5. The London Borough of Newham should establish a time-limited working group with relevant statutory and voluntary sector agencies to develop a comprehensive plan that aims to minimise the negative impact of inadequate housing on child development and educational experience.
6. The London Borough of Newham should scale up support to voluntary organisations who are well placed to develop innovative solutions to support children and families.
7. The London Borough of Newham should review the choice based letting system and establish a user orientated support service for those who need housing advice or are on the housing waiting list.
8. Social workers based either in schools

or working across schools could play an important role in supporting pupils and their families who are living in inadequate housing. The London Borough of Newham should ensure there is a whole family support practitioner for every school to work with young people and their families to identify and unpick underlying causes of persistent absence.

Research methodology

This research project was led by TELCO, the founding chapter of Citizens UK who utilise a community organising approach³ aimed at bringing together communities to organise for change. One of the key principles of a community organising approach is listening and gathering testimony and this principle has informed our methodological approach.

We worked with four of our member organisations in Newham. This included St Antony's Catholic Primary School, St Bonaventure's Secondary School, NewVic Sixth Form College and Shpresa (an organisation working with Refugees and Asylum Seekers). In addition, we worked with two organisations that were not TELCO members: Focus E15 (a campaigning organisation set up in 2013 following the eviction of single mothers from a hostel in the borough) and the Magpie Project (a children's centre aimed at parents and pre-school children living in temporary or insecure accommodation).

Given that this was a small pilot project our focus was on educational experience rather than educational outcomes, as the latter would have been much harder to quantify.

We undertook a comprehensive review of relevant secondary literature on the impact of inadequate housing on children and young people's wellbeing and educational experience/outcomes and we contextualised this within the UK housing crisis and its specific impacts in Newham. We were mindful that this was a sensitive topic and potentially traumatic experience and therefore we adopted a trauma informed approach.⁴

We designed a participatory research framework

that utilised both qualitative and quantitative methods. We utilised a Child Rights Based approach to engage Year 6 and Year 7 pupils in a range of activities aimed at exploring the relationship between inadequate housing, educational experience and children's rights as enshrined in the UNCRC [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child - UNICEF UK](#)

We co-designed two surveys with A-Level Sociology students at St Bonaventure's School: one aimed at Primary School pupils and another at Secondary School pupils. We designed a further survey for teachers and parents and undertook a focus group with parents of under 5's living in temporary accommodation at the Magpie Project. We undertook semi-structured interviews with Seventeen parents and six professionals working in education related roles in Newham.

We utilised Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological model as this offered a whole systems approach, giving us an understanding of the relationship between children, their educational experience and inadequate housing. This was an action research project and therefore there was a focus throughout on identifying strategies for change.

The research was undertaken between February 2022 and April 2024.

Research Limitations

This was a small pilot study. This research was undertaken with our member organisations, which included a charity working with Albanian refugees and Asylum Seekers, two Catholic Schools and the Magpie Project which is a charity. Ideally with more resources we would have interviewed pupils in a wider range of schools and therefore by focussing exclusively on two Catholic Schools we acknowledge that the demographic make-up of these schools is different to the demographic make-up of schools in the borough as a whole.⁵

3 Click on this link to find out more about Community Organising [What is community organising? - Citizens UK](#)

4 Click on the link to find out more about a Trauma informed approach [Working definition of trauma-informed practice - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

5 Data from Census 2021 indicated that 35.3% of the population of Newham recorded their religion as Christian, 34.8% Muslim; 6.1% Hindu; 1.6% Sikh, .6% Buddhist and .1% Jewish. [Population - UTLA | Newham | Report Builder for ArcGIS](#)

This research was undertaken in the period following the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools were short staffed and there was a perception of research fatigue, therefore, we limited the scope and scale of activities.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all those children, young people, and their families who gave up their time to participate in this project and share some very difficult experiences. We would like to thank St Anthony's Catholic Primary School, St Bonaventure's School, Shpresa, Magpie, People's Empowerment Alliance for Custom House (PEACH) and Focus E15. We would like to thank the University of East London for funding a postgraduate student to work as research officer on this project, Mayor Fiaz and London Borough of Newham officers, and Bert Provan, Senior Policy Fellow and Knowledge Broker at the LSE. Special thanks go to Andy Lewis, Deputy Headteacher at St Bonaventure's, Luljeta Nuzi at Shpresa and Jane Williams and Gifty Amponsah from Magpie who worked tirelessly to support the research project. Thanks also to Emmanuel Gotoro and Caroline Verdant from Citizens UK who supported the project throughout.

This report is divided into six chapters:

In the first chapter, we contextualise the housing emergency nationally and its specific impact in Newham.

In Chapter Two we contextualise the relationship between inadequate housing and educational experience. We review relevant literature that provides insights into the impact of inadequate housing on children's lives generally and educational experience. We include testimony from expert witnesses from relevant professionals who work in Newham, and we utilise Bronfenbrenner's model to explore the complex relationship between inadequate housing and other dimensions of children's lives.

In Chapter Three we summarise the key findings of fieldwork undertaken at the Magpie Project with parents with children under 5 living in temporary accommodation. We highlight ways in which inadequate housing limits the potential of babies and toddlers to practise a range of key skills, for example, walking, crawling, and engaging in play-based learning.

In Chapter Four we summarise key findings from the fieldwork undertaken with Year six pupils at Anthony's Catholic Primary School in Newham that included a survey with all year six pupils that explored the relationship between inadequate housing and educational experience and classroom-based activities that explored the relationship between inadequate housing and children's rights.

In Chapter Five we summarise key findings from research undertaken with a Secondary school in Newham, St Bonaventure's School, with pupils and parents. In this chapter, we explore the impact on inadequate housing on the educational experiences of children and young people at St Bonaventure's School. This includes perspectives from pupils, teachers, and parents on the impact of inadequate housing on educational experience.

In Chapter Six we summarise the findings of research undertaken in conjunction with the Shpresa Charity and parents of children living in refugee families on the impact of inadequate housing on educational experience.

Chapter One: Newham's housing emergency in context

Newham's housing emergency is part of a wider housing crisis affecting households across the country. In this chapter we identify some of the pertinent elements of this housing crisis at national and regional (London) level and summarise key elements of Newham's housing crisis.

The housing crisis in context

The housing crisis in Newham must be understood as an extreme manifestation of a wider national crisis whose features have been summarised in a plethora of reports.⁶ Here we summarise some of the key elements of this national emergency/crisis and refer to them as a number of 'gaps'. Firstly, one key overriding problem is the result of a '**supply gap**'. There has been a consistent failure across decades to build sufficient homes to meet need, both in relation to overall numbers of units built and the type/tenure of those properties. This has contributed to an '**affordability gap**' where there is a growing gap between incomes and the cost of housing in all tenures. This is acting as a barrier to access and contributing to an increase in poverty after housing costs.⁷ The '**affordability gap**' also manifests itself in some types of affordable housing and in particular shared ownership housing where overall costs are determined by market values rather than incomes.⁸ There is a '**quality gap**' in that a small but significant proportion of housing is of poor quality and

therefore it is acknowledged that there is a need for further regulation.⁹ The lack of social rented housing means that many people on low incomes live in the private rented sector. However, there is a '**benefits gap**' in that welfare reforms have resulted in a cap on benefits such as the Local Housing Allowance that in many instances do not cover the cost of suitable private rented housing in an area, although at the time of writing this had been increased and whilst this is welcome it is not clear whether this increase will address this gap.¹⁰ There is also an '**expenditure gap**'. The government and local authorities are investing significant resources in housing. However, most of this expenditure is spent on Housing Benefit and supporting families who are often living in inadequate and temporary accommodation as compared to building new homes. Specifically, in 2022/2023 annual expenditure on Housing Benefit in the UK was £15.4 billion.¹¹ In that same period local authorities in England spent a further £1.74 billion on temporary accommodation. By contrast, the budget for new affordable homes for the period 2021 – 2026 was £11.4 billion, equating to £2.3 billion per annum.¹² Central government and local authorities are currently spending substantial amounts of money on housing benefit and temporary accommodation with limited return on investment and poor outcomes for children whereas investing in new socially rented

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- 6 See for example, Berry, C, Pennington, J. (2022) *Cover the Cost: Protecting Renters from Homelessness in the cost of Living Crisis*, London: Shelter ; Commission of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York on Housing, Church and Community (2021) *Coming Home Tackling the Housing Crisis Together*; Department for Communities and Levelling up (2023) [English Housing Survey 2021 to 2022: private rented sector - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) Stephens, M, Perry, J, Williams, P, Young, G. (2023) *UK Housing Review*, York: Chartered Institute of Housing; Commission of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York on Housing, Church and Community (2021) *Coming Home Tackling the Housing Crisis Together*; Taylor, R. (2022) *Housing in England, Issues, Statistics and Commentary*, House of Lords Library
- 7 Stephens, M, Perry, J, Williams, P, Young, G. (2023) *UK Housing Review*, York: Chartered Institute of Housing
- 8 Barton, C, Wilson, W. (2023) [What is affordable housing? - House of Commons Library \(parliament.uk\)](#)
- 9 In 2023, according to the English House Condition Survey 23% (990,000) Private Rented sector homes failed to meet the Decent Homes Standard; 10% (380,000) Social rented homes, and 13% (2 million) Owner-occupied homes failed to meet the Decent Homes Standard.
- 10 Citizens Advice. (2021). [The Impact of Freezing the Local Housing Allowance - Citizens Advice](#)
- 11 Clarke, D. (2023) Government expenditure on housing benefit in the UK 1948-2023, [UK housing benefit expenditure 2023 | Statista](#), 11th October
- 12 Barton, C, Wilson, W. Op Cit

homes would result in a saving of £180,000 per unit across a 30-year period.¹³

The housing crisis in London

The housing crisis and its effects are most pronounced in London, where there is a growing population and a consistent failure to build sufficient housing to meet need/demand and therefore the ‘**supply gap**’ here is particularly severe.¹⁴ The lack of housing supply means that housing costs are particularly high, and the ‘**affordability gap**’ is very pronounced. Londoners spend a disproportionate amount of their income on housing costs and are more likely to be pushed into poverty after housing costs than elsewhere in England.¹⁵ The high cost of housing has resulted in a massive demand for affordable social rented housing in London. There are currently 300,000 households on housing waiting lists across the 32 London Boroughs accounting for a quarter of all those on housing waiting lists in England.¹⁶ Families in London are disproportionately affected by homelessness. Specifically, 59% of all households placed in temporary accommodation are in London (56,500 households including 78,500 children). Some London local authorities experience significant difficulties sourcing suitable accommodation and are forced to place households in Bed and Breakfast accommodation or in accommodation that does not meet their needs and may be some distance from the borough in which they live, fracturing social networks.¹⁷ The lack of social rented housing

means that many households live in the private sector. However, there has been a sharp fall in the availability of private sector lettings and an increase in rents making it more difficult to access private rented sector housing.¹⁸ Declining benefits and increasing rents, in other words the ‘**benefits gap**’, is making it increasingly difficult for households to live in inner city areas in several cities including London and is resulting in their displacement to less desirable/accessible parts of the city, which is sometimes described as the sub-urbanisation of poverty.¹⁹ There is also a ‘**quality gap**’ in that 20% of Private Rented homes, compared to 13% of socially rented Homes, and 8% of owner-occupied homes, fell below the decent homes’ standard.²⁰ Those on low incomes, living in council homes or of Black, Bangladeshi, or Pakistani ethnicity, were more likely to rate their housing as poor.²¹

Newham – in Context

We now move on to focus specifically on Newham. We begin by providing some key demographic data before moving on to look in more detail at Newham’s housing crisis. According to the 2021 census, Newham’s population increased by 14% between 2011 and 2021 from 308,000 to 351,000. Newham has a diverse ethnic population: 42.2% of the population define their ethnicity as Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh; 30.8% as White; 17.5% as Black African, Black Caribbean, Black British or Black Welsh and 4.9% as Other. Between 2011 and 2021 there was a marginal increase in those describing themselves as White and a small

13 See Fletcher, C. (2021) Investment in council housing will save public money in [Local Government Chronicle, 13th October](#)

14 Greater London Authority. (2022) Housing in London, London: GLA; Minton, A. (2017) Big Capital: Who is London for? London: Penguin

15 Greater London Authority. (2022) Housing in London, London: GLA.

16 Harding, C, Cottell, J, Tabbush, Z, Mahmud, Z. (2023) Homes fit for Londoners; London’s Homes Today; London: Centre for London

17 Harding, C, Bosetti, N, Urquiljo, J, (2022) Temporary Accommodation, London’s Hidden homelessness crisis, Centre for London: London

18 Davies, A, Scanlon, K. (2023) Supply of Private Rented Sector accommodation in London. LSE Consulting/Savills

19 Bailey, N, Livingston, M, Bin, C. (2023) Housing and welfare reform, and the suburbanization of poverty in UK cities 2011-20, Housing Studies, DOI: [10.1080/02673037.2023.2266398](https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2023.2266398)

20 The Decent Homes Standard was introduced in 2000, with the intention of ensuring housing meets minimum standards. Government funding for bringing social homes up to decent homes standard came to an end in 2016. [115,000 of London’s social homes fail to meet decent standards | London City Hall](#)

21 Greater London Authority. (2022) Housing in London, London: GLA

decrease in those describing themselves as being from Black and Minority Ethnic groups.²²

Newham has benefitted from substantial investment/regeneration in specific parts of the borough, specifically Stratford, Canning Town and the Royal Docks, resulting in an increase in a wealthier population, polarisation between those living in the new main market housing and existing populations, and indirect displacement because of rising house prices.²³ Despite this investment poverty levels remain high: 43.7% of children in Newham live in relative poverty after housing costs (defined as 60% of median income) and this is the second highest in London and the fifth highest in the UK.²⁴ West Ham is one of two parliamentary constituencies in Newham and this constituency has the highest gap between poverty before-housing costs (23%) and poverty after Housing Costs (47.5%) in the UK. In other words, housing costs are a key explanatory factor in high rates of child poverty and poverty more generally.²⁵ The London Living Wage has been embraced by the London Borough of Newham and other employers in Newham and this is having a positive effect on low pay. Specifically in 2020, 26.3% of the population in Newham were on low pay (defined as earnings below the London Living Wage) and in 2022 this had declined to 21.2% of the population, although this was still significantly higher than the London Average (16.1%) and was the second highest in London.²⁶

Despite this high level of poverty Newham pupils make good progress at school. In 2022, 67% of

pupils in Newham reached the required level in Reading, Writing and Mathematics combined at Key Stage 2 and this was above the London average.²⁷ In 2021/2022, the average attainment 8 score per pupil at GCSE in Newham was 53.8 for all pupils (the tenth highest in London) and 49.4% for pupils on Free School Meals (FSM) (the second highest in London).²⁸ **Therefore, there is not a direct correlation between poverty and educational attainment**, although the borough has a higher number of 19-year-olds that do not have a Level 3 qualification (29.3% compared to a London average of 25.7%).²⁹

Housing and housing need in Newham

Newham has some of the highest level of housing need both across the region (London) and nationally (England) on a range of indicators and since commencing the project there is evidence that the housing emergency is becoming more extreme. This is impacting negatively on children and their families, and it is also making it increasingly difficult for the borough to address this issue. Specifically, the cost of temporary accommodation is growing and impacting on the borough's overall financial situation which in turn is impacting on overall budgets and resulting in widespread cuts to services including services for children and families.

In 2021/2022 there were 33,234 residents on Newham's housing waiting list (the second highest in England) and 19,416 of these were defined as living in insanitary or overcrowded housing (the highest in England).³⁰ 22% of

22 Office for National Statistics. (2022) [Newham population change, Census 2021 – ONS](#).

23 Bernstock, P. (2014) *London's Olympic Housing: Critical Reflections on London 2012's Legacy*, Routledge: London; Watt, P. and Bernstock, P. (2017) *Legacy for Whom? Housing in Post-Olympic East London*. In *London 2012 and the post-Olympics City* (pp. 91-138). Palgrave Macmillan, London.

24 Stone, J. (2021) *Local Indicators of Child Poverty After Housing Costs*. 2021/2022, Loughborough, Centre for Social Policy

25 Op Cit

26 Trust for London. (2023) Proportion of Borough Residents that are Low paid. [Low pay in London boroughs | Trust for London](#)

27 National Statistics. (2023) [Key stage 2 attainment, Academic year 2022/23 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](#)

28 Department of Education. (2023) [GCSE Results by Borough - London Datastore](#) accessed 16th October 2023

29 Trust for London. (2023) Borough Profile accessed at [Poverty and Inequality Data For Newham - Trust For London | Trust for London](#)

30 Source: Department for Levelling up, Communities and Local Government, Table 600, Live tables on rents, lettings and tenancies, [Live tables on rents, lettings and tenancies - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Newham's population are living in overcrowded conditions in England, significantly higher than the average for London (11%) and England (4%).³¹ Black and Minority Ethnic households were more likely to be overcrowded than other households in Newham. Specifically, 41% of all Black British/ Black Welsh, Black African and Black Caribbean; 40% of Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh; 35% of White Gypsy or Irish Traveller, Roma or other White and 16% of White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British were overcrowded.³²

In 2021 Newham had the highest rate of homelessness acceptances (49.36 per 1000) and the highest rate of repossession per 1000 (3.39) in London.³³ Moreover, as of June 2023 the borough had the highest rate of households living in temporary accommodation in England (5833 households including 3198 living in nightly accommodation).³⁴ Black and Minority Ethnic groups are more likely to be homeless than other groups. Data for 2023 reported that homeless households identified as being from the following backgrounds: 34% Asian or Asian/ British background, 21% Black African, Black Caribbean or Black British Background, 9% White, 5% Mixed Heritage background and 5% identified as Other.³⁵ The sharp increase in homelessness combined with the lack of social rented housing means that many families are housed in temporary accommodation. Between 2012 and 2015 the number of households in temporary accommodation increased by 51% from 2226 to

3419 and this upward trend has continued.³⁶ In June 2022 there were 4,034 families in temporary accommodation in Newham and this included 8,363 children and young people, 1,773 of these children were under-five.³⁷ According to an analysis by the Observer Newspaper, just over 10% of Under 18's in the borough live in temporary accommodation.³⁸ Data provided by the London Borough of Newham for the whole of 2022 indicated that out of 3533 offers of temporary accommodation made, 1613 were outside of the borough.³⁹ In 2022/2023 the Borough set out a policy commitment as part of its building a fairer future to increase the number of households placed within the borough to 70% by 2026. In June 2023 reported that 64.7% of households were in temporary accommodation in Newham. The borough has also committed to minimise the use of nightly accommodation. As of June 2023, there were 3269 households in nightly accommodation, up from 3245 in the previous month however.⁴⁰

Data for 2023/2024 confirms a worsening picture, with an increase in the number of households approaching the council for support. Each month the borough is supporting an average of 30 additional individuals/households. Temporary accommodation is the largest form of expenditure for the council and in October 2023 the borough predicted an overspend of £23 million which in turn has generated the need for financial savings and this is discussed in more detail in the next

31 Office for National Statistics. (2023) Occupancy ratings for Bedrooms, 5th January [Occupancy rating for bedrooms - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/articles/occupancyratingsforbedrooms/2023-01-05)

32 Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (LSE) Newham Overcrowding Research Network, December 11th, 2023

33 Trust for London. (2022) [Poverty and Inequality Data For Newham - Trust For London | Trust for London](https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/poverty-and-inequality-data-for-newham)

34 London Borough of Newham. (2023) Olympus House - 24 unit acquisition, 5th September. [Public Pack\) Agenda Document for Cabinet, 05/09/2023 09:00 \(newham.gov.uk\)](https://www.newham.gov.uk/public-pack-agenda-document-for-cabinet-05/09/2023-09:00)

35 Department for Levelling up, Communities and Local Government. (2023) Detailed Local Authority Level Tables First Quarter 2023, Jan – March 2023, Live tables on homelessness, [Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/tables-on-homelessness)

36 Watt and Bernstock. (2017) p115, Op Cit

37 Apps, P. (2022) [inside Housing - Insight - The new social housing: data shows scale of infant children in temporary accommodation](https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/inside-housing-insight-the-new-social-housing-data-shows-scale-of-infant-children-in-temporary-accommodation), 16th December

38 Jayenetti, C. (2023) [One in 10 children in parts of London are 'effectively homeless', data shows | Homelessness | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/dec/10/one-in-10-children-in-parts-of-london-are-effectively-homeless-data-shows) 10th December

39 Ford, W. (2022) [Housing allocation case questions lawfulness of council's scheme \(osborneslaw.com\)](https://www.osborneslaw.com/news/housing-allocation-case-questions-lawfulness-of-councils-scheme) November.

40 London Borough of Newham. (2023) Building a Fairer Newham Performance Report, Q1, 5th September [Public Pack\) Agenda Document for Cabinet, 05/09/2023 09:00 \(newham.gov.uk\)](https://www.newham.gov.uk/public-pack-agenda-document-for-cabinet-05/09/2023-09:00)

chapter.⁴¹

Rising Housing Costs in Newham

Newham has traditionally been an area that people were attracted to because of its relatively affordable market housing. However, one key explanation for the rising number of households on the housing waiting list and in temporary accommodation is an increasing 'affordability gap'. In 2000 the average house price was £75,762, by 2019 this had increased by 429%, to £400,754. This was the highest increase of any area and double the UK average of 207%.⁴² Between 2012 and 2019 the price of an average rental property increased by 58% from £899 to £1422.⁴³ Between 2020 and 2023 average rental prices increased by 20.3% and this was the highest of any London Borough. By 2023 the average rental price for a unit was £1850 pcm.⁴⁴ These house price increases are particularly problematic given the income profile of residents. The lack of social rented housing means that many families are living in the private rented sector and are reliant on housing benefits to support them with housing costs. The Local Housing Allowance was frozen in 2015 and is now insufficient to cover the cost of a private sector rented unit in the lowest quartile in Newham. This is resulting in significant hardship for families and means that families are renting units that do not

meet their needs. For example, where several family members live in a one- bedroom flat.⁴⁵

The housing 'supply gap' in Newham

Table 1 below provides an overview of housing tenure/housing type across a forty-year period. This provides an insight into the type of housing people live in and how this has changed over time. We can see from Table 1 that the proportion of the population living in affordable rented housing has been declining since 1981. The proportion of the population living in owner occupation increased between 1981 and 2001 but has declined since 2001, and the proportion of the population living in private rented housing has changed from being the least common tenure in 1981 to the most common tenure type by 2021.

The gap between the type of housing being built and housing need.

There has been an increase in the overall number of housing units in the borough across the same period, up from 103,000 in 2011 to 125,000 in 2021.

⁴⁶ However, across the same period, there was a decline in the proportion and overall number of affordable social housing for rent. Specifically, the number of Local Authority units declined from 17,547 to 15,440, while the number of Registered Social Landlord Units increased from 13,065 to

Table 1: Housing Tenure/Housing type change in Newham

	Affordable Rented Housing	Private Rented	Owner occupier	Shared Ownership
1981	42%	16%	42%	N/A
2001	36%	20%	44%	NA
2021	28%	38.5%	30.8%	2.4%

Source: Census 1981, 2001 and 2021

41 London Borough of Newham. (2023) Overall Financial Position 2023/2024, 3rd October ([Public Pack](#))Agenda Document for Cabinet, 05/09/2023 09:00 ([newham.gov.uk](#))

42 Brown, F. (2019) [House prices in one London borough have risen 429% in just two decades](#) | Metro News. 28th December

43 Valuation Office. (2020) Average rents 2012-2019, [Valuation Office Agency: private rental market statistics - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

44 Calcea, N. (2023) [Rent prices: How much have they gone up in your area?](#) - BBC News 29th March

45 London borough of Newham. (2022) Newham Strategic Market Housing Assessment 2022, [2022-06-10-newham-shma-final-report](#)

46 London borough of Newham. (2022) Newham Strategic Market Housing Assessment 2022, [2022-06-10-newham-shma-final-report](#)

14,361.⁴⁷ In 2021/2022 just 926 Local Authority/Registered Social Landlord lettings became available and therefore the 33,000 households on Newham's waiting list were competing for these lets.⁴⁸

Table 2⁴⁹ below provides an insight into new housing completions between 2015-16 and 2020/2021. We can see that market housing for rent and sale accounts for 65% of new housing while affordable housing accounts for 35% of all completions. Further analysis of the type of affordable housing built indicates that intermediate shared ownership housing comprises 20% of all completions, while social and affordable rent comprises just 10% of all completions. The types of housing completed across this period illustrates a 'supply gap' between the type of housing being built and the type of housing needed.

Newham recently undertook a housing needs

assessment (see Table 3⁵⁰ below), which adopted an evidence-based approach to understanding housing need for the period 2021-2038. The assessment includes a range of computations (we have included one computation below). The report identified a significant need for affordable housing and in particular affordable housing for social rent because of the lower incomes of residents. They argued that there was a lower need for affordable housing/ home ownership products such as shared ownership housing as these were not affordable to those in housing need without much greater subsidy.

Declining supply of private rented accommodation

Another key challenge for the London Borough of Newham that has emerged over the last year (2023) is a decline in the availability of private rented sector properties, as private sector landlords either sell their properties because of high interest rates or re-let their properties at

Table 2: Housing Tenure/Housing type change in Newham⁴⁹

	Total	Market housing	Social Rent	LAR	Aff rent	Shared O.	Intermediate Rent
Newham	13,350	8656 (65%)	195 (1%)	439 (3%)	1249 (9%)	2724 (20%)	87 (1%)

Table 3: Housing Need Newham 2021 – 2038⁵⁰

Housing Need 2021-2038	Market Housing (Sale and Rent)	Social Rent Affordable Housing	London Living Rent	Home Ownership affordable products (First Steps)	Affordable Housing Total
55,872	30,736 (55%)	15,615 (28%)	5517 (10%)	3934 (7%)	25,136 (45%)

47 Department for Levelling up, Communities and Local Government. (2022) Live tables on Dwelling Stock, Table 115: Private Registered Provider stock, by local authority district, England, 31 March 1997-2022 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1124290/LT115.ods

48 Department for Levelling up, Communities and Local Government. (2023) Table 602: Live Tables on rents, lettings and tenancies - [Live tables on rents, lettings and tenancies - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/live-tables-on-rents-lettings-and-tenancies)

49 DCLG. (2022) Additional dwellings by Local Authority [Housing supply: net additional dwellings - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/housing-supply-net-additional-dwellings)

50 Figure 49, p63, Newham Strategic Market Housing Assessment. 2022 Op Cit

higher costs to capitalise on a growth in private rented sector properties⁵¹.

Conclusion

In this section we have provided an overview of the UK's housing crisis and demonstrated that it is at its most severe in Newham. We have provided an insight into Newham's housing emergency that manifests itself in extremely high levels of need because of a lack of affordable housing options. This housing emergency is impacting on the lived experience of thousands of children and young people. We explore this in more detail in the next chapter.

51 London Borough of Newham. (2023) Olympus House - 24 unit acquisition, 5th September. ([Public Pack](#))[Agenda Document for Cabinet, 05/09/2023 09:00 \(newham.gov.uk\)](#)

Chapter Two: Inadequate Housing and Educational experience

In this chapter we consider how inadequate housing impacts on children and young people's lived experience. The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section we review existing literature/research findings on the impact of inadequate housing both on children's lives in general and educational experience in particular. In the second section we utilise Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model to explore the complex relationship between inadequate housing and educational experience in Newham. In the final section we offer insights from some key experts working in the area.

Section One: The impact of inadequate housing on children's lives and educational experience - Review of the literature

There is a relatively small evidence base/literature on the impact of poor/inadequate housing on children's lives in general and on educational experiences in particular. There is a growing awareness that adverse childhood experiences (ACE) can impact children into adulthood and across their lifetime. In 2020 Public Health England published 'No Child Left Behind' where they set out the case for the adoption of a public health approach to prevent adverse childhood experiences by creating an environment throughout the life course where negative impact is mitigated. This report identified poor housing conditions and lack of access to green space as two indicators that contributed to vulnerability in childhood.⁵²

Shelter has produced three reports that have explored the impact of poor housing on children's

lives including education.⁵³ In 2006, they published 'Chance of a Lifetime,' where they argued that poor housing was having a profound impact on all aspects of children's lives. This report identified a link between growing up in bad housing and behavioural and mental health problems. They then commissioned further research to compare the lives of children on either side of the housing divide (in other words those who were adequately housed and those who were living in inadequate housing, described in their study as bad housing).

This study identified a range of adverse impacts for children living in inadequate housing that were particularly accentuated for those living in temporary accommodation. They found that inadequate housing was impacting negatively on children's emotional well-being and physical health resulting in sleep problems, an increase in respiratory problems such as asthma and more frequent attendance at A and E. Children living in inadequate housing were more likely to feel unhappy with their family, more likely to run away, and their mothers were more likely to be clinically depressed. Teachers reported that children living in bad housing were more unhappy or depressed than other children. Privacy emerged as a significant concern, particularly for teenagers sharing bedrooms with their parents. The lack of adequate housing impacted on other areas of their lives including the ability to bring friends home. The research identified some very specific impacts on both educational experience and outcomes specifically: children living in bad housing were nearly twice as likely as other children to leave school without any GCSEs; more likely to be excluded from school; had a higher

52 Public Health England. (2020) No Child Left Behind, A public health informed approach to improving outcomes for children. [Addressing vulnerability in childhood - a public health informed approach \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874119/no-child-left-behind-a-public-health-informed-approach-to-improving-outcomes-for-children.pdf)

53 See Rice, B. (2006) Against the odds: An investigation comparing the lives of children on either side of the Housing divide, London: Shelter; Harker, L. (2006). Chance of a Lifetime: the impact of bad housing on children's lives, London: Shelter; McCallum, A, Rich, H. (2020) The impact of homelessness and bad housing on children's education A view from the classroom. Shelter and YouGov.; Shelter. (2020) Sharma, R. (2020) Shelter Briefing: The impact of homelessness and bad housing on children's education. London: Shelter

rate of absenteeism' and were less likely to have a safe place to study.

In 2020 Shelter published further research that explored the impact on children's educational experience of being either homeless or living in bad housing. The research was undertaken with teachers who identified some very specific impacts including higher rates of absence; tiredness linked to living in overcrowded accommodation; going to school hungry because of lack of suitable cooking facilities; arriving at school in unwashed or dirty clothing because of lack of affordable washing facilities in temporary accommodation and the negative impact of living in mouldy and damp conditions.

Many studies have explored the direct and indirect impacts of living in bad housing on the mental health/socio-emotional development of household members. Overcrowding in the home has been identified as having detrimental impacts on children's socio-emotional well-being including their potential to play and sleep which may in turn lead to difficulties in concentration and impact on both mood and behaviour⁵⁴ and by exacerbating family tension and conflict.⁵⁵ Living in poor housing may affect the mental health of adults and this in turn may impact the socio-emotional development of their children by the transfer of negative emotions/mood (emotional contagion) and their parenting relationships/skills.⁵⁶ Other studies have focussed on the impact of poor housing on children's physical health. These studies have focussed on

the impact of living in homes that have problems with mould and damp. For example, damp housing may result in increased exposure to respiratory problems such as asthma which may in turn result in increased absence from school⁵⁷. Poor housing quality also affects indoor air quality and this in turn impacts the respiratory health of children and young people, cold homes, exposure to dampness and/or mould, the presence of pests and pollutants all have a significant detrimental impact on a child's respiratory health and these risks are particularly stark for younger children.⁵⁸

There is a substantial literature exploring the impact of frequent moves on children and a recognition that moving may have both negative and positive impacts, i.e., moving may lead to an improvement either in housing or neighbourhood or both.⁵⁹ A range of studies have confirmed a correlation between frequent moves and mental health/behavioural problems. A study with pre-school children in the US found that frequent moves had specific impacts on two important dimensions of school readiness, i.e. concentration and behaviour, and these problems were more pronounced for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.⁶⁰ A longitudinal study exploring the impact of moving on children's mental health in the UK suggested that whilst there was a substantial variation in responses to moving, analysis of data confirmed a link between children who moved home and poorer mental health, compared to those who remained residentially stable (in this study 'poorer mental health' refers to behavioural problems rather than a

54 Claudia, D. Solari, Robert D. Mare. (2012) Housing crowding effects on children's wellbeing. *Social Science Research*, Volume 41, Issue 2, 2012, Pages 464-476

55 Nasim, B. (2022) Does poor quality housing impact on child health? Evidence from the social housing sector in Avon, UK. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, Volume 82, 2022, ISSN 0272-4944, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2022.101811>.

56 Clair, A. (2019) Housing: An Under-Explored Influence on Children's Well-Being and Becoming. *Child Ind Res* **12**, 609-626 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-018-9550-7>

57 Beasley, R., Semprini, A., & Mitchell, E. A. (2015) Risk factors for asthma: is prevention possible? *Lancet*, 386, 1075-1085.

58 Holden, K, A, Lee, A., R, Hawcutt, D.B, Sinha, I, P. (2023) The impact of poor housing and indoor air quality on respiratory health in children. *Breathe* (Sheff). 2023 Jun;19(2):230058. doi: 10.1183/20734735.0058-2023. Epub 2023 Aug 15. PMID: 37645022; PMCID: PMC10461733.

59 For a discussion of the impact of moving on children see Lennon, M, Clark, W, Joshi, H. (2016) Editors Special Issue, Moving Home and Children's well-being, *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies*, Volume 7, No 3, 2016

60 Guest K, M, McKenna, C.C. (2014) Early childhood housing instability and school readiness. *Child Dev*. 2014 Jan-Feb;85(1):103-13. doi: 10.1111/cdev.12105. Epub 2013 Mar 27. PMID: 23534607.

psychiatric diagnosis). This study identified some of the pathways that might operate to lead to this including disruption to social networks; social stress; household disruption and reductions in parent-child interactions.⁶¹ A study undertaken in Scotland found that children from more disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to move home and to move more than once. They found that moving home was associated with lower socio-economic well-being at age 5 and 10, and cognitive outcomes/development were lower for those aged 5 but not aged 10.⁶² It has been argued that policymakers should do more to enable advantageous positive moves (to improve housing conditions) and to minimise disadvantageous moves. They found that those facing homelessness were in a constant and ongoing state of flux and insecurity and this has an ongoing effect on physical and mental health.⁶³

A study published in 2022 utilised a Citizen Science Approach to identify indoor environmental barriers to optimal health for under 5s experiencing homelessness in temporary accommodation in Newham. Data was collected by mothers with lived experience of temporary accommodation who identified multiple indoor environmental barriers. This included overcrowding/shared facilities; dampness/mould; poor inadequate kitchen/toilet facilities; infestations/vermin; structural problems/disrepair, unsafe electrics, excessively cold temperatures, and unsafe surfaces that risk causing trips/falls.⁶⁴

A further study published in 2023 provided an insight into the perceptions of relevant

professionals (including health visitors) on the impact of living in temporary accommodation (TA) and the COVID-19 pandemic on healthcare access and health outcomes in Newham for under 5's. Interviewees identified a number of common problems including the lack of security and safety provisions that included unsafe/steep stairs that were not child proof, lack of access to cooking facilities and a reliance on microwaves, damp and mould that resulted in skin irritations, respiratory illnesses and allergies, the presence of pests and vermin in some instances that posed potential risks and challenges for a mobile infant or child, lack of access to outdoor space that made it difficult for under 5s to explore, play, run or stimulate the senses, all of which were identified as vital to the development of fine and gross motor skills. They found that children living in TA were quite delayed with their speech, and experienced long waits for speech and language therapy.

Parents felt helpless in their ability to support their children and had poorer mental health, and this impacted on positive parenting and child health and development.

The research recommended that policymakers should ensure that families are provided with access to free and safe spaces for health services aimed at providing opportunities that would enable families to leave their surroundings and interact with other children which would allow them to develop critical, physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional skills through play and engagement.⁶⁵

61 Morris, T, Manley, D, Northstone, K. Clive E. Sabel, S. (2017) How do moving and other major life events impact mental health? A longitudinal analysis of UK children, *Health & Place*, Volume 46, 2017, pp 257-266, ISSN 1353-8292, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2017.06.004>.

62 Fiori, F, (2021) Moving home during childhood. is it harmful, Centre for Population Change, Southampton [2021_PB65_Moving_home_during_childhood_is_it_harmful.pdf \(cpc.ac.uk\)](https://cpc.ac.uk/2021_PB65_Moving_home_during_childhood_is_it_harmful.pdf)

63 Hardy, K. and Gillespie, T. (2016) Homelessness, health and housing. *Report*. University of Manchester

64 Rosenthal, D. M.; Ucci, M.; Heys, M.; Schoenthaler, A.; Lakhanpaul, M.; Hayward, A.; Lewis, C. (2022) A Citizen Science Approach to Identifying Indoor Environmental Barriers to Optimal Health for under 5s Experiencing Homelessness in Temporary Accommodation. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(7), 3976.

65 Rosenthal, D.M.; Schoenthaler, A.; Heys, M.; Ucci, M.; Hayward, A.; Teakle, A.; Lakhanpaul, M.; Lewis, C. How Does Living in Temporary Accommodation and the COVID-19 Pandemic Impact under 5s' Healthcare Access and Health Outcomes? A Qualitative Study of Key Professionals in a Socially and Ethnically Diverse and Deprived Area of London. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 2023, 20, 1300. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20021300>

Overall then we can conclude that there is an evidence base that highlights some very specific direct impacts on educational outcomes and experience along with more indirect impacts that impact on early childhood development and mental and physical well-being.

Section Two: A whole systems approach to understanding the relationship between inadequate housing and educational experience.

In this section we utilise Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model to explore the wider context and complex relationship between inadequate housing and educational experience in Newham and argue that these are best understood as a set of complex interactions/interdependencies. Bronfenbrenner argued that it was possible to explore children's lives through the prism of a socio-ecological model. His model comprised five connected layers with the individual child at the centre. The five layers are a Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem and Chronosystem⁶⁶. (See Figure 1) We have modified the model for the purposes of this study and utilised four of these five layers (we have excluded the Chronosystem that considers temporal impacts on individuals).

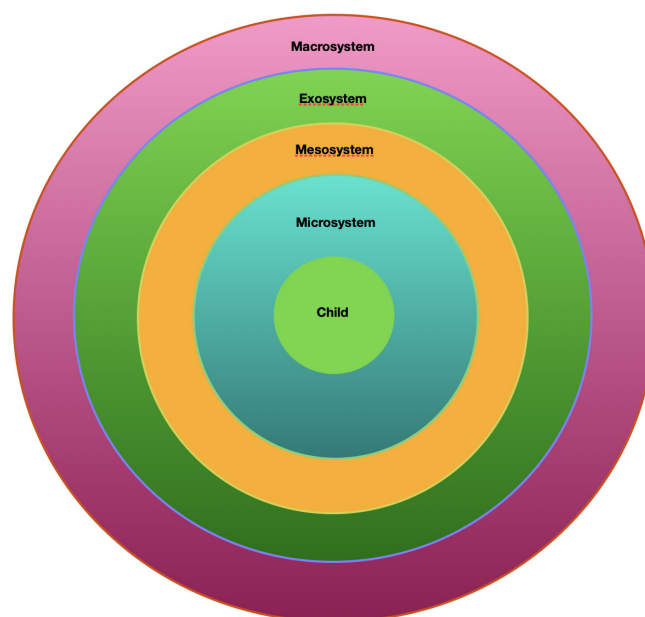


Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's Model

According to Bronfenbrenner, the '**Microsystem**' is the layer closest to the child and includes people and environments that the child has contact with, including siblings, family, peers, relatives, teachers, community groups/charities, classroom, home,

⁶⁶ See Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) The ecology of human development: experiments by nature and design Boston, Harvard University Press

local green space, and local services that they use such as libraries and health centres. According to Bronfenbrenner, 'A micro-system is a pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material circumstances.'⁶⁷ This is useful for understanding how the child may be impacted, for example, by overcrowding or damp/mould conditions, or by their peer relationships at school.

The next layer comprises the '**Mesosystem**', which is where these immediate environments interact e.g., family and school, family and neighbourhood, housing, and school. According to Bronfenbrenner: 'A mesosystem comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing child actively participates'⁶⁸ The model can therefore capture the complexity of how different environments or relationships interact, which is crucial for understanding the relationship between housing and education. For example, it can focus on how overcrowded housing impacts a child's capacity to do their homework in the presence of other family members; or how living in temporary accommodation impacts their peer relationships, which in turn may impact the child's educational experiences.

The next layer is described as the '**Exosystem**'. According to Bronfenbrenner, 'An exosystem refers to one or more setting that do not involve the developing person as an active participant but in which events occur that affect or are affected by what happens in the setting containing the developing person'⁶⁹. The 'exosystem' does not interact directly with a child but it is important in shaping a child's experience. For example, if a family is forced to move the parent may have to work further away from home and whilst this is the immediate environment of the parent, rather than the child, it can impact the child's educational experience if the parent can no

longer give the child breakfast or take or pick them up from school. The exosystem also refers to broader systems that impact the child so, for example the role of Local Government in terms of its regulation of housing conditions or cuts to libraries and other public services may directly or indirectly impact the child's educational experiences. The exosystem therefore allows an understanding of the complexity of how the child's immediate environment and experience can be impacted by that of others around them and by wider local systems that regulate or shape these environments or experiences. Again, this is vital for understanding the complex influences that shape how inadequate housing and educational experiences interact; as well as how multiple kinds of interventions and policy shifts may be required to address a complex set of problems.

Surrounding the Exosystem is the '**Macrosystem**'. In Bronfenbrenner's model the Macrosystem refers to broader cultural or political systems that, whilst outside of the child's immediate environment, nevertheless have an impact on the culture and workings of the 'lower order' environment. Bronfenbrenner describes it as 'consistencies in the form and content of lower-order systems (micro, meso, exo) that exist or could exist at the level of subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideologies underlying such consistencies'.⁷⁰ We utilise the concept of the 'macro system' to refer to the wider national UK policy context, that informs and shapes the conditions of local policy making and therefore activity in other layers of the system. Again, this is a crucial layer for understanding how a child's experience of housing and education are shaped by the national policies and political decisions that have reduced access to affordable secure housing, such as through the persistent sell off of council housing since Right-to-buy; or how the caps on Local Housing Allowance push families into poor and overcrowded accommodation, which in turn

67 P22, Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) The ecology of human development: experiments by nature and design Boston, Harvard University Press

68 P25, Op cit

69 P25 op cit

70 P26, Op Cit

impact a child's educational experience.

For this study there are three key points emerging from using the Bronfenbrenner model:

1. National and local policymaking shape local housing conditions.
2. These housing conditions result in a range of negative impacts on children and young people's lives and educational experiences, with the need for services to compensate for this, such as speech therapy, counselling, nursery provision.
3. The housing emergency in Newham means

that the Local Authority is confronted with a range of direct challenges arising from the housing emergency, such as procuring suitable temporary accommodation, building new homes, determining housing priorities; plus, a range of indirect challenges including financing and developing an infrastructure of support to compensate for this inadequate housing. We argue that as the housing emergency has intensified and the cost of supporting families in temporary accommodation increased, it now poses a real risk that the infrastructure of support in place to compensate for inadequate housing will be eroded and insufficient to meet needs.

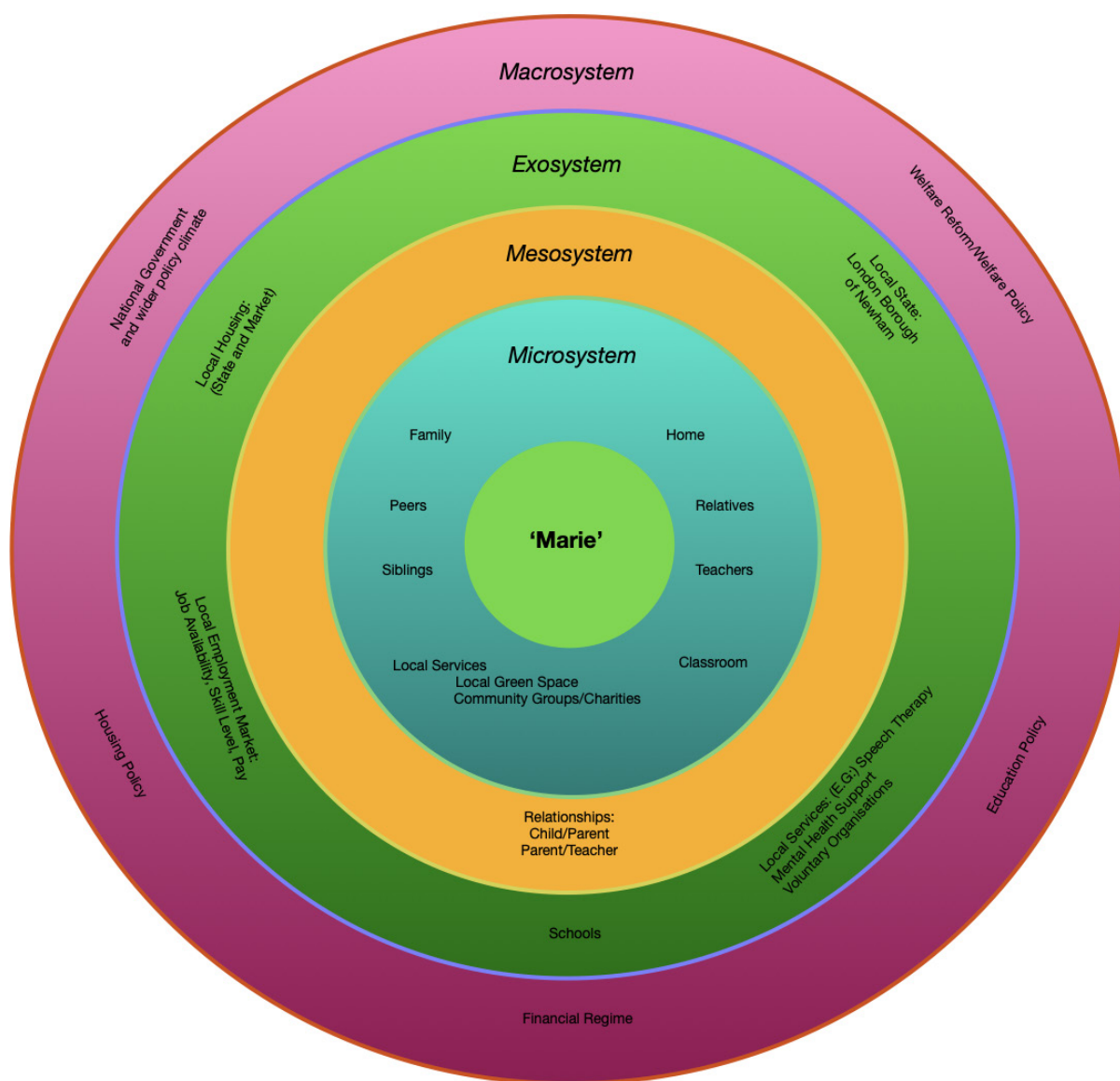


Figure 2: Bronfenbrenner's model as a tool for understanding the complex relationship between inadequate housing and educational experience in Newham

Application of Bronfenbrenner model to Newham context

On the page below we apply the Bronfenbrenner model to a hypothetical Newham child based on the findings of the primary research undertaken for this project to demonstrate the complex relationship between inadequate housing and educational experience operating at different but inter-relating environmental scales:

Let us imagine a hypothetical child living in Newham (Marie). Marie is 8 and lives in a one-bedroom flat with her two parents and her 12-year-old brother (Paul). Both parents work as cleaners for the NHS. They are paid the London Living Wage. Whilst this example is 'hypothetical', the characteristics and contexts discussed have been selected from the primary research data, so represent an amalgam of the real-life situations and experiences faced by the children we researched.

Macrosystem Level

The 'Macrosystem' is understood here as National/UK policy that shapes and informs policy and experiences in all other levels and these are having a substantial impact on Marie and her family. We do not have space here to highlight all policies but instead have focussed on some of those most pertinent to this topic. National Policy has favoured market and quasi-market solutions to meet housing need (such as subsidised housing for sale, shared ownership or supporting residents to live in the Private Rented sector). National policy has enabled a pattern of expenditure that has resulted in investment in housing benefit and supporting families to live in temporary accommodation rather than building new social homes for rent.

Caps to the Local Housing allowance combined with rising rental costs have made it difficult for Marie and her family to find suitable affordable housing in the private rented sector within the borough of Newham. They currently live in a one-

bedroom property in the private rented sector that does not meet their needs because of lack of alternatives. Their housing costs are high, and this means that they have limited income and are in relative poverty after housing costs. Their flat is in a poor state of repair, but they are fearful to complain because they fear being evicted if they do. No-fault eviction is a key cause of homelessness in Newham, and they understand that it will be difficult to secure alternative accommodation. Therefore, they were hopeful that their situation would improve following plans for the introduction of the Renter Reform Bill.⁷¹

National policymakers have argued that they are keen to promote social mobility. A key initiative to address disadvantage is the Pupil Premium that provides funding to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in state funded schools. Eligibility is linked to free school meals. Despite Marie's family having limited income they are not eligible for Free School Meals and therefore the schools that Marie and Paul attend do not receive a Pupil Premium allocation for either Marie or Paul.⁷² A combination of national and local policy (i.e., the macrosystem and the exosystem) has resulted in these outcomes on the child's experience, however as Newham has some outstanding schools and high-ranking universities, Marie and Paul are able to access high quality education despite their housing and income position. This model therefore already points to how an array of negative and positive contextual and political influences, operating from different scales, impacting on children's housing and educational experiences.

Exosystem

The Exosystem comprises policies emanating from the local state (i.e., the London Borough of Newham), local housing market (state and market), local employment market (job availability, skill level, pay), schools, local services such as speech therapy, mental health support and voluntary organisations. The London Borough

⁷¹ [Guide to the Renters \(Reform\) Bill - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/guide-to-the-renters-reform-bill)

⁷² Department of Education. (2023) Free School Meals, Guidance for local authorities, maintained schools and free schools, [Free school meals \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/free-school-meals-guidance)

of Newham is led by an elected Mayor. Newham's first Mayor, Sir Robin Wales, was elected as Mayor in 2002 and led the council for 16 years up until 2018 and since 2018 Rokhsana Fiaz has held this position. They have adopted different approaches to policy making.

Under Sir Robin Wales's leadership there was a focus on encouraging the construction of more market housing both for sale and rent despite the very high need for social rented housing in the borough. In 2014 the borough established a development vehicle 'Red Doors' aimed at developing mainly private rented housing for sale⁷³ and in 2012 the authority reviewed its housing allocation policy to prioritise those in work, rather than those in greatest need.⁷⁴ Sir Robin also set up what was then the first private sector licensing system aimed at raising standards in the private rented sector, a policy enabled by the Housing Act 2004, i.e., national legislation at the macro-system level impacting the exo-system.

Mayor Fiaz has addressed housing policy in a different way. Her election campaign included a commitment to improve the housing situation of Newham where she pledged to build 1000 new council homes⁷⁵ and maximize levels of affordable housing on new developments. Since taking up her position, she has led a review of housing allocations where they have reverted to prioritising housing to those in greatest need.⁷⁶ In 2022 Mayor Fiaz was elected for a second term and launched a far-reaching policy agenda aimed at building a fairer Newham with a raft of policy commitments including building more social rented housing, improving housing repairs, extending the Living Wage, establishing family hubs and investing

in services for children and young people with disabilities and special educational needs some of which may have a positive impact on Marie. The local authority has also continued the licensing system for private rented housing throughout most of Newham. Indeed, it is important to understand that Marie's lived experience is not just shaped by her immediate housing experience, and the mesosystems and exosystems shaping it, but by a range of other initiatives at the local level that may mitigate negative impacts, such as speech therapy, mental health support, open spaces, libraries, Children's centres, extracurricular and enrichment activities etc.⁷⁷

The borough funds a range of services and voluntary organisations that support families in need such as Shpresa (offering support to Albanian refugees and asylum seekers) and Magpie (a Children's centre that offers support to under 5's and their parents living in temporary accommodation). Demand for support is high and mirrors the high demand for housing support. Therefore, those in need may not be able to access services immediately. Referrals to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and speech therapy have been increasing,⁷⁸ and whilst it is difficult to confirm a clear causal link between inadequate housing and these referrals it is likely that there is some correlation, as will be explored in this study. The table below provides details of referrals for Primary and Secondary Schools and indicates an upward trend in referrals from primary schools from 2017 onwards and an upward trend in referrals for support from Secondary schools followed by a slight dip in referrals from Secondary schools from 2019 onwards.

73 [UK Innovation Corridor – Sir Robin launches Red Door](#)

74 Bernstock, (2014), Watt and Bernstock, (2017)

75 [Newham Mayor says good quality homes are a right, as latest housing projects start – Newham Council](#)

76 [Housing allocation policy to be made fairer and to help those most in need – Newham Council](#)

77 To find out more about Newham's policy agenda aimed at realising a fairer future click on [About Us \(buildingafairernewham.com\)](#) and [lb-newham-community-wealth-building.pdf \(buildingafairernewham.com\)](#)

78 There were 1646 referrals to CAMHS for the first six months of 2022 and this had increased by 18% to 1949 for the first six months of 2023. (Data provided by LBN). Similarly first contact speech therapy for Paediatrics increased by 72% from 614 for the period April to August 2022 to 1023 was for the period April to August 2023.

Table 4: SEN Provision – Type of Need - Speech, Communication and Language in Newham (Headcount)

	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/20	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Primary School	1538	1666	1793	1917	2086	2216
Secondary School	599	574	568	581	602	696

Source: Data provided by London Borough of Newham

As the housing emergency has intensified and the need to support families in temporary accommodation has grown, it is impacting on other budgets. A report presented to the borough's cabinet in January 2024 noted that the cost of supporting people in temporary accommodation comprises Newham's largest area of expenditure and given increased demands is predicted to rise by £16 million in the coming year and therefore in order to balance the books nearly £3 million pounds of possible savings have been identified from Children's services including the closure of four children's centres, reduction in early intervention support, removal of enrichment services and reductions in eligibility for support where resources will be targeted at those in the highest need, along with a raft of other proposals for cuts.⁷⁹ If these cuts are implemented they will potentially have a devastating impact on Marie and others in her position, i.e. impacting on the microsystem and the children's immediate environment and experiences.

At the same time Marie's own microsystem will interact with those of others around her, such as her parents' workplace, travel conditions, timescales, and incomes; or her teacher's work or housing conditions: complex interactions between Marie's immediate environment (her microsystem) and that of others that are also represented in Bronfenbrenner's model as the exosystem. For example, teachers struggle to find affordable housing in London and therefore this shortage may impact Marie's educational experience resulting in higher staff turnover and a

reliance on supply teachers disrupting a consistent education experience and relationships.

Microsystem and Mesosystem

The microsystem refers to the systems and relationships that represent the child's immediate environment (schools, housing, green space, community facilities, teachers, family, peers etc); whilst the mesosystem refers to the range of interactions between them. For example, child/parent relationships; parent/teacher relationships, parent/pupil relationships, sibling relationships are all in the mesosystem, i.e., dimensions of the microsystem (such as school and housing) interacting with each other. If we return specifically to think about Marie and her family, they are living in very overcrowded conditions. This lack of space and privacy is impacting on all family members and has resulted in tensions and pressures on all family relationships. Housing pressures have resulted in Marie's parents splitting up on two occasions and this resulted in Marie becoming anxious. There are two families that also live in the house where they live, and they have complained about the noise from the children, and this has resulted in the parents encouraging the children to be quiet and limit play. Neither Marie nor her brother have ever brought a friend home to play. Their parents are embarrassed about their housing situation.

Their housing situation is affecting the whole family. Marie is withdrawn and has been referred to the Speech and Language service. Her brother has asthma and anxiety and misses school

⁷⁹ See London Borough of Newham. (2024) Local Investment for Fairness in Tough Times - Draft Budget Proposals for 2024/25, 30th January Appendix C (newham.gov.uk)

frequently because of poor health. Her parents are distressed and suffering from depression/low mood. They feel frustrated that they have limited capacity to support their children's learning and Marie's mother has been on long term sick, triggered by their housing situation. This is affecting their family finances. Paul has been given the opportunity to go on a school trip to France, but his parents cannot afford this.

Marie's school, aware of the high number of their pupils living in inadequate housing, offers a range of after school clubs, but financial pressures mean that the school may not be able to offer these clubs going forward and Marie will be forced to return home at 3pm. Marie's brother has joined a chess club at his local school and has been travelling around London to play at tournaments, but has been advised that the chess club may need to close because of a lack of resources. The chess club provides respite from his dire housing situation. Marie's mother has joined a local campaign (Focus E15) to fight for more housing and this has had a positive impact on her mood. The borough is offering support for overcrowded families to help them more effectively limit space and they have signed up for this service. The highlight of the week for Marie's family is Friday evening when the family log on to the choice-based lettings website to see what social rented housing is available and bid for suitable properties as this reflects a moment of hope in that they might be able to access more suitable housing. Unfortunately, they are competing with more than 30,000 families plus for a small number of properties and have been doing this for four years and in that time have viewed only one property.

This story therefore highlights the complex ways in which Marie's microsystem - her immediate environment- is impacted by the complex interaction of different systems, such as her housing and educational experience (the mesosystem); her own experiences and environments and that of others (the exosystem); and by what is or is not offered in the way of mitigation locally (exosystem) in the wider context of national policies (the macrosystem).

In this section we have attempted to illustrate the complex interaction between inadequate housing and educational experience by utilising an adapted version of Bronfenbrenner's model and a hypothetical family.

Section Three: Expert views on inadequate housing and educational experience

In this section we include testimony from some key experts working in Newham who can offer further insights into the impact of inadequate housing on educational experience. These witnesses include a Senior Speech and Language Therapist, A Chief Executive of an Advice service; A Deputy Head Teacher and an agency offering support for children who are excluded from school. All these professionals are based in Newham.

Expert Witness 1: Housing and Speech, Communication and Language - A perspective from a senior speech and language therapist

Expert witness 1 works as a Senior Speech and Language Therapist in Newham's speech and language service. The speech and language services are a targeted intervention that supports children and their families in a range of ways, from one-to-one appointments to offering group interventions and general advice. They provide diverse interventions depending on age and stage of development. Many children are referred following their two-year review. The service deploys staff to offer support to parents in a range of settings including the Family Hub, libraries, and children's centres. The philosophy of the service is that:

"Speech language and communication is everybody's business. Your communication practice happens seven days a week with every person you meet. You cannot rely on going out of the classroom for an hour with a speech and language therapist. So, I am a very big advocate of the model that parents need to be practising and family members need to know how to interact with that child. We encourage interaction with play. For example, turn taking."

In other words, school, and home play an important

role in the development of communication skills. Newham's speech therapy service has a high and increasing demand (see above). There has been an increase in the number of children and young people diagnosed with autism generally (linked to revised guidance on diagnosis) However, rates are particularly high in Newham and policy makers have suggested that overcrowding may in part be contributing to this increase.

Inadequate housing creates some very particular challenges for children with behavioural issues/ additional needs who have limited indoor and outdoor space.

"Families who had children with behavioural issues experienced real challenges in the various lockdowns. So, we certainly heard of parents whose children were going stir crazy when they were stuck in one room with the television on without the right sort of stimulus, without being able to go out and about and be a bit more physical active and move around and partly that was the physical space and the environment. So, if we think about housing, parents who had gardens were able to say I was really great. I could take my child outdoors, then they could regulate and come back in."

Lack of space/overcrowding limits the potential of parents to support their children whilst meeting the needs of different family members. It also impacts on sleep regimes:

"In Newham, we have got families that are really overcrowded. We were assessing a child the other day. They are in a two-bedroom flat. There are four children ranging in age from 7 to 16. The parent is trying to home-school, but the lack of space to do activities to help him regulate isn't there. Doing some activities and strategies in the home is a big ask if you have got children where the accommodation is overcrowded and

not fit for purpose. You may have an older sibling who needs to do homework, another child can be playing around and practising language. There is a need for space that can enable children to meet their diverse needs... In a household where there is an autistic child, bedtime routines can be a challenge. A child may be over-stimulated, and this results in a nightmare bedtime routine where they don't settle. This potentially impacts all of the children who may struggle to concentrate the next day at school because they are exhausted."

One theme/challenge that emerged whilst undertaking research for this study was that parents sometimes felt under pressure when they lived in overcrowded or shared accommodation to impose restrictions on noise and play:

"They should be making noise. They should be having fun. That's part of normal development. So, when you deprive someone of normal development and normal opportunities, it will impact because they're not getting those experiences. If you are being told to be quiet, you are not getting the normal stimulation or interaction that facilitates language, I'm sure you have seen these scenarios where children can't have toys and again another way of developing language is through the use of objects."

It was clear that inadequate housing had the potential to impact on parent's wellbeing, parenting capacity and ability to support their children:

"If you have a parent that does not have the right parenting capacity at that point in time, whether that is because they themselves are unwell... They may be an asylum seeker who was hoping for a new start, and they are very isolated. Or a mother who has been put into

sheltered accommodation because of domestic abuse, so she is in a bedsit.

What you see is a parent who is terrified of going out in case their partner stalks them and finds them. They are in a room. The parent may have low mood and be very depressed. That is not good head space to be trying to stimulate a child. So not just speech, but emotional development. You know, physical development, all of that will be held back by the fact that you are not in the right accommodation. I've worked with parents who are in bed and breakfast accommodation. Physical movement is very delayed because they have limited potential to practise motor skills."

The London Borough of Newham continues to innovate to provide services to support children and families generally:

"We have established a service called Family Navigators to help families to access appropriate support. We are partnering with our libraries and early and family hubs, and we are saying stay and play time should be increased. We have deployed speech and language assistants to support some of the children's interaction sessions that they do so that we can really show how to do that book reading, some people would not have a clue about how to engage with children's centres, but they're probably more likely to turn up in a library where they have bolted on additional services."

It was therefore clear that inadequate housing impacted negatively on children's child development/educational experiences.

Expert Witness 2: CEO of Advice Agency in Newham

The second witness is a CEO of a local Advice agency (Money Advice and Education) that provides money advice and education to disadvantaged groups, diverse ethnic communities and young people. The agency offers support to families on a range of issues including housing.⁸⁰

There was a perception that housing need was worsening:

“Waiting lists and waiting times for people who are deemed to be vulnerable and in priority need have got longer. People are bidding for LA property and waiting times have got longer. More families are being placed in temporary accommodation where they often wait several years to get a location that is suitable for them.”

Rising housing costs are contributing to increased poverty levels:

“From our stats rental costs are rising and becoming increasingly inaccessible. This has worsened over the past year. Families are struggling to pay their rent and gas and electricity, and we are seeing a massive rise in what we call the deficit budget where incomes are less than monthly bills. The cap on the local Housing Allowance is having a massive impact. There was a time when the cap did not exist. We need to get rid of the cap as that would help vulnerable families. We are now seeing different families living together as a way of covering housing costs. The conditions are bad. It is sad that children are living in these sorts of conditions. There is a high correlation between debt/money issues and mental health.”

Challenges of temporary accommodation:

“There are often two issues with that. The first is that the temporary accommodation is often in the private rented sector where the costs of rent is extremely high and the second is that people get offered places or are moved out further than where their roots are, so they are away from their families, a long distance from school and their general support networks.”

Impact on children and young people

Inadequate housing was impacting upon educational experience in a range of ways. For example, they may have to travel long distances to school, they may be impoverished because of a mixture of low wages and high housing costs and the mental health of the family may be impacted:

“A lot of children must travel a long way to school. (although there was a recognition that more effort was being made to ensure people were re-housed closer to home) I haven’t heard of people moving outside of London, but people are moving to different boroughs. It is not good for children and leads to lots of mental health issues and anxiety. Parents have a lot of stress, they are trying to shield the children from it, but that stress has an impact on the children. It will have an effect on household budgets. There may be less food, and there may be periods when they do not have adequate heating/lighting electricity. The distance children travel does not do much for their mental health or put them in the best place to learn. It has a really massive effect. It impacts on the whole family, and it is affecting young people....it will impact their educational outcomes and it is a sad situation that we are seeing these conditions in one of the richest cities in the world.”

The impact on teenagers was slightly different:

⁸⁰ Money management and financial education | Money A+E | United Kingdom (moneyaande.co.uk)

“The teenagers are more aware. There have been recent studies showing that 25% of young people are worried about money issues and have mental health issues because of that, Money worries specifically are becoming increasingly part of the issue for why they have mental health issues.”

What needs to change?

“One thing that has changed is that they are building more council houses. There is more social housing being built and they are committed to work with vulnerable people to look at other housing options. There is an urgent need to increase the cap and review choice-based lettings to ensure that it is fit for purpose.”

Expert Witness 3: Deputy Headteacher, St Bonaventure’s School.

The Deputy Headteacher has been working at St Bonaventure’s Secondary School for boys based in Forest Gate, Newham and they provided various examples of how inadequate housing was impacting young people’s educational experiences.

The Housing crisis is impacting on pupils at this school:

“As a school, we see first-hand the challenges that housing problems bring. The stress and anxiety for parents is incredible, and while students often demonstrate great resilience, overcrowding, poor conditions, and long journeys after being moved without planning naturally have a significant impact on their education outcomes. We are finding that we are supporting more and more families – sometimes with uniform and other clothing as they have been evicted and lost possessions, laptops

to allow them to work in libraries as there isn’t suitable study space at home, and many letters of support, trying to appeal to authorities to consider young people’s education when evicting, moving and seeking alternative housing.”

Pupils are increasingly placed out of borough placing additional stresses:

“We have had families moved to Wolverhampton and Bradford as this was the ‘nearest’ available housing, and students travelling from Southend and parts of Kent daily trying to complete their education, including in the run up to their GCSEs. We always want to help families. It is an urgent issue, and the impact is significant.”

Expert witness 4: Head of Policy and Engagement, School Home Support

School-Home Support (SHS) is a national charity that works through schools to provide bespoke whole family support to tackle the underlying causes of poor attendance and engagement at school so children can get the most out of their education. They currently work with families and schools in Newham and have been East London based since the charity began 40 years ago.

In your expert experience, how does inadequate housing impact on both absenteeism in general and more persistent absenteeism? Is inadequate housing a risk factor for persistent absenteeism?

The underlying causes of poor school attendance are complex and often overlapping. There is no one size fits all and every family is different: “Inadequate housing is a growing problem for the families we support and presents a major risk factor for persistent absenteeism. ‘Where I live’ (housing) currently ranks in the top three presenting issues for the parents and young people we work

with".⁸¹ To help tackle barriers to attendance SHS Whole Family Support Practitioners are helping to secure appropriate accommodation, writing to housing officers, signposting other services and making applications to the SHS Welfare Fund to buy essential items like a mattress, a desk or an alarm clock to make 'where I live' less of a barrier to school. They provide practical and emotional support to families when inadequate housing exacerbates mental and physical health problems or when overcrowding leads to family tensions in the home. Such severity of need requires multiple layers of support for attendance to improve. SHS's Intensive casework support has increased by 49% rising from Spring 2022/23 in the same period for 2023/24.⁸² SHS's whole family support practitioner service is responding well, despite these challenges, increasing the attendance outcomes by 3%. 7 out of 10 young people we supported improved attendance by an average of 23 extra days in school. SHS interventions increase school attendance, but also equip families with new skills and resilience to tackle the challenges they face and improve life for the whole family.

For pupils who are offered support in the home, how does inadequate housing impact their ability to engage with their studies at home?

SHS conducted a survey with 42 parents responding at a Newham primary school. A quarter of all respondents⁸³ said that their housing situation affected all the following:

- their health, or the health of their children or other family members
- their ability to deal with everyday life (going to work/children going to school /shopping/cooking/ children doing homework etc)
- their overall happiness or sense of wellbeing

The same survey found that solutions to

overcrowding often created more problems than they solved. One parent who was affected by overcrowding was moved out of Newham: "I was forced to move from Newham, it wasn't my choice, and it affected our way of life as we have to travel to get to school at least 5 to 6 hours on a daily basis."

When asked what would help most in dealing with the overcrowding, responses showed how far reaching and broad impacts can be on family life. One respondent said she most wanted "To have suitable accommodation so my daughter has stability and space to do homework and to have healthy meals not fast food and also routine would improve her health - she has asthma so fast food not good for health".

SHS case studies⁸⁴ show high numbers of families with unsupported housing issues which create barriers to good attendance.

- 11-year-old **Hayden** was living in a damp two-bedroom flat with his mum and his three siblings. In the overcrowded space he struggled with sleep and was often tired and frustrated in school. With practitioner Millie's support to get their housing needs re-assessed, the family have now moved into a four-bedroom house with a garden.
- 5-year-old **Benji** was living with his mum in temporary hostel accommodation that had no cooking facilities and was three bus journeys away from school. The difficult journey and unstable living situation meant his attendance fell to just 24%. Through a referral to Crisis by practitioner John, the family were allocated a safe new home just 20 minutes away, and Benji is now building his attendance back up.

⁸¹ SHS statistics from Autumn & Spring term 2023/24

⁸² SHS statistics from Autumn & Spring Terms 2023/24

⁸³ Source: Anonymous survey completed for SHS by parents at a Newham primary school - completed Oct 2023 by 42 parents about their housing situation

⁸⁴ All names have been changed to protect the identity of our service users

- 10-year-old **Julia** had recently moved into temporary accommodation, which consisted of a single hotel room shared with her parents and sister. It was far away from school, and Julia's attendance fell to 70%. With Polish as their first language, the family were struggling to access the support they needed. Since working with practitioner Ben, the family have been settled in a house that much better suits their needs, giving them the space and stability to work towards the next thing.
- 6-year-old **Oscar** and his mum live in a house that was damp and had severe mould. Following an intervention from practitioner Mike, the landlord took action to treat the mould and carried out more repairs on the house, making it a much safer environment for Oscar.

The housing crisis is accelerating, have you identified any impacts on your service and service users?

Housing is a growing barrier to good school attendance and engagement for the families of the absentee children we support. SHS 2022/23 annual impact statistics⁸⁵ revealed for the first time how poor housing is also now one of the top three presenting issues for young people who struggle with attendance. One in five young people that we support identified 'where they live' as a major barrier to school attendance, an increase of 73% year on year. The SHS research⁸⁶ was written up by the Guardian.

This trend has continued in Autumn 2023 and Spring 2024 terms. 'Where I live' remains in the top 3 presenting issues for young people, increasing from 18.8% to 21.61%. While 'where you live' (housing) has dropped to the third highest area of need for young people after confidence and self-esteem and feelings and behaviour they have still seen an increase in this area of support

of 16%. moving from 18.8% to 21.61% Housing is one of the factors contributing to a 49% increase in our intensive support case load.

How can we better support children and young people living in inadequate housing to ensure they can engage with their studies?

SHS is campaigning for a whole family support practitioner for every school to work with young people and the wider family to identify and unpick barriers to good school attendance. Whole Family Support practitioners have the time and skills to 'dig a little deeper' into wider issues, like inadequate housing and target or signpost support to alleviate barriers to school.

The SHS Whole Family model is scalable and was highlighted to the Government by the Education Select Committee as a blueprint for the national rollout and refocusing of the Government's Attendance Mentors Pilot following SHS's evidence to its [Inquiry](#) into tackling persistent absence in disadvantaged areas. Government responded by committing £15 million to expand and improve the pilot, recognising the need for a family-centred approach to tackling high absence. We have welcomed this commitment but have urged the Government to go further and faster to get help to schools, young people, and families so they can address wider issues like housing which are the underlying causes of high absence.

⁸⁵ SHS Annual Impact Statistics 2022/23

⁸⁶ SHS Impact Data briefing 23

Chapter Three: Under-Fives, inadequate housing and early child development

“Every child deserves the best possible start in life and the support that enables them to fulfil their potential. Children develop quickly in the early years and a child’s experiences between birth and age five has a major impact on their future life chances. A secure, safe, and happy childhood is important.”⁸⁷

The home learning environment has the potential to play an important role in enabling child development for Under-fives, with the potential to close the attainment gap. For example:

“Research tells us that regardless of the quality of settings, the most important predictor of children’s future outcomes is the quality of the home learning environment, so involving parents in their children’s learning is the most significant factor in enabling children to do well despite disadvantage.”⁸⁸

In this chapter, we illustrate ways that inadequate housing impacts the home learning environment for under-fives. We highlight ways in which inadequate housing limits the potential of babies and toddlers to practice a range of key skills, for example, walking, crawling, potty training and engaging in play-based learning. We consider the impact of inadequate housing on the emotional and physical well-being of parents and their babies and toddlers. We identify services that are making a difference in supporting these families and make some recommendations for how we could better meet the needs of families living in inadequate accommodation. We have incorporated the voices of participants throughout this chapter as they clearly articulate the challenges they are facing.

Methodology

We begin by outlining our methodological approach. This research was undertaken in collaboration with the Magpie Project, a charity that was set up to provide a safe and fun place for mums and pre-school children living in temporary and insecure accommodation.⁸⁹ The Magpie Project agreed to work with us on this action research project as they were aware that inadequate housing was impacting the lived experiences of families using their service.

We worked closely with the CEO and Lived Experience Manager to develop an appropriate methodology underpinned by a trauma-informed approach aimed at recognising the potential impact of participants on speaking about these issues and establishing processes to mitigate them. Mindful of the potential impact on users we agreed to limit our methodology to:

- Four semi-structured interviews each lasting approximately 45 minutes with parents of Under 5s living in inadequate accommodation.
- A one-hour focus group.
- All interviews were undertaken at the Magpie Centre. Staff were available to offer support both prior to and following the interviews. The Lived Experience Manager recruited participants and provided them with information about the research and their involvement in it. Interviewees were provided with a copy of the interview guide before the interviews to enable them to reflect and prepare for the interview. Each participant provided informed consent.

87 Department of Education. (2014) Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, p5, para 1
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/299391/DFE-00337-2014.pdf

88 Early Years Coalition. (2021) p28, Birth to Five Matters, Birthto5Matters-download.pdf

89 The Magpie Project – Supporting mums and under-fives in temporary accommodation in Newham. Registered Charity Number 1176267.

- Another parent not associated with the Magpie Project provided a three-page testimony that followed similar themes to those explored in the interview. This was analysed and incorporated into key findings from interviews.
- We have endeavoured to anonymise interviewees by concealing key facts e.g., place names, age, and sex of children.
- The Focus group was held at the beginning of this project i.e., May 2022 and the interviews at the end of the project i.e., April 2024.
- All participants provided informed consent and were supported before and after participating in both the interview and the focus group.

We devised a topic guide to shape the interviews and a modified version was used for the focus group. We were interested to understand:

- a. Their recent housing histories and current housing situation including key challenges.
- b. The impact of their housing situation on their ability to support and facilitate their infants with some key activities associated with early childhood development, such as crawling, walking, potty training, and play.
- c. The impact of their housing situation on the emotional and physical wellbeing of both them and their infant.
- d. What kinds of services were valued by families living in inadequate accommodation.
- e. What kinds of services and policies should be put in place to support these families further?

Key Findings

1. Families interviewed were living in dire housing conditions where they were subject to frequent moves, considerable

uncertainty and where they spent long periods of time in unsuitable and inadequate temporary accommodation.

2. Space is an important factor in facilitating home learning and the lack of space was having a detrimental impact on the ability of families to support they're Under 5's with practising key skills such as crawling, walking and play-based learning.
3. For those living in hotels and shared accommodation there were additional challenges that resulted in families being deprived of both space and access to basic facilities such as fridges/kitchens, crucial for good nutrition.
4. Families living in hotels and shared accommodation felt that they had to limit their children's natural desire to express themselves and encourage them.
5. Inadequate housing was impacting on the emotional and physical well-being of under 5's and their families.
6. Under 5's living in inadequate housing had limited opportunities to socialise with other children and were dependent on facilities outside of the home.
7. Local charities such as the Magpie Project were providing outstanding services delivered in a respectful way that was appreciated by service users. Other services valued by parents included family navigators, Talking Therapies and Community Kitchens.

Housing/Housing Histories

We begin by illuminating the housing challenges faced by each of the five families who were either living in, or had lived in, incredibly challenging and unsafe housing situations.

Household One included a mother (who is a full-

time student) and her three-year-old son. They became homeless two years ago. The council then allocated them temporary accommodation in a block used solely as temporary accommodation. They were advised that they would stay there for three months but were still living there 18 months later and there was no indication that this would change. Their housing was inadequate - the living space was small and housing costs were high and this meant that the mother was juggling three jobs to pay the bills and rent:

“During our time living here we have faced a few problems that no one should have to face where they live. My son and I don’t feel safe living here. There have been people from the building attacking other people that live here including neighbours trying to kill each other inside the building. The security is very disrespectful, and they have threatened both me and my daughter because I would not share confidential information. We constantly have problems with the security guards. The laundry must be done by hand as the washing machines are expensive and have animal(rat) poo. The fire alarm in the building goes off a lot and terrifies my son. The external areas are constantly dirty with vomit or urine. There is no outdoor space for my son to play, no space for him to walk and play inside. It is not safe due to our belongings being stored in boxes which are laying on the floor and stacked up on top of each other. We are on a housing waiting list, but we get no updates.”

Household Two included a mother, partner and 5-year-old son. They had spent one year living in a very small hotel room where there was no kitchen or fridge. They had recently been rehoused out of the borough (two hours from Newham) into a two- bedroom flat. The flat is in a converted building and is very cold. The key challenge for this household is that although their current housing is an improvement on their previous

accommodation it is a long way from vital social networks:

“I have talking therapy, and my son has speech therapy but now we have moved it is difficult to access these. It is much better than the hotel, but we are a long way from our social networks.”

Household Three included a mother and her four-year-old son. They had spent more than two years living in a shared room in a shared four-bedroom house with 15 other people. Their housing situation improved recently when they were rehoused into a one-bedroom flat in Newham:

“At first, they said I was going to be sent to Nottingham, and I was really depressed. I ran to Magpie and said all my support system are here. I don’t know how I’m going to survive. I’ve been someone who has been through a lot. You know I have depression, anxiety and suffer from PTSD. They advocated for me and then they said they would send me to somewhere in Kent – two hours away). However, there were problems with this property and then they said, ‘Even though you’re entitled to two-bedroom we have got a one-bedroom flat at the minute if you can manage.’ The people who managed the property said if you refuse this you are going to make yourself homeless. I accepted it and I have been there ever since and even though what they said to me was, oh, it is a temporary. It is interim. They use that word. Interim like emergency accommodation, I have been there three years! The flat was running alive with cockroaches, live cockroaches everywhere! The whole building was infested. There was also bad mould. Magpie helped and the landlord said they would send someone from pest control. The problem went on for six months because the whole block was infested but it has now

been addressed. We still have mould problems, I call them every now and then the agent will come and, you know, use a spray, wipe it down. I don't feel safe to be honest, because when we first moved there, the entrance door was broken. All the letterbox was trashed. We now have a proper lock and letterbox. I just try to be as safe as I can with my son. We don't really go out much. Recently I have noticed homeless people wandering around, they come in there to sleep and wee in the hallway."

Household Four included a mother, her 9-year-old daughter and 2-year-old son. They had been moved to six hotels across East London in a seven-month period. They had recently been rehoused into a three-bedroom flat in Stratford where they had lived for the past eight months:

"I was moved to six different hotels in a space of seven months. I am in a flat and it makes a massive difference, it is not 100%, but I can cook and so I don't need to keep buying from outside. My kid can have a little place to play."

Household Five included a mother and her two children (5-year-old son and 15-year-old daughter). Both children are autistic. Their housing problems started when the mother lost her job and became homeless. Both children had spent most of their time living in inadequate accommodation and had experienced several moves. After more than five years they had been rehoused into a 3-bedroom property in the private rented sector:

"At the moment I'm in private accommodation. It's a 3-bedroom property. But just before that in the space of three years, we moved about 3 or 4 times. So, we were moved to Barking. It was a little box room with a living room. There wasn't enough space and my daughter had to sleep in the living room. We were moved to a Travelodge,

and there was all of us in one hotel room for some time. We then moved to a one-bedroom property, it was terrible. It was mouldy, like a lot of mould... The building was very damp, we couldn't sleep in the bedroom. We had to sleep in the open plan living room. So, we had a kitchen on the side and a couch on one side and that is where we slept. We used to get electric shocks if you put the tap on. It was a very, very dangerous situation to live in. The council came and they said it is not a place that anybody should be in, but they still left us in there for another eight months. "We did not feel safe at all, physically, emotionally, or mentally because of our surroundings. One flat we lived in was infested with mice and there were slugs everywhere. You can't relax, you are on edge all the time, I'm having to sanitise things all the time. I can't sit in the house even with a mask because of the mould, your scared the mice are going to go over the food. You were always covering things and saying don't do this,"

The frequent moves were particularly challenging for her two children as they had additional needs:

"This situation is difficult for all children but for small children with additional needs it is much more difficult. Because my daughter is autistic change is very difficult for her, so I would have to reassure her all the time about what is going to happen, she would always keep asking mummy 'when are we going to move'? Have they told you? It also meant that I had to keep her at her old school because we were moving around so much. Otherwise, it would mean her hopping from one school to the other and that would not help. So, I kept her at the school. But that meant we were travelling two hours each way. And we couldn't go back home. So sometimes I would wander around whilst she was at

school but that meant my daughter spent much too much time in her pushchair.”

Feedback from the Focus group identified similar problems, including:

- Lack of space.
- Multiple moves.
- Poor quality accommodation with particular challenges for those living in hotels and shared accommodation.

A theme that emerged more strongly in the focus groups was a failure to be treated with respect and heard by statutory authorities. For example:

“They don’t listen, they don’t do nothing”.

“It’s very difficult to get repairs done, it’s very difficult to get them to listen”.

“Last time I reported a problem, the manager made me feel bad... she tried to blame me, she said this is not something I should have reported”.

“They take their time to fix one thing, they don’t listen to us, they don’t treat us with respect”.

“The psychological pressure of people of not listening is draining. It’s like torture, it’s just drip, drip, drip every day and that as well puts you at risk and puts your children at risk because you get so down about it”.

“Often it can feel like you’re telling your story, and no one is listening, but I think we have to keep telling it to whoever we can tell so that something happens. They make us feel ashamed and it’s not our fault and it’s, literally nothing that we’ve done wrong.”

The impact of inadequate housing on the home learning environment and the ability to practise and develop key skills.

The home learning environment plays an important role in early child development where it has the potential to act as an enabler or barrier to child development. Here we demonstrate ways in which inadequate housing acts as a barrier in enabling child development.

Gross Motor Skills and the home learning environment

We begin by exploring the relationship between the development of gross motor skills and inadequate housing. We focus on two elements i.e., crawling and walking. Guidance for parents provided by NHS states: *“There are lots of ways you can get your child moving at home. Have a game of hide-and-seek, see who the most star jumps can do, create an obstacle course or stick some music on and have a dance-off.”*⁹⁰

It quickly became clear that inadequate housing and in particular severely restricted space limited the potential for families to support their families in practicing these skills and engaging in basic activities identified above.

Interviewees were asked to think back to when their child was learning to crawl or walk. Where did their baby practise these skills? Was there anything about their housing that made it difficult? It was clear both from the focus group and interviews that that lack of space was severely inhibiting the ability of babies and toddlers to practise these skills, and was restricting basic activities such as tummy time:

“Yeah, it was really difficult because there was no space, so just trying to help her to walk was very difficult for me, because the room was very small and I didn’t want to put her on the carpet as it was not clean, we had just 1 metre. I just used to take her to the park all of the time, and most of the time it was raining or just very cold, so it was really difficult. Sometimes I put her in a walker in the parking area in the hotel.”

⁹⁰ Playtime activities and bonding with your toddler - Start for Life - NHS (www.nhs.uk)

"My son really went through hell when he was younger. I was living in this box room, there was my bed, and he had a tiny bed (the lounge was used by a different family) The only place my son could crawl was on my bed. If he was on the floor, he couldn't crawl one step to another because we didn't have that space at home. So, the only space he had to move around was on my bed and it was hard for him to get a grip, it didn't feel safe at all at all. He didn't crawl until maybe three or four months after his milestone.... Walking was so difficult, he had very little space to walk. We couldn't have a walker because there was no space... He didn't walk until he was 2 and a half."

"That one is so difficult. I wanted him to be independent but on the other hand I need to look at the safety, the place is so tight and there is furniture that can hurt him. The mattress was the only place he could hold on and stand but there was nowhere to grip on, so if you just held onto the mattress, you would just fall down and that happened. I took him to different Children's Centres, I think this helps in a bit, but he was a bit delayed."
"You have so much stuff, a cot, highchair, and it's all in a very small space and it's difficult for her to be free and move around like any other child. She used to backward crawl under things. Sometimes you will find her underneath the heated clothing rail. You always have to be hyper vigilant of where she's going to go. There is the cooker that she can easily reach. It wasn't safe and of course we were in open plan so you couldn't put up a baby gate."

We asked the focus group specifically about tummy time. It was clear that this was a particular problem. Challenges included not wanting to put their infant on the floor because of a lack of space,

dirty carpets and either the reality or fear about pests such as mice, lice and cockroaches crawling on their baby.

Potty training

Interviewees were asked whether there was anything about their housing that made it difficult to potty train. There were four barriers identified. This included lack of space, lifestyle (often spending large chunks of the day travelling around to avoid returning to their accommodation); shared facilities such as bathrooms and limited access to laundry facilities. For example:

"It got to the point where we were travelling around so much that we got to the point where they would just be in pampers."

"I couldn't do that because we lived in a house with 14 other residents, so it was very difficult, if everyone puts their stuff in the bathroom there is no space. We had to wait until we moved."

"Yes, it was difficult actually. I think my child is very intelligent, but it was difficult to teach her. When we were in the hotel it was difficult to wash clothes, we could only do this once a week, but when we were potty training, I needed to wash her clothes daily and it was very difficult to wash her clothes by hand in the hotel, so sometimes I just put her in pampers."

Play

Play is recognised as an important aspect of early childhood development and an important part of home learning. We were interested to understand more about ways in which inadequate housing was restricting or limiting play. Interviewees were asked a range of questions about play including:

- Do you have enough space to store toys?
- Is there anything about your housing that makes it difficult to play?

- Is there a quiet place to read/explore a book with a child?
- Are you able to invite other children over to play with your child/children?
- Do you have to place any restrictions on play as a result of limited space?

Interviewees recognised the importance of play in the home learning environment. However, inadequate housing was creating substantial barriers. These barriers included limited space to play, store toys, sit and read a book or engage in activities such as messy play, colouring etc. For some interviewees, particularly those in hotels, the bed was the site in which all activities took place. Inadequate housing also meant that it was not possible to socialise with other children at home.

“There is no space for him to walk and play inside. There is not enough room to store toys, no space to do any messy play which is a shame because this can help with a child’s expression, creative and imaginative development. The only place we can read, and study is on the bed. I try not to restrict her learning and development and I will move the storage boxes into the corridor, bedroom or kitchen so that he can have some space to play, even if that means I have to climb over boxes to make food or go to the bedroom. There is hardly enough space for both of us and so we can’t have any friends or family to visit. There is a playground outside the building, but it is not safe as people use it for their dogs. There are needles and alcohol bottles on the floor of the playground.”

“In the hotel it was very difficult. We just had a few toys in a small bag because there was no space and I used to put those toys on the bed. The bed was for sleeping, for sitting, for eating, for playing, for everything. I had some small cups, drawing paper, coloured pens. The good thing was that Magpie was close by, so I used to bring her there to

play and see other children. There was a child in the hotel, and they wanted to come and play together. But I don’t have space. For us, it’s very tight. So how can I bring another child here? When I told my daughter we don’t have space, she was crying.”

“I used to do online stuff at home with the children. Messy play was a no- no. We couldn’t practice ourselves because we didn’t have enough space to do it. A lot of things that we are supposed to be doing with them I couldn’t. Because number 1, I don’t have a highchair to put my son to sit in, and there is no table that you can put stuff on. Even if we are doing drawing it is literally on the bed, you know how soft the bed is, so we really didn’t really do much colouring or drawing. We only did that when we have the chance of opportunity to go somewhere where there is a highchair.

It would have been nice to have a space to put books at home so that we could pick them up and read them. There was no space to play with Play-Doh, that was a no no because we are on the bed. So yes, I couldn’t really do much with him but we did spend that time together, but we couldn’t explore. As a mum you know there were things that I was looking forward to doing but I couldn’t do them. if I had the material and the opportunity to do it, I definitely would have done it with him. It wasn’t as engaging as it was meant to be.”

“There was no messy play, there was no way he could do that, now he has got older we have messy play, but we couldn’t do it before. To help him draw I got a big paper. And a box. I put it on the bed so he could draw, but it wasn’t conducive to that... The only time he could read was when his brother had gone to school in the morning but then

I didn't want to take him back to the hotel quickly. Sometimes I would take him to the library. It was not possible to have children over to play. We have one friend who has a 2-bedroom house. They have a garden; we have been there. So, whenever we go there my son says can I have a sleepover (at the hotel) I say no not today. The older one is more active and the younger one is struggling and so there might be a clash and I don't want accidents. It is not that I don't want them to play but there is no space to do that, so I tell them to sit more. When I used to come to Magpie, they would give me a set of toys for the home for a week or two weeks and then I would change them over it was very helpful."

"I'm an advocate for child-led play, supervised by another because they learn through play. But we could not do that because of lack of space. Everything was stacked on top of each other. We did everything on the sofa, we slept on the sofa, we lived on the sofa, and we played on the sofa. Now we have moved she has got a kitchen set in one corner, and a drawer of cubes in another. She can choose what she wants to play with, but we couldn't do that before. We never did messy play at home. We would go to a Children's Centre if we wanted to do something like that. Number 1 there was no space to invite a friend over and number 2. We did not want people to see the state that we were in. Now we are just learning as a family to invite people over a bit. I had to encourage them to sit down, and I think this has meant that my older child is not very active. It was always "Shush", you know they can't play, they cannot be kids, it was always "Be quiet".

Findings from the focus group were similar, with participants highlighting the impact of very limited space on the ability to play and for

those in shared housing, often play for small children took place on the stairs. Participants also identified limitations of outdoor space which was often perceived as hazardous for infants because of rubbish, pests and rusty nails.

Children's Centres and the Magpie Project were playing an important role in enabling both play and the opportunity to socialise with other children. The Magpie Project provided small packs of toys aimed at enabling play where there was limited space, and this was welcomed by parents...

Limitations on children's voices as a result of inadequate housing

We were interested to understand whether there was anything about their housing situations that meant children's voices were being restricted. It was clear that living in hotels and shared accommodation in close proximity to others created some very specific challenges and meant that interviewees sometimes encouraged their child/children to lower their voices and speak quietly, potentially impacting the development of their speech and language skills:

"She speaks very quietly and is very shy. I say raise your voice. All of the time in the hotel I would say don't speak loudly. Because in the hotel the security would come, and I would feel scared that they might evict us. So, my partner and I would say 'don't speak, don't speak.'"

"In the hotel you are told to be quiet because you have people on a work trip, on holiday, so it is always Shush. Then we moved to the one-bedroom flat and the person that used to be next to us used to complain about my kids, my daughter (who has autism) was running around. She doesn't sleep, so we were up at night."

"He wasn't a noisy boy, and he wasn't very vocal until he was 2 and a half, but he is really loud now. We were

staying there on the bed all the time. That was our playground. That's our nursery. That's our school. So, I think that impacted in part. If he was able to explore, he would say Mama, what's this? But we didn't have that." (Early development coincided with Covid 19 lockdown).

"She speaks very quietly and is very shy. I say raise your voice. All of the time in the hotel I would say don't speak loudly. Because in the hotel the security would come, and I would feel scared that they might evict us. So, my partner and I would say 'don't speak, don't speak.'"

One interviewee resisted this pressure:

"I allow him to express herself by allowing her to speak however she wants in terms of volume and play with whatever she wants to."

Emotional and Physical Wellbeing

As we have seen in the previous chapter inadequate housing plays an important role in emotional and physical well-being. We were interested to understand whether inadequate housing was affecting the emotional and physical wellbeing of interviewees and their children. Interviewees were asked whether their housing impacted the emotional wellbeing of them and their children? Did it affect their sleep? Did it affect how they engaged with their children? Did it affect their physical health? Did it affect their access to nutritional food?

It was clear that housing was having a significant impact on emotional wellbeing as a result of being confined to a very small unsuitable space that resulted in a lack of privacy; limited the potential to socialise with others and created a sense of powerlessness that their housing situation would change:

"It has affected my mood a lot."

Sometimes I am at home, and I am not doing anything. I'm just crying. I am still alive and where there is life, there is hope, but sometimes I feel like not going anywhere, not talking to anybody, just staying indoors. Sometimes my oldest son was crying and saying I don't want to move to another hotel, I am tired of this. I am pretending it is okay, but sometimes I just snap. I don't want him to see me sad, but I am human."

"The housing situation has worsened my emotional, mental and physical health. I have been diagnosed with depression, anxiety and PTSD; I have had to refer myself to a therapist since moving here. My son has been impacted emotionally, mentally and physically. He no longer eats his food and is constantly scared that a neighbour will attack us or take him away from me. Due to all of this stress He is constantly having tantrums on a daily basis and asks me when are we going to our new home? This breaks my heart as it shows how she feels living here."

"In the hotel, it was too much I suffered from depression, and I was referred for talking therapy."

Sleep was a particular challenge:

"We couldn't sleep in the bedroom. Because of the mould situation, so it was three of us on the sofa. If you are on a sofa with two children, you don't get a proper sleep. I would wake in the middle of the night and somebody's hand is on somebody. My daughter wriggles a lot. She might wake up and cry or something I will be consoling her and then he wakes up. So, it was difficult, it really messed with their sleep patterns. It was tough, because you were not getting enough sleep. You were looking after children. You're supposed to be able to

rest, and you know when you haven't got enough sleep, you get up. In the morning. All Tired. Grumpy, just not rested and the body aches as well." "In the hotel, it was too much I suffered from depression, and I was referred for talking therapy."

"My daughter slept okay. Sometimes I had a headache because I was thinking too much. Being a long time in one room, one very small room is very difficult, and it made it difficult for me to sleep."

"It was a roller coaster because we were all in one place. I remember the youngest was teething, the older brother was unable to sleep properly so he fell asleep at school and the teacher told us and when I explained he said, 'not to worry'. They asked if I needed any help and said if I am running late, I should not worry. But we have never been late because that would break my son's heart. He has 100% attendance."

"My son and I have never been able to get a full night's sleep/rest since living here due to the fire alarm waking us up and my son waking in fear and saying someone is going to come to hurt us."

It was clear that inadequate housing was also affecting physical wellbeing:

"She had really bad bouts of bronchitis when we were in a very bad mouldy place."

"I have been diagnosed with a breathing disorder and since moving into temporary accommodation this has worsened and I have been having episodes virtually every day."

"We both suffer from allergies now and I think that is because of the mould. I always wake up with a stuffy nose."

Participants in the focus group described a range of ways in which their housing was impacting their physical health as a result of increased exposure to infections as a result of sharing kitchens and bathrooms that were not clean.

Nutrition/Food

Interviewees were asked whether their housing situation affected their access to nutritional food and impacted on their choices around breastfeeding. For those living in hotels and shared accommodation there were challenges as they did not have access to a fridge or cooking facilities:

"In the hotel there was absolutely no way to cook. You just have a kettle. So, we used to go and get food from outside which is not healthy. I couldn't cook healthy food and it was expensive because we were getting food from outside three times a day and it is expensive. Even if somebody said I will bring you some food there was nowhere to store the food."

"There was no healthy diet or anything in the hotel. I slept many days hungry because I couldn't store any foods in the fridge because there was no fridge. We needed to eat outside and when we came home sometimes, I would forget to have a biscuit. My daughter got diarrhoea and lost too much weight because she was eating too much sugar and food from outside."

"We only had one fridge for the whole family in the (shared) house. We had one shelf in the cupboard between two families. So even if you are buying food there is nowhere to store it. The only thing I could keep in the fridge was milk. We were feeding off tinned meatballs and baked beans. We couldn't make really good meals. Because there

was not enough space to store things. That was very difficult.”

“Financially it is expensive because we have to keep buying junk food and there is no staple food, you just pick up what you see. One day me and my oldest son ate something, and we had food poisoning. The GP gave us medication but that one was another roller coaster. We had to go to the reception of the hotel, I explained he needs to take medication and it needs to be in the fridge. They said they can’t take it and I called the manager. They put it in the fridge, but I want to be responsible for my son’s antibiotics, I want to see where it is kept and who is handling their medicine.”

One interviewee highlighted the challenge of juggling the needs of two children whilst living in a hotel and a long journey to school:

“It was really difficult. I used to travel a long way to my daughter’s school and my son would be in the buggy and we would stay outside to wait to go and pick him up. So, we would rely on finger food, we couldn’t just go home and make a warm lunch because it was too far, it’s not healthy giving her finger foods all day long. Another thing is cooking with the kids. There wasn’t enough space. They love to cook but you can’t do that at home because it was a tiny space.”

Breastfeeding was a challenge for those living in hotels:

“We arrived in the hotel, and I stopped breastfeeding because she was two and a half months old. It was so difficult. When you are breastfeeding, you need to feel comfortable for breast milk.”

“I was breastfeeding in the hotel, but it was very difficult. I had to sit at the end of the bed and place myself on the wall

or go and sit on the stairs to breastfeed. I did breastfeed for nearly two years. Weaning was very difficult because you know you might like to introduce vegetables, fruit stuff that you blend and put them in the fridge for a couple of days. But I couldn’t because we didn’t have that facility.”

There was a perception that inadequate food in the hotels was impacting on breastfeeding:

“Some of the women who stay in the hotels breastfeed and they’ve said they haven’t been able to continue to breastfeed because the food is so bad.”

Services to support households living in inadequate accommodation.

We were interested to understand what services interviewees found helpful. The Magpie Project was identified as providing valuable support that was delivered in a respectful way:

“In terms of services, Magpie is number one. There are other charities that I have been to, but at Magpie you are welcomed and accepted. They are helping mums like me who are living in a shared housing and don’t have space. They offer you that space. You bring your children to do different activities. They have lots of toys to play with. They take children on trips that you would not normally be able to organise or afford. You can have breakfast, you can have lunch, you can have snacks...It is outstanding, it really is.”

“Magpie is like my family, like my second home. They helped me a lot with so many things. There was a health visitor to check the little one and see he is not losing weight. You are given fruit and veggies. They have magnificent services.”

“We both suffer from allergies now and I think that is because of the mould. I always wake up with a stuffy nose.”

Other services that were valued included local libraries, children’s centres, community kitchens, family navigators and Talking Therapy:

“We used to go to the community kitchen every week. My son is always looking forward to that day. I asked him what he wanted? We had one-hour slots... So everyone has their slots. That was really helpful.”

“We both suffer from allergies now and I think that is because of the mould. I always wake up with a stuffy nose.”

We asked interviewees and focus group participants what services should be put in place to support them:

“When I was in Stratford, there was a Newham Team and a Family Navigator that you could ask about support. The lady was so helpful she would guide us to where we could go and made things easier. In Newham there were lots of services, now we have moved it is not the same.”

“It would be really helpful to have things like family hubs and breastfeeding hubs. I know there is one in Newham, so increasing those.”

“A Community Kitchen and a little bit more of storage would make life a bit better.”

“I think community kitchens help. I think families with children under 5 should not be in this position at all they should not be living in inadequate Housing.”

Focus group participants made some

recommendations for ways in which their situation could be improved:

- Families should be housed in self-contained accommodation rather than hotels or shared accommodation.
- More should be done to make housing safe i.e. durable locks and more consideration to women’s safety.
- Families should be treated with respect and dignity.

Conclusions

1. This chapter provides a detailed insight into the housing situation of families with children under 5 living in temporary accommodation in Newham.
2. Families were living in dire housing conditions where they were subject to frequent moves, considerable uncertainty and where they spent long periods of time in unsuitable and inadequate temporary accommodation and were not able to socialise with other children in their home.
3. Inadequate housing was impacting on the emotional and physical well-being of under 5’s and their families.
4. Lack of space was having a detrimental impact on the ability of families to support their Under 5’s with practising key skills such as crawling, walking and play-based learning in the home.
5. For those living in hotels and shared accommodation there were additional challenges that resulted in families being deprived of both space and access to basic facilities such as fridges/kitchens, crucial for good nutrition.
6. Local charities such as the Magpie Project were providing outstanding services delivered in a respectful way that was appreciated by service users. Other services valued by parents included

Family Navigators, Talking Therapies and Community Kitchens.

7. The UK is a signatory to the UNCRC. The UNCRC includes a range of rights and those most pertinent to this issue are Article 3 (best interests of the child) and Article 27 (adequate standard of living). We would suggest that the housing provided for these families is inadequate and not in the best interests of these children.
8. We recommend that Families with Under 5's should be housed in self-contained accommodation with appropriate facilities such as a kitchen and sufficient space to support the development of basic skills, such as crawling, walking and play based learning.
9. In March 2024 the government updated its Homeless Code of Guidance and stated that housing would not be suitable if there was not enough space for a cot for each child under 2. This guidance is welcome, but we recommend that the government and local authorities work together to ensure that this is implemented.
10. The London Borough of Newham should establish a time-limited working group with relevant statutory and voluntary sector agencies to develop a comprehensive plan that aims to minimise the negative impact of inadequate housing on child development and educational experience.
11. The London Borough of Newham should scale up support to voluntary organisations who are well placed to develop innovative solutions to support children and families.

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Chapter Four:

Inadequate housing and Educational Experience

Views and experiences from Year 6 pupils attending St Antony's Primary School

"If England was good, I would have been able to find a good house and I would not have had to move multiple times." (Year Five pupil, London's Olympic Housing Legacy: Time for a new Deal)

In this chapter, we explore the impact on inadequate housing on the educational experiences of Year Six pupils at St Antony's Catholic Primary School. We begin by providing some contextual data on the school. We then move on to outline the research methodology utilised. The research findings are organised into two sections: The first summarises the findings from a pupil survey completed by all year Six pupils that explored the relationship between inadequate housing and educational experience. The second provides an overview of findings derived from Classroom based activities that explored the relationship between inadequate housing and children's rights. Finally, we draw some conclusions.

Context

St Antony's Catholic Primary School based in Forest Gate, Newham. It is an oversubscribed school with 488 pupils on its school roll in 2023. The school was inspected by OFSTED in 2023 where it was described as 'good', although it was observed that the nature of the inspection limited its rating to 'good' but *'There is enough evidence of improved performance to suggest that the school could be judged outstanding if we were to carry out a graded (section 5) inspection now'*⁹¹

In 2022/2023 25% of pupils were eligible for Pupil Premium and this is in line with the national average. According to the most recent inspection undertaken by the Diocese in 2019, the proportion of Catholic pupils was 84% and there is a well above average number of pupils from minority ethnic groups and 57% of pupils speak English

as an additional language.⁹² Pupils at the school are encouraged to play an important part in the life of their local community. There is a strong emphasis on citizenship and social responsibility. St Antony's Catholic Primary School is a member of TELCO and has worked with staff and pupils on several campaigns. Mindful of the impact of inadequate housing on pupils at this school, the leadership team was keen to work with us on this project.

We had previously worked with staff and pupils at the school on a short film exploring London's Olympic Housing legacy. [London's Olympic Housing Legacy: Time for a New Deal - YouTube](#) Pupils provided testimony for the film that described their own subjective experiences of multiple moves, living in overcrowded housing, and dealing with pests, such as ants and mice and it was clear that the housing emergency was having an extreme impact on some of the pupils.

Methodology:

There were two important considerations that guided us in devising an appropriate and robust methodology: Firstly, we were just exiting the pandemic and therefore we wanted to ensure that the project resulted in minimal disruption. Secondly, we were mindful that this was a sensitive and potentially upsetting topic for children and therefore we wanted to ensure our approach minimised any potential for harm to children. We worked closely with the Head of Pastoral Care to plan activities and we agreed to focus our activities on Year 6 students whom we felt would be more able to navigate this difficult topic and ask for help if required.

We limited our activities to a short survey that included questions about their housing situation and its impact on their educational experience. The survey was completed by all 64 year 6 pupils,

91 PI, Ofsted-Report-10268862-St-Antonys-Catholic-148025-draft-to-school-for-review-1.pdf (stantonyscatholicprimary.co.uk)

92 Northampton Diocese Section 48 Inspection Writing Frame [Sept 2010] (stantonyscatholicprimary.co.uk)

in other words there was a 100% completion rate. We also engaged the pupils in classroom-based activities that utilised a child rights-based approach to explore the relationship between inadequate housing and educational experience by focussing on children's rights. We worked with Year 6 on three separate occasions between November 2022 and May 2023. In the first session we introduced pupils to the key intentions/aims of the research and their role in it; familiarised/refamiliarised pupils with the UN Convention on the Rights of Children where we focused on those rights most pertinent to housing and worked with pupils in small groups to explore the impact of inadequate housing on educational experience. At the end of the first session, all pupils completed the survey (See above).

In the two subsequent sessions, pupils worked in small groups and wrote a letter to the Mayor of Newham or the Minister for Housing and Levelling Up explaining how inadequate housing impacts on educational experience. In the final session pupils produced Housing Charters setting out some basic minimums/expectations about adequate housing.

Section One - Key Findings - St Antony's Primary School Survey

- 24/64 (38%) reported problems with overcrowding/lack of space.
- 20/64 (31%) reported having mould in their homes.
- 16/64 (27%) reported having damp in their homes.
- 5/64 (8%) Shared a kitchen with another family.
- 3/64 (5%) reported having pest infestations.
- 22/64 (34%) had moved because of housing problems.
- 19/64 (30%) Do not have a quiet place to read at home.
- 39/64 (61%) do not have a shelf to store schoolbooks in their home.
- 33/64 (52%) of children completed homework at a desk; 23% on the Kitchen table; 15% on a bed and 9% on the floor.

- 23/64 (36%) reported difficulties falling asleep either because they shared a bedroom or because their house was too noisy.
- 22/64 (34%) do not have space outside their home where they can play. For example, a garden or communal area
- 16/64 (27%) reported not having enough space at home to relax and play with friends.
- 13/40 (33%) who provided details about who they shared a bedroom with reported that they shared a bedroom with 2 or more other people.
- 5/40 (13%) who provided details of who they shared a bedroom with reported that they were sharing their bedroom with a parent.

St Antony's Primary School Survey findings in more detail

Housing Problems

A sizeable minority of pupils reported problems with their housing. Specifically, 22/64 (34%) had moved because of their housing situation:

- 24/64 (38%) reported that they were overcrowded/had a lack of space.
- 20/64 (31%) reported having mould.
- 16/64 (27%) reported having damp.
- 5/64 (8%) shared a kitchen with another family.
- 3/64 (5%) reported having pest infestations.
- 22/64 (34%) reported not having outside space where they could play such as a garden or communal area.

Most pupils shared a bedroom 51/64 (79%) and 40/64 (63%) provided details of who they shared a bedroom with:

- 24 /40 (62%) shared a bedroom with one other sibling.
- 7/40 (18%) shared a bedroom with two other siblings.
- 3/40 (8%) shared a room with 3 other

siblings.

- 1/40(3%) shared a bedroom with 4 other siblings.
- 2/40 (5%) reported sharing a bedroom with two parents and other siblings.
- 3/40 (8%) reported sharing a bedroom with at least one parent.

Some pupils provided additional comments on this issue. For example:

“I have some problems with sleep because my older brother gets moody and annoyed and starts arguing so I sometimes sleep on the couch.”

“My brother and sister don’t let me sleep.”

“An experience I had in my other house was sharing a bedroom with my whole family and it is much better now.”

“I don’t have enough space to put my books because my sister occupies $\frac{3}{4}$ of the house.”

“The space is too small, and it is hard to breathe in.”

Lack of space/overcrowding was impacting upon the pupil's ability to sleep, specifically 23/64 (36%) of pupils reported difficulties falling asleep either because they shared a bedroom or because their house was too noisy.

Studying at home

Ideally pupils should have a quiet place at home where they can read; a shelf to store schoolbooks and to do their homework. Survey findings reported that whilst most pupils did have a quiet place to study, a sizeable minority 19/64 (30%) of pupils did not. 39/64(61%) did not have a shelf to store schoolbooks in their home. More than half, 33/64 (52%) of children completed their homework at a desk with a further 15/64 (23%) completing their homework on the kitchen table; 10/64 (15%) on a bed and 6/64 (9%) on the floor.

Impact on ability to socialise with friends at home.

We were interested to understand whether pupils whether they were able to socialise at home with friends. A sizeable minority of pupils 16/64 (27%) reported not having enough space at home to relax and play with friends. Therefore, housing was having a detrimental impact on children's ability to socialise.

Journey to school

We were interested to understand more about the length of time pupils travelled to school. A sizeable proportion of pupils, specifically: 28/64 (44%) had a journey of less than 15 minutes; a further (48%) had a journey of between 15 and 30 minutes whilst (8%) had a journey of between 30 and 60 minutes. No pupil travelled more than an hour to get to school. The most common mode of travel to school was walking 31/64 (49%) followed by the car 23/64 (36%) then public transport 9/64 (14%) and bicycle 1/64 (2%).

Section Two: Key findings - A child rights-based approach to exploring inadequate housing and educational experience.

In this section we summarise the key findings and outputs that emanated from the classroom-based activities that were divided into three separate sessions.

Session 1: Classroom discussion

In the first session we introduced pupils to the key intentions/aims of the research and their role in it; familiarised/refamiliarised pupils with children's rights as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC). The convention includes several articles, and we focussed our discussion on those elements we considered to be most relevant to the topic, including:

- Article 3 (best interests of the child) The best interests of the child must be a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children.

- Article 12 (respect for the views of the child) Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. This right always applies, for example during immigration proceedings, housing decisions or the child's day-to-day home life.
- Article 16 (right to privacy) Every child has the right to privacy. The law should protect the child's private, family and home life, including protecting children from unlawful attacks that harm their reputation.
- Article 27 (adequate standard of living) Every child has the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and social needs and support their development. Governments must help families who cannot afford to provide this.
- Article 31 (leisure, play and culture) Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.⁹³

We then had a discussion with half of the year group, who worked in small groups to consider the impact of inadequate housing on educational experience. At the end of the session the small groups fed back to the larger group. The key points are summarised below:

- Poor housing including overcrowded housing impacts on bedtime routines affecting sleep.
- Lack of sleep impacts on pupils' mental and physical health. For example, they may feel frustrated/sad/angry, and this frustration/anger translates into disruptive behaviour in the classroom and playground. They may fall asleep in class and/or find it difficult to concentrate.
- Overcrowded housing impacts on privacy making it difficult to complete homework/read a book. This was described by one

pupil as:

*"Feeling like a conjoined twin
unable to separate/unable to
complete homework/unable to read
a book."*

- Living a long distance from school may result in a pupil being late or absent and this will impact on their ability to keep on top of their studies.
- The physical aspects of poor housing such as mould and damp have direct impacts on health resulting in sickness/absence, possibly requiring the use of an inhaler.
- Inadequate housing makes it difficult to socialise with friends at home.
- Inadequate housing makes it difficult to play and impacts on the ability to learn through play.

At the end of the session pupils completed a brief survey on their own housing situation (See above) and were advised to spend some time reviewing the UN Charter on the Rights of Children.

Session Two: Letter writing

In the second session pupils worked in small groups and wrote letters to either

1. The Mayor of Newham, Rokhsana Fiaz
2. Michael Gove, Secretary of state for Levelling up, Housing and Communities

The pupil's letters outlined how poor housing was impacting on the educational experience of primary school pupils and considered whether this might be impacting children's rights under the UN convention on the rights of the child.

We have included the letters over the next few pages:

⁹³ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child - UNICEF UK -

Dear Mayor of Newham,

Did you know every child has the right to a standard of living that supports their needs and development, including housing. In addition, we feel you should develop a strong understanding of where and how children and young people live and how they feel about their home and immediate surroundings. Ensure that any opportunity to participate is prompted in an accessible and child friendly way. It is a fact that my home is contaminated with damp, mould and pests. Also, every single second, my time is interrupted by my family when I try to read, when I try to study, when I try to sleep it is annoying! My mum is working hard so much just to pay the bills. Our things do not even work, our sink, toilet, bathtub, oven, heater, stove all broken! I do not even have a place to study. We barely have enough money coming from my mum's jobs. Additionally, it is not only me who is suffering, but other children too. It is unacceptable.

Thank you for your time.

Dear Mayor of Newham,

On behalf of the children in Newham, we disagree with the way that you let children live. Do you realise how this is affecting children? Every child under 18 should be able to enjoy all the rights set out in the UNCRC, without discrimination and so there should be absolutely no inequalities in basic standards. Mould and damp are why 31% of children have asthma and breathing difficulties. Mould causes bad air which you breathe that can make you sick. Damp also causes asthma and makes a permanent smell.

Here is the real question? How do you think children are managing in small houses with 10 people living in them? Do they have space? Space is extremely essential for children to have. For example, doing homework and playing with friends. Every child has the right to a standard of living that supports their needs and development, including housing. Do you think it is observing the rights of the child? Children do not have a place called home because of overcrowding. Do you truly believe that you are offering an honest deal to the future generations?

Therefore, I hope this letter has made you make a difference to the rights and lives of children. Change your ways now.

Yours faithfully

Dear Mayor of Newham,

It would be utterly remiss of me not to write this letter. To begin with every child has rights and values; one of them is every child has the right to rest, leisure, and play. Firstly, my house is always packed to the rafters with all my family members, and it is covered with mould and damp (which is utterly unsuitable for a developing child). My house is also extremely small which means there is no room for playing or physical activity. This really affects the development, growth, and wellbeing of a child.

Undoubtedly good housing is essential for every child to grow healthy and optimistic, so I would definitely recommend aligning internal housing standards I.e., a safe and well-maintained home that supports children's physical, mental, spiritual, and social development. Did you know that some children are out there with terrible housing, and it affects them physically and mentally? To conclude, every child has a voice, and it should be heard.

Yours Sincerely,

Dear Mayor of Newham,

I am writing to inform you about the many problems in Newham. Children should live in a healthy environment. A place with no mould and damp? Did you know that damp and mould can cause asthma? Every child in Newham should have a place to play and have a friend. Over to play. Playing can help your mental health and create a safe area to study.

Your sincerely,

Dear Mayor of Newham,

On behalf of every single child, in Newham we would like to state that in houses there have been a variety of different situations that children have experienced some of these situations are:

Overcrowded in a house

Did you know in one room three children are living? They have no privacy when they are changing. Also, when children are doing their homework, they do not have a desk or privacy. Furthermore, do you realise that sometimes two families share one house? To add, it is noisy so children cannot concentrate on their homework, which leads to bad grades.

Not socialising with friends at home

It is too noisy to talk and there is no space to relax. Siblings might embarrass you and everyone will be shouting. You might get frustrated, and your mood will bend out of shape. There are many different reasons, but personally I think these are the most essential reasons for an adequate house. Listen to the children if adults have a right so should children.

Yours sincerely,

Letters to the Minister of Housing

Dear Minister of Housing,

To say that these disenfranchised children have not even been heard is an understatement. I am here to express that I am utterly fuming and concerned for their health. How can children live in such an overcrowded space that is called home? They are totally suffering, and you don't even bother to listen to their sayings and rights? My first point is that you have been destroying their mental and physical health and you are not permitting them to have their proper childhood that everyone deserves. This mould is not decoration, it is reality, and we need to face it and do something about it? How can you live with yourself knowing you are offering half baked bread? They must step up and end this ludicrous game!

Your Sincerely

To the Minister for Housing

I am writing to address the issue of bad housing in the UK. I strongly agree that children under the age of 18 have the right to a standard of living that supports their needs and development.

Have you ever experienced overcrowding? Well children all over the UK suffer overcrowding every day. Many children live in overcrowded housing, and it is a huge problem! A huge and insufferable range of children have no place to work, no place to play and even unsafe mould growing in their houses. I am able to go out to a nearby playground or my garden and enjoy my time and I have a place to study and read books. Every child should have this opportunity.

There is no doubt that every child should enjoy the same opportunities to develop their full potential. Not one child should fall behind in education because they are not given the correct housing. Don't you see how unfair that is? Even horses have their own space, shouldn't children have some too???

Your sincerely,

Session Three: Charter for Adequate Housing

In the final session, we worked with pupils in small groups on the design of a housing charter aimed at identifying a set of basic minimums underpinning adequate housing. There were four themes that ran across these charters that included:

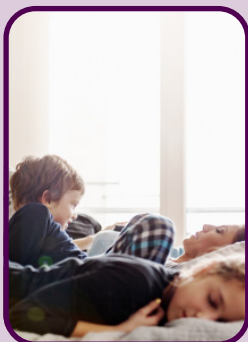
- The need for a quiet place to study.
- The need for privacy
- The need to limit the number of children sharing a bedroom.
- The need for somewhere to play and relax with others either at home or at a nearby park.

Charter for Adequate Housing



It is imperative that all children are entitled to have:

- A quiet place to study and read
- Privacy
- A safe place to sleep and shelter over them
- Maximum 2 people per bedroom
- An area to socialise and have fun
- 20-30 minutes travel time to school
- At weekends children should have the right to choose their own activities



It is totally and completely necessary that every child ought to have:

- Personal Space
- Time and space to relax and socialise with others
- Having your own privacy
- Having a say in what you do – (Parents tend to tell their children what to do)
- Garden for fresh air and relaxation
- Children over the age of 10 should not share a room with a person of the opposite gender



It is imperative that us (Children) should have:

- Time to relax and privacy in their own home.
- We need bookshelves to help to keep our books organized.
- No bug infestations
- A playground to get fresh air
- A home close to school



It is imperative children should:

- Have suitable housing – They shouldn't need to move houses constantly.
- A park nearby for rest and recreation. Without recreation they cannot concentrate on work.
- They need personal space to study and relax. Their place cannot be so noisy they cannot read.
- They need a safe environment to study.
- They should not need to travel more than 30 minutes to school.



It ought to be mandatory for every school-age child to:

- Have an adequate place to study
- Be able to develop their hobbies/social skills
- Have at least one holiday every year.
- Have a bedroom that is not shared by more than 3 people.
- Not to have to share a room with opposite genders.
- Have a space to play

Conclusions

1. This chapter provides a detailed insight into the housing situation of Year Six pupils at one primary school in Newham.
2. More than one quarter of the pupils reported having mould and damp in their homes; not having a quiet place to read; not having enough space at home to relax and play with friends. More than a third of the year group reported experiencing overcrowding/lack of space and this in turn impacted on their daily lives, limiting their privacy, sleep, ability to play, etc. and therefore we can conclude that a sizeable minority of pupils are affected by inadequate housing and this in turn is adversely impacting their lived experience of education.
3. The UK is a signatory to the UNCRC. The UNCRC includes a range of rights and those most pertinent to this issue are Article 27 (adequate standard of living) Every child has the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and social needs and support their development and Article 31 (leisure, play and culture) aimed at ensuring every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities. Based on the evidence we have gathered it is clear that children's rights are not being universally upheld in this borough.
4. This group of year six pupils had some realistic proposals that could underpin a basic set of housing rights. The most frequently occurring minimum standards related to the need for a quiet place to study; the need for privacy; the need to limit the number of children sharing a bedroom; The need for enough space to enable pupils to play and relax with others either at home or at a nearby park.
5. Policy makers should work with Children and Young People to develop a charter of basic minimums rights aimed at addressing the impacts of inadequate housing on educational experience.

Chapter Five: Inadequate housing and Educational Experience

Views and experiences from pupils, parents and teachers at St Bonaventure's Secondary School

In this chapter, we explore the impact on inadequate housing on the educational experiences of children and young people at St Bonaventure's School. We begin by providing some contextual data on the school and its involvement with TELCO in two other projects. We then move on to outline the research methodology utilised and key findings. We have organised the findings into three sections: The first section summarises findings from pupils and includes analysis of two online surveys with pupils and a workshop on inadequate housing and children's rights. The second section summarises the findings of an online survey with teachers aimed at understanding their perspectives on the impact of inadequate housing on educational experience. In Section three we analyse parent perspectives on the impact of inadequate housing on their children's educational experience. Finally, we draw some overall conclusions.

Context

St Bonaventure's is a single-sex boy's school with a co-ed sixth form and is a member of TELCO. There are 1331 pupils on the school roll, and in its most recent OFSTED inspection was rated as 'outstanding'.⁹⁴ 71.8% of students are Catholics with most of the remainder coming mainly from other Christian denominations and other faith backgrounds. The vast majority of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds. A sizeable proportion (65%) of students in years 7-11 do not have English as their first language. 38% students are eligible for Pupil Premium funding, and this is higher than the national average.⁹⁵ The school places a strong emphasis on citizenship and social responsibility.

Pupils and staff have consistently highlighted the

detrimental impact of the lack of high-quality affordable housing on pupils and staff. TELCO had previously worked with pupils and teachers on two housing-related projects. This included:

- The TELCO Community Organiser worked with pupils on an action research project aimed at understanding the impact of housing evictions on the mental health of pupils at their school. Pupils interviewed 10 teachers to understand their perspectives on the impact of evictions on the mental health of affected students. Their findings reported that teachers felt this was a very serious problem and reported that they were approached on a regular basis to offer pastoral support to pupils facing eviction (i.e., once a month); Half of the teachers interviewed identified a change in the behaviour of affected pupils such as increased anxiety and being withdrawn. Four teachers observed a change in pupil's appearance.
- A TELCO-led project exploring London's Olympic Housing Legacy - In 2019 TELCO worked with a range of organisations in East London including pupils at St Bonaventure's School on a short film that assessed the impact of East London's housing crisis on the lived experience of residents and the extent to which new housing built on London's Olympic Park was addressing this need. Problems identified included very high levels of housing need; Pupils being placed out of the borough (resulting in long and tiring journeys to school) and impacting on support networks; Overcrowding/lack of

⁹⁴ Ofsted. (2022) Inspection of St Bonaventure's School, 28, 29 November. Access at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/19kMdAU-ZX5OB5Qdha9wk-Q05RPJEA7LC/view>

⁹⁵ Diocese of Brentwood. (2019) Section 48, denominational report, 9th July.

space and negative impacts on emotional and physical well-being.⁹⁶

Methodology:

There were two important considerations that guided us in devising an appropriate and robust methodology. Firstly, we were just exiting the pandemic when we commenced the research and therefore, we wanted to ensure that the project resulted in minimal disruption. Secondly, we were mindful that this was a sensitive and potentially upsetting topic for children and young people therefore we wanted to ensure our approach minimised any potential for harm to children. We worked closely with the head of pastoral care on research design. We undertook two waves of fieldwork at St Bonaventure's. The first wave was undertaken between February 2022 and May 2022 and the second wave in October 2023 was aimed at interrogating further some of the findings that emerged in Wave one.

Wave One

The first wave of research was undertaken between February and May 2022. During this phase we opted for a mixed methods approach aimed at interrogating the impact of inadequate housing on educational experience from the perspective of teachers, pupils, and parents. Our overall philosophy was to utilise a child right based and participatory approaches where appropriate, in other words engaging children and young people in discussions about children's rights and inadequate housing and to involve pupils in the co-design of research methods where appropriate.

During the first wave of research we:

1. Worked with A-Level Sociology Students to co-produce an online survey that was distributed to all pupils.
2. Undertook semi-structured interviews with the Head of Pastoral Care, a social work trainee and five families.

3. Designed and distributed an online survey to all teachers.
4. Organised a workshop with Year 7 pupils aimed at designing a charter for adequate housing that utilised a 'child rights-based' approach.

Wave Two - October 2023

The second wave of research was undertaken to follow up on some of the findings that had emerged during the first wave of the research. Specifically, in the first wave of research we distributed an online survey to all pupils. The survey was completed by 66 students (5% of students) from across all year groups. Despite this small sample, a wealth of data was extracted from this first survey, but we were concerned that the findings may have been skewed in that it may have been completed by pupils who were disproportionately impacted by inadequate housing. We decided to repeat the survey with one entire year group as we felt this would give a more reliable insight into the housing experiences of pupils. We worked closely with the Head of Year and the completion of the survey was set for homework as a way of ensuring higher levels of completion. The Survey was distributed and completed in October 2023. There are 193 pupils in Year 8 and the survey was completed by 125 pupils and therefore the response rate was 65%. In wave two we distributed an online survey to the parents of pupils in Year 8 to complement the online survey distributed to year 8 pupils. However, just 24 parents responded and therefore we have excluded any quantitative findings and concentrated our analysis on qualitative comments.

Key Findings

1. The housing crisis is resulting in significant stress and impacting on the educational experience of children and young people.
2. Inadequate housing is having some specific impacts on emotional health and physical wellbeing and this in turn

⁹⁶ London's Olympic Housing Legacy: Time for a New Deal - YouTube

impacts educational engagement.

3. Pupils living in inadequate housing are less likely to be able to bring friends home to socialise and more likely to identify specific impacts on their emotional and physical wellbeing because of lack of privacy/space.
4. Families in housing need felt abandoned by statutory authorities and were bidding unsuccessfully for several years without success. The choice-based lettings scheme was a source of frustration and anxiety for households and did not appear to be fit for purpose. In other words, despite bidding for several years many families had not even been in a position where they were able to view a property.
5. The lack of housing means that it is not unusual for a parent and child or indeed a whole family to share a bedroom resulting in a severe lack of privacy.

Section One - Findings online pupil Survey, Waves 1 and 2

In this section we outline the findings from the Online survey distributed in Wave 1 and Wave 2:

Wave 1 - Online Pupil Survey Key findings

- 23/66 (35%) of pupils completing the survey self-assessed their housing to be inadequate.
- 30/66 (46%) of pupils reported that they shared a bedroom, and most pupils shared a bedroom with one other person.
- 13/66 (20%) of pupils reported that there was something about their house that made it difficult to sleep.
- 14/66 (22%) reported that their housing had affected their emotional and physical wellbeing.
- A sizeable minority of pupils, 26/66 (39%) reported that their housing situation made it difficult to bring friends home.

- 52/66 (79%) reported that they had a shelf to store their books although 14/66 (21%) did not. Those who described their housing as inadequate were slightly more likely to indicate that they did not have a shelf to store their books compared to pupils who described their housing as adequate.
- 48/66 (73%) reported that they completed their homework on a desk or table. Just 4/66 (6%) pupils reported that they completed their homework on the floor or bed.
- 53/66 (82%) reported that they had access to outside space, although a small but sizeable minority, 12/66 (18%) did not.
- Pupils identified ways in which inadequate housing impacted on their educational experience. The most common impacts included reduced emotional and physical well-being that translated into increased levels of stress and anxiety, lack of sleep, an inability to concentrate and demotivation.
- Pupils identified ways in which their school could support pupils who lived in inadequate housing. This included extended opening hours, providing resources such as food, equipment, writing letters to support families to access housing, providing clubs and offering therapy.

Findings in detail

We were interested to understand how many pupils lived in inadequate housing. We provided pupils with a definition and asked whether they would define their housing as inadequate:

"The London Borough of Newham has some of the highest levels of housing need in England. This means many families live in inadequate housing. The term Inadequate housing relates to different kinds of housing problems. For example, you may be living in overcrowded housing, you may have damp or infestations. You may share a bathroom or kitchen with other families."

More than one-third 23/66 (35%) of pupils reported that they lived in inadequate housing.

Pupils were given the opportunity to provide additional comments. 18 students provided additional comments and we have included a selection below:

“There is mould everywhere and it is so damp and very dusty. In the bathroom, there is a gigantic hole in the wall and in the shower. The kitchen is not very good, we have cabinet and drawer planks broken off underneath. We had also a cockroach infestation when we first came back here in 2020.”

“I kept my bed in my living room and that is where I sleep with my parents and brother in a small room. On the wall there is mould from the bad weather. The living areas are unsafe because it is very jam-packed.”

“Our house is damp. Rodent and cockroach infestations. The whole house is falling apart. It has been like this for 3–4 years now and the landlord/agent does not care.”

Overcrowding

As we have seen in Chapter Two, overcrowding is a major challenge for residents living in Newham. Statutory definitions of overcrowding are set out in part 10 of the Housing Act 1985 where either the room standard (based on the number and sex of people who can sleep) in a room or the space standard (based on the number of people that can sleep in a room of a particular size). A household is statutorily overcrowded if two siblings of the opposite sex over the age of 10 share a bedroom or siblings share a bedroom with an adult couple.⁹⁷

We were not able to draw clear conclusions about the proportion of pupils at the school whose housing was statutorily overcrowded, however, we were able to understand more about how many

people were sharing their housing and how many bedrooms they had.

Most pupils reported living in either a 2 or 3-bedroom property.

- Two pupils reported living in a one-bedroom property that was shared with four and five people respectively.
- Twenty-six pupils reported living in a two-bedroom property. Five pupils shared this property with two people; a further five shared the property with three people; Eight pupils shared their property with four people and eight pupils shared the property with five people.
- Twenty-seven pupils reported living in a three-bedroom property. Eleven pupils shared this property with four people; Five pupils shared this property with five people; Five pupils shared this property with six people and one pupil shared this property with seven people.
- Ten pupils reported living in four-bedroom properties. One pupil shared this property with four people; six pupils shared this property with five people; two pupils shared this property with six people and one pupil shared this property with twelve people.
- One pupil reported living in a 6-bedroom property that was shared with five others.

Sharing a bedroom

We were interested to understand how many pupils shared bedrooms and how many people they shared a bedroom with. 30/66 (46%) reported sharing a bedroom. Two-thirds of those who shared a bedroom provided further details of how many people they shared a bedroom with. Fourteen pupils reported they shared a bedroom with 1 other; five with two others and three with three others.

Pupils were invited to provide further comments. Below we have included a selection that illustrate the main issues raised:

⁹⁷ House of Commons Library. (2018) Paper 1013 Overcrowding(England)

"I share a bedroom with five people (including three siblings) ...and it is the smallest room in the house. I sleep on a mattress that is on the floor. My older brother sleeps on the top of the only bunk bed in the room, while my two sisters share the lower bunk bed."

"I share a bedroom with my father and my mum. My sister shares the other bedroom. When my eldest sister comes back from university for the holidays my mother sleeps on the couch for a month and a half."

"I live in a small flat and share a room with my sister who is 9 years younger than me. My parents need to sleep in the living room and there is damp around the house."

Place to store books/complete homework

One of the challenges for children and young people living in inadequate housing is that there is often a lack of space to store books and complete homework. Most pupils, 52/66 (79%) pupils confirmed that they had a shelf to store their books but a small proportion 14/66 (21%) did not. Similarly, most pupils completed their homework on a desk or table 48/66 (73%). Just 4/66 (6%) pupils said they completed their homework on the floor or bed.

Impact on physical and emotional wellbeing

We have demonstrated in chapter three that there is an established link in the literature that living in inadequate housing impacts negatively on emotional and physical wellbeing. We were interested to understand pupils' perspectives on the impact of inadequate housing on their emotional and physical wellbeing. 14/66 (22%) reported that their housing had impacted on their emotional and physical wellbeing.

Pupils were invited to provide further comments. Below we have included a selection that illustrate the main issues raised:

"Getting ill sometimes due to dampness of house."

"I can't have a proper sleep and I worry and cry that my situation will never be better."

"Physically I have to fix a lot of things and mentally it's stressful to have to worry about this and school."

"I feel ashamed of my flat because it is small and has thin walls. I feel like I have no privacy."

Housing and Sleep

We were interested to understand whether there was anything about people's housing that made it difficult for them to sleep. 13/66 (20%) reported that there was something about their house that made it difficult to sleep and those who described their housing as inadequate were more likely to indicate that there was something about their house that made it difficult to sleep than those living in inadequate housing.

Socialising at home with friends

We were interested to understand whether pupils were able to bring friends home to socialise. 26/66 (39%) reported that there was something about their housing that made it difficult to bring friends home.

Pupils were invited to provide further comments. Below we have included a selection that illustrate the main issues raised:

"Just bad housing overall and too many people live with me so I wouldn't bring friends around."

"It is small and not enough space."

"Everything is broken and there's damp and mould in the house."

"Very jam packed and claustrophobic."

"They might find my flat disgusting and I do too. My parents are sick of it too but do not have enough money to afford another place to live. My mother never allows me to bring a friend over."

"The condition is honestly embarrassing. Our bathroom sink is almost falling off the wall. Our carpet is deteriorating. The wallpaper is peeling."

Access to outside Space and a place to relax

Outdoor space can offer a space for children and young people to relax outside of their home and is particularly important for pupils living in inadequate housing. Most pupils, 53/66 (82%), reported that they had access to outside space. Nevertheless, a small but sizeable minority, 12/66 (18%), did not.

Pupil perspectives on the impact of living in inadequate housing

Pupils were asked to identify ways in which inadequate housing impacted on educational experience. The most common impacts related to emotional and physical well-being that in turn were perceived to result in increased levels of stress and anxiety, lack of sleep, inability to concentrate, and demotivation. For example:

"Increased stress on pupils as they worry about their home and the state it may be in."

"Maybe they might feel cramped or stressed."

"Disturbed sleep leading to lower concentration levels."

"Being tired and not performing to your optimum level."

"Not enough sleep, late homework."

"Leads to underachievement and negative effects on mental health."

"Inadequate housing may cause some students to lose focus and even demotivate them from doing their work."

"It can cause high stress levels which makes it difficult for some to perform well."

"Less concentration in class. Unable to take in content. Less energetic."

"Homework could not be completed to the best of their ability as they are constantly being distracted."

"Inadequate housing may have an impact as damp or mould can cause sickness and bed bugs and cockroaches might appear in these houses due to inadequate housing which may make people really tired from fears of spiders or cockroaches coming onto beds which makes students fall asleep at school."

Others commented on the impact of lack of space on a pupil's ability to focus on their studies:

"Bad housing situations may make it harder to study especially if you live in a cramped house where you don't have your own space."

"The lack of home space means that they may not have access to desks and a quite area for themselves and they may also find it very hard to sleep if they are sharing rooms with other people such as siblings or cousins."

"It may cause some students to struggle with privacy, leaving them struggling to revise/study privately, which could damage performance in school."

One pupil summed up the situation:

“Because they don’t get to enjoy themselves to the best and in a sense feel uncomfortable in a place, they call home.”

Pupil perspectives on ways in which schools can support pupils living in inadequate housing

We were interested in understanding how pupils felt schools could support pupils living in inadequate housing. 25 pupils suggested ways in which their school could support pupils:

- Extended school opening hours (mentioned by 10)
- Provide resources such as food, equipment (mentioned by 8)
- Writing a letter in support of the family (mentioned by 3)
- Provide clubs (mentioned by 2)
- Provide therapy (mentioned by 2)

Wave 2 – Survey with Year 8 pupils

In October 2023 we distributed a second survey to St Bonaventure’s pupils. This survey was targeted at Year 8 pupils as they would not have completed the first survey but would be more established within the school compared to Year 7 pupils. We visited the Year 8 assembly and explained the survey’s purposes and how they could get support if they became upset by completing the survey. Pupils were required to complete the survey as part of their weekly homework. In this survey we included two additional questions on journey time to school, whether they had moved home. We modified the question on overcrowding to enable pupils to provide more information about who they shared a bedroom with:

- 125 of 193 Year 8 Pupils completed Survey 2.
- Although we had more returned questionnaires, there were several missing responses and much less qualitative information was provided.
- Those who provided more detailed responses in Survey 1 tended to be older

pupils and therefore it is suggested that future research should target older pupils or where a whole school approach is applied, more is done to ensure higher completion rates.

Key findings

- 17/125 (14%) self-assessed their housing to be inadequate compared to 23/66 (35%) in Survey 1. However, this should be read with caution as many pupils who described their housing as adequate were in some instances severely overcrowded and therefore their housing was inadequate.
- 31/125 (25%) shared a bedroom with someone of the opposite sex and therefore their housing met the statutory definition of overcrowding and 10/125 (8%) were sharing a bedroom with 2 siblings or more.
- 14/125 (11%) shared a bedroom with either a parent and parents and siblings.
- 20/125 (16%) reported that they had moved home because of their housing situation.
- 19/125 (15%) reported that there was something about their housing situation that made it difficult to sleep. This is lower than the findings from survey 1, 13/66 (20%), but confirms that sleep deprivation is a problem for a significant minority of pupils.
- 105/125 (85%) reported that they had a shelf to store their books, whilst 19/125 (15%) did not. This is slightly higher than survey 1 where 52/66 (79%) reported that they had a shelf to store their books and 14/66 (21%) did not. We can conclude that a small but significant minority of pupils do not have a shelf to store their books.
- 20/125 (16%) reported that there was something about their house that made it difficult to socialise with friends at home. This was significantly lower than survey 1 where 26/63 (41%) reported that there was something about their house that made it difficult to socialise at home.
- 10/125 (8%) reported that their housing situation impacted on their emotional or physical wellbeing. Again, this is lower

than survey 1 where more than a fifth, 14/66 (22%), reported that their housing had affected their emotional and physical wellbeing.

- Most pupils reported that they had access to outside space 112/125 (90%) whilst 10/125 (8%) did not. This was higher than survey 1 where 53/66 82% reported that they had access to outside space, and 12/66 (18%) did not.
- 105/125 (85%) of pupils reported that their journey to school was 30 minutes or less.

Findings in detail

Proportion of pupils who live in inadequate housing

We were interested to understand how many pupils lived in inadequate housing. We provided pupils with the same definition used in survey one and asked whether they would define their housing as inadequate:

“The London Borough of Newham has some of the highest levels of housing need in England. This means many families live in inadequate housing. The term Inadequate housing relates to different kinds of housing problems. For example, you may be living in overcrowded housing, you may have damp or infestations. You may share a bathroom or kitchen with other families.”

17/125 (14%) self-assessed their housing to be inadequate compared to 23/66 (35%) in survey 1. However, this should be read with caution as many pupils who described their housing as adequate were in some instances severely overcrowded and therefore their housing was inadequate.

Pupils were given the opportunity to provide additional comments. In this survey just 4 pupils provided additional comments to indicate their choices and all related to infestations and damp. For example:

“Lots of damp, mice and rats

everywhere and even my whole family got asthma because of the damp.”

“There is damp and infestation of mice.”

Overcrowding

A key housing challenge for Newham residents is overcrowding. Most pupils were living in either a 2 or 3-bedroom property.

- Five pupils reported they were living in a one-bedroom property, 2 pupils shared their property with 4 people, 2 pupils shared their property with 5 people and 1 pupil shared this property with 1 other person.
- Thirty-nine pupils reported that they were living in a two-bedroom property. 2 pupils shared their property with 2 people; 10 pupils shared their property with 3 people; 20 pupils shared their property with 4 people; 6 pupils shared their property with 5 people and 1 pupil shared their property with 6 people.
- Twenty-nine pupils reported that they lived in a three-bedroom property. 3 pupils shared their property with 3 people; 13 pupils shared their property with 4 people; 4 pupils shared their property with 5 people; 8 pupils shared their property with 6 people and 1 pupil shared their property with 7 others.
- Twenty-eight pupils reported that they lived in a four-bedroom property; 3 pupils shared their property with three people; 1 pupil shared their property with four people.
- Six pupils reported that they lived in a five-bedroom property; 1 pupil shared their property with 3 others; 3 pupils shared their property with 7 others; 1 pupil shared their property with 8 others and 1 pupil shared their property with 10 others.

Sharing a bedroom

We were interested to understand how many pupils shared bedrooms and where it was shared, how many people they shared it with. Here we highlight some key issues:

- 50/125 (44%) reported that they had their own bedroom.
- 31/125 (25%) reported that they shared a bedroom with someone of the opposite sex and 10/125 (8%) were sharing a bedroom with 2 siblings or more.
- 9/125 (7%) of pupils reported sharing a bedroom with parents and siblings and a further 5/125 (4%) reported sharing a bedroom with a parent or parents.
- Analysis of data suggests that space is not distributed equally. For example, in some instances pupils were living in a two-bedroom flat with five others and reported they had their own bedroom.
- Based on an analysis of those sharing a bedroom with either a sibling of the opposite sex or parents we can conclude that at least 41/125 (33%) were statutorily overcrowded.

Moving Home

- 20/125 (16%) reported that they had moved home.

Of these, 12 pupils provided additional information to explain why they moved. Analysis of the qualitative comments indicated that five pupils had moved because their landlord wanted to end their tenancy. For example:

“Forced to move because the landlord wanted it back.”

“We had to move because the landlord wanted to live back in their house, so we found somewhere else to live. The housing situation was worse before”.

Five pupils reported that they had moved to improve their housing situation. For example:

“A bit of improvement a little bit more space”

“I used to live in 1 bedroom flat for all 4 of us. The kitchen was tiny with only

space for 2 people at a time.”

“We got our house renovated, extended and newly done up even before it was adequate, just more comfortable now.”

Another pupil had moved to Newham because housing was cheaper, and another had moved to be closer to school.

A shelf to store books

105/125 (85%) reported that they had a shelf to store their books, whilst 19/125 (15%) did not. This is slightly higher than survey 1 where 52/66 (79%) reported that they had a shelf to store their books and 14/66 (21%) did not. We can conclude that a small but significant minority of pupils do not have a shelf to store their books.

Impact of housing situation on sleep

20/125 (16%) reported that there was something about their house that made it difficult to socialise with friends at home. This was significantly lower than survey 1 where 26/63 (41%) reported that there was something about their house that made it difficult to socialise at home but indicates that this is a problem for a small but significant minority.

Thirteen pupils provided additional comments. Analysis of these comments indicates that noise from siblings was a key challenge (mentioned by 4), noise from outside e.g., cars (mentioned by 3), noise from neighbours and other tenants (mentioned by 3) and noise from infestations (mentioned by 2). For example:

“Lots of cars pass by my flat and when they do, the whole building shakes a lot.”

“Bad smells sometimes during the night from cockroaches eating rubbish.”

“There is noise outside my house and scratching of mice on the floor.”

“Neighbours and the cramped space make me uncomfortable.”

"I share a bed with my older brother who uses his phone at night."

"We got our house renovated, extended and newly done up even before it was adequate, just more comfortable now."

Socialising with friends at home

20/125 (16%) reported that there was something about their house that made it difficult to socialise with friends at home. This was significantly lower than survey 1 where 26/63 (41%) reported that there was something about their house that made it difficult to socialise at home.

14 pupils provided additional comments that indicated that the quality of their home and lack of space were key reasons why they did not feel able to bring friends home. For example:

"The mould and pests which I am quite insecure about and how small the house is."

Housing and emotional and physical well-being

10/125 (8%) of pupils reported that their housing situation impacted on their emotional or physical wellbeing. Again, this is lower than survey 1 where more than a fifth, 14/66 (22%), reported that their housing had affected their emotional and physical wellbeing.

Very few pupils provided additional comments. Those that did referred to:

"I get a bit sad that my house is not like others".

"I feel angry and hungry but not at the same time."

"Moved house many times."

"Sometimes it is hard to sleep because of the rodents."

Access to outdoor space

Most pupils reported that they had access to outside space 112/125 (90%) whilst 10/125 (8%) did not. This was higher than survey 1 where 53/66 82% reported that they had access to outside space, and 12/66 (18%) did not.

Journey to school

One of the concerns about the lack of suitable housing is that children and young people are forced to make long journeys to school. We asked pupils how long it took them to travel to school (table 5 below).

We can see from the table that 106/125 (85%) pupils' journey to school was 30 minutes or less and 3/125 (2%) of pupils had a journey of 1 hour or more.

How does inadequate housing impact on educational experience?

We were interested to understand pupils' perspectives on ways in which inadequate housing might impact on educational experience/ educational performance. 90 pupils responded to this question. Pupils identified a number of impacts and the most frequently mentioned related to:

- Lack of sleep resulting in fatigue
- The impact of lack of sleep on behaviour
- The impact of low mood on behaviour including being angry, sad, or withdrawn
- Practical impacts due to lack of space and difficulties in meeting deadlines because of their housing.

Table 5: Journey times to school (Rounded up to highest whole number)

Less than 15 minutes	15 – 30 minutes	30 – 60 minutes	More than one hour
36% (45)	49% (61)	13% (16)	2% (3)

We have included a selection of additional comments below:

“It might make students angry and annoyed to other students.”

“It might make them feel sad.”

“Inadequate housing may impact a child’s learning experience as there is no space for them to do homework and they may get detentions because of this. Students may not be able to sleep or space to relax because of inadequate housing and small spaces. If the child doesn’t get enough sleep, this may cause them to sleep in class and miss out on important things that they should learn and if there is an assessment on it, they won’t know what the answer would be as they were sleeping in class, and they won’t get energy to study in school.”

“When I used to share with my sisters, we would often keep each other up or be woken up early. Having my own room now, I have no distractions and can sleep in the dark which I prefer.”

“The dampness may affect people with asthma and pests. Noise all around may also reduce the amount of sleep people may get”.

“Inadequate housing could make a school student depressed or angry or sad. It could also make them get less sleep so they might sleep in class.”

“I think that inadequate housing can impact an educational experience/ educational performance at school because sometimes if you can’t sleep at home, you might sleep in class and can’t pay attention in class and not learn as much and also if you can’t do homework, you receive sanctions etc so yes, it affects

your learning.”

How can schools support pupils?

85 pupils provided suggestions for ways in which schools could support pupils. The most frequently cited proposals (mentioned by at least 6 pupils) included:

- Provide homework/after school clubs.
- Offer a breakfast club/morning club.
- Provide space within schools for pupils to complete their homework.
- Provide additional learning resources e.g., additional tutoring, online support, Chromebooks.
- Offer advice and support and listening to pupil’s concerns, including those who may be late due to long journeys and adopting a more sympathetic approach.

Workshop with Year 7 students aimed at designing a charter for adequate housing - Voices from a Secondary school in Newham.

This is an action research project. One of the key intentions of the project was to involve children and young people in activities and discussion that explored the relationship between inadequate housing and children’s rights. Therefore, the starting point for this workshop was to familiarise or refamiliarise pupils with their rights:

- Article 3 (best interests of the child) The best interests of the child must be a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children.
- Article 12 (respect for the views of the child) Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. This right always applies, for example during immigration proceedings, housing decisions or the child’s day-to-day home life.
- Article 16 (right to privacy) Every child has the right to privacy. The law should protect the child’s private, family and home life, including protecting children

from unlawful attacks that harm their reputation.

- Article 27 (adequate standard of living) Every child has the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and social needs and support their development. Governments must help families who cannot afford to provide this.
- Article 31 (leisure, play and culture) Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.⁹⁸

What rights do we have in relation to housing?

- Article 11 of The UN International Covenant on Economic, Human and Social Rights sets out the right to adequate housing that sets out rights in relation to security of tenure; habitability; affordability; accessibility; location; availability of services.⁹⁹

The workshop focused on two key issues:

1. What is adequate housing
2. Design a charter setting out basic rights in housing.

What is inadequate housing?

- The intention of the first part of the workshop was to understand pupil perspectives on inadequate housing. It became very clear during the workshop that many pupils had first-hand experience of the housing crisis/housing inadequacy.
- Many referred to frequent moves, insecurity of tenure (evictions), overcrowding, housing disrepair (mould), lack of privacy and space and conflicts arising from having to share limited space.
- Pupils identified a paradox i.e. Many young people described feeling trapped in overcrowded and very overcrowded

housing but were scared to leave the house because of fear of crime/danger.

- Pupils identified inequalities in the distribution of available space with older children securing access and preferential rights whilst restricting the access of younger siblings and therefore effectively limiting their rights.
- The challenge of securing affordable housing close to school was identified as a key concern with many pupils having to make long journeys to school with financial and time costs.

Charter for adequate housing

In the second part of the session pupils worked in groups to develop a charter for adequate housing. There were four clear themes that emerged from their discussions:

- Maximum of two children of the same sex sharing a bedroom.
- Location – priority for pupils to live close to school.
- Good state of physical repair – no mould.
- Ensuring homes and neighbourhoods are safe.

⁹⁸ [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child - UNICEF UK](#) -

⁹⁹ [The human right to adequate housing | OHCHR](#)

Section Two: Teachers' perspectives on inadequate housing

Teachers are increasingly playing a role in offering pastoral support to pupils living in inadequate housing. Therefore, we were interested to understand the perspectives of teachers on the impact of inadequate housing on their pupils. We designed an online survey that was distributed to all teachers. The survey included a question asking whether they would consider being involved in an online focus group, however, no one volunteered to participate further. The survey included two sets of questions, one focusing on teachers' perspectives of inadequate housing on educational experience and another focusing on teacher perspectives on the impact of inadequate housing on physical and emotional well-being. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with the head of Pastoral care and a social work trainee. The school employs 89 teachers, and the survey was completed by 13 teachers, in other words we had a response rate of 15%. Therefore, it is not possible to generalise from this survey. Nevertheless, we have decided to include this survey as it does offer some insights into teacher perspectives, partly through the teachers' qualitative comments but also because there was a very high consistency of agreement amongst all the responses regarding the negative impact of inadequate housing on educational experiences across a range of measures. The findings also suggest important key questions and themes for follow-up research with teachers in Newham and more widely.

Key Findings – online survey

Teacher perspectives on impact of inadequate housing on educational experience

- 13/13 (100%) of teachers completing the survey reported that living in inadequate housing impacted on pupil's educational engagement.
- 12/13 (92%) reported that living in inadequate housing resulted in pupils being tired in class.
- 11/13 (84%) reported that living in

inadequate housing resulted in non-submission of homework.

- 10/13 (77%) reported that living in inadequate housing impacted on absence, attention span, educational achievement, and the ability of parents to support their children with their learning.
- 9/13 (69%) reported that living in inadequate housing resulted in pupils arriving late for school and experiencing difficulties in maintaining uniform protocols.

Teacher perspectives on the impact of inadequate housing on emotional and physical wellbeing

- 13/13 (100%) of teachers reported that pupils living in inadequate housing experienced low mood.
- 12/13 (92%) reported that pupils living in inadequate housing were more likely to experience anxiety.
- 11/13 (84%) reported that pupils living in inadequate housing were more likely to experience physical health problems.
- 9/13 (69%) reported that pupils living in inadequate housing were more likely to be socially isolated and 6/13 (46%) reported that it would impact on their capacity to make friends.

Teachers' perceptions on the impact of inadequate housing on educational experience

We were interested to understand the perceptions of teachers on the potential impacts on inadequate housing on educational experience. Teachers were provided with a list of impacts, reflecting issues identified in the literature (see chapter three) and asked which of these they encountered in their daily practice as a teacher that particularly affected children living in inadequate housing. We can see from the table below that teachers identified a range of impacts of inadequate housing on educational experience ranging from educational engagement, absence, tiredness/falling asleep in class; non-submission of homework through to difficulty in maintaining uniform protocols.

Table Six: Impact of inadequate housing on educational experience

	Particularly affects children living in inadequate housing Yes	Particularly affects children living in inadequate housing No	Particularly affects children living in inadequate housing No response
Educational Engagement	13/13 (100%)	0	0
Tiredness/falling asleep in class	12/13 (93%)	1/13 (8%)	0
Non-Submission of homework	11/13 (84%)	1/13(8%)	1/13 (8%)
Absence	10/13(77%)	2/13(15%)	1/13 (8%)
Poor attention span	10/13 (77%)	0	3/13 (24%)
Impact on educational achievement	10/13 (77%)	1/13(6%)	2/13 (16%)
Impact on ability of families to support children with their education	10/13 (77%)	0	3/13 (24%)
Arriving Late for School	9/13 (69%)	2/13 (16%)	2/13 (16%)
Difficulty in maintaining uniform protocols	9/13 (69%)	1/13 (8%)	3/13 (24%)

Teachers were provided with an opportunity to provide additional comments on the impact of inadequate housing on educational experience. Teachers identified a range of impacts as follows:

“I have taught students who have had to share a single room with parents and have no realistic options for alternative housing due to the lack of availability and cost. The impact of this on the students is noticeable. The student cannot study properly, and it causes stress and worry.”

“Students want to attend school to avoid being at home but without the school’s support cannot always complete work at home successfully or have the equipment/ uniform that they need.”

“Not having a stable home, impacts all aspects of their life and education.”

Teacher perspectives on Inadequate housing on physical and the emotional wellbeing pupils

The second part of the survey explored the perceptions of teachers on the potential impacts of inadequate housing on the physical and emotional well-being of pupils. Teachers were provided with a list of impacts, reflecting issues identified in the literature (see chapter three) and asked which of these they encountered in their daily practice as a teacher that particularly affected children living in inadequate housing. We can see from the table below that teachers identified a range of impacts including low mood, anxiety, along with impacts on physical health.

Table Seven: Impact of inadequate housing on the emotional and physical wellbeing of pupils

	Particularly affects children living in inadequate housing Yes	Particularly affects children living in inadequate housing No	Particularly affects children living in inadequate housing No response
Low Mood	13/13 (100%)	0	0
Anxiety	12/13 (92%)	1/13 (8%)	0
Physical health/ respiratory problems	11/13 (84%)	1/13 (8%)	1/13 (8%)
Socially isolated	9/13 (69%)	4/13 (31%)	0
Impact on the capacity of pupils to make friends	6/13 (46%)	6/13 (46%)	1/13 (8%)

Teachers were provided with an opportunity to provide additional comments on the impact of inadequate housing on emotional and physical wellbeing. Teachers identified a range of impacts:

“When housing is inadequate, it causes tension at home which affects how students feel about themselves.”

“I think that students can be embarrassed about their home and not want to bring people around to socialise.”

“Children that are in temporary accommodation find it hard to settle.”

One teacher highlighted the role that the school plays a role to counter isolation:

“Students are always integrated into our community, so friends/isolation is not an issue.”

The impact of the pandemic on pupil learning

The pandemic highlighted widespread inequalities. We were interested to understand the perception of teachers on the kinds of challenges that confronted their pupils during the pandemic. Analysis of qualitative comments indicated that

the most dominant theme related to the digital divide followed by inadequate housing and social isolation.

Digital divide

“Access to online work Ability/confidence to engage fully in online lessons.”

“Lack of computer equipment and internet to do any work that was provided.”

“Poor Internet connectivity.”

“Lack of internet access was a huge thing.”

Inadequate housing

“Not wanting to turn the screen on in their house/flat.”

“Lack of a quiet space to study and lack of resources.” (Mentioned by 3)

Social isolation

“Becoming socially isolated – school is their main socialising experience.”

“Not wanting to turn the screen on in their house/flat.”

New housing being built in Newham is not improving the housing situation of pupils.

Newham has been at the forefront of many new building projects, including new housing built on the Olympic Park. We asked teachers whether they felt that new housing being built in Newham was improving the housing situation of pupils at their school.

9/13 (69%) of teachers reported that they did not think that this new housing was benefiting their pupils and 4/13 (31%) were unsure. Analysis of qualitative comments indicated that teachers felt that the new housing was not aimed at pupils from their school but rather wealthier populations:

“The new homes are for wealthy young professionals and not our families.”

“Housing is far too expensive for local residents.”

“I don’t know if the new housing is accessible for the families of our students or if the new housing is for an alternative audience rather than families within the borough.”

“Housing is expensive for a borough that is one of the most deprived in London. Most are private; there is very little new social housing stock becoming available.”

“Students are still living in cramped and inadequate conditions. Who is being given access to the new housing? I see that a lot is for the private sector.”

“I would assume that a lot of the families are not living in these conditions out of

choice but rather that they cannot afford to move and a new-build in this market is out of their price bracket and because they are on minimum wage can’t get a mortgage to get one.”

Strategies to support pupils living in inadequate housing

We were interested to understand the teachers’ perceptions of how schools could support pupils living in inadequate housing. Teachers provided qualitative comments on ways in which schools could support pupils. There were two main themes that emerged.

1. Provision of pastoral and practical support

“Practically, being aware helps. It means that we do not place any further undue stress on the students or their family. We can provide time and space for quiet study after school.”

“Offer pastoral support.”

“Emotional support – it is the local authority’s job to make sure they have a suitable place to live.”

“We provide online equipment access to online facilities, homework club library/book access breakfast sessions.”

“Provide space and support for students to complete homework after school.”

“Schools could provide chrome books for students but also lobby on behalf of these students to try and influence the government’s decision to provide adequate housing.”

2. Being aware of the pupil’s situation/housing need:

“Practically, being aware helps. It means that we do not place any further undue stress on the students or their family.”

We can provide time and space for quiet study after school.”

Barriers to offering pastoral care

Both pupils and teachers identified a potential role for teachers to in offering pastoral support. However, the Head of Pastoral Care identified a particular challenge/barrier in that whilst primary schools tended to be familiar with the individual circumstances of pupils this personalised knowledge tended to get lost as pupils transition to secondary school. Staff are much less likely to be aware of the individual circumstances and particular challenges at home.

Case Study: Social work as an enabler of support

In 2022, the school appointed their first social work trainee who was able to offer much pastoral support to pupils and identified housing as a key problem for pupils.

Pupil X had been sharing a bedroom with his mother for more than ten years and had been bidding through the Choice Based Lettings system without success. Pupil X had additional needs, was withdrawn and depressed and had poor attendance and was failing to meet attainment targets. The Social work trainee was able to work with a range of agencies and advocate for the family. The family was rehoused to suitable housing. Once the pupil was rehoused, the social work trainee identified a transformation in mood and engagement with both the pupil's studies and their peers.

This case study highlights the potential role social workers could play in supporting pupils and their families with housing challenges.

Section Three: Parents perspective on inadequate housing

In this final section we analyse parent perspectives on the impact of inadequate housing on their children's educational experience. We undertook semi-structured interviews with five families at St

Bonaventure's School. These interviews aimed to provide a more in-depth understanding of the challenges confronting pupils and their families because of living in inadequate housing. The school assisted us in recruiting parents. An email was sent to all parents in February 2022. The email explained the purposes of the research and our intention to interview parents who self-identified as living in temporary accommodation and/or inadequate housing about the impact of their housing situation on the educational experience of their children. Ten families contacted us and indicated that they would like to participate in the research. They were all provided with information about the project. Five families were eventually interviewed, and each provided informed consent. All interviews took place at the homes of the interviewees.

An interview schedule was developed that explored several themes including housing histories/ housing problems, educational aspirations, and the impact of their housing situations on their children's educational experience. In four of five cases, parents were the key informants, however, in one household a 16-year-old pupil participated in the discussion. Some key facts have been changed to ensure anonymity. Each interview has been written up as an individual case study.

Key Findings

- Inadequate housing was causing severe stress for all family members.
- The lack of appropriate housing impacted on children and young people's educational engagement and their ability to socialise and relax at home either alone or with friends.
- Out of borough placements resulted in some very particular challenges for children and young people.
- Parents had high aspirations for their children and placed significant value on education but were concerned that their housing situation was impacting on their progress and would therefore limit their potential.
- Families conveyed a general sense of

abandonment both in terms of support from the council to access suitable housing through the choice based lettings system and from landlords in terms of maintenance.

- All households interviewed were in work, but their incomes were insufficient to secure alternative/more suitable housing.
- Overcrowding was a problem for four of the five households. In three cases all members, i.e., parents and children were sharing one bedroom.

Case Study: Family One

Family One had lived for several years in Stratford in the London Borough of Newham and had moved several times. In 2014 after just a few months of living in a private rented sector (PRS) property, the landlord asked them to vacate their property. The London Borough of Newham rehoused them into a two-bedroom PRS property in a neighbouring borough on a temporary basis. Ten years later the family are still living in this property. The property is poorly designed and poorly maintained. The shower room had mould, rooms were small and there was a draught coming from an attic above that made it difficult to keep warm in the winter. They had continually reported problems to the landlord with minimal intervention and had attempted to resolve problems themselves. The household had been bidding each week for several years through the choice-based lettings system but had been unsuccessful in securing a suitable property. They stated that they felt a sense of abandonment from the local authority.

When they first moved to the property the household comprised two parents and two children (a 12-year-old girl and an eight-year-old boy). The oldest child has since left home in part because of the untenable housing situation, leaving behind her brother:

“I heard the word temporary all over the place and then, next thing you know it I’m 16 and I’m still here.”

All members of the household participated in the interview including the pupil who we have referred to below as a young person. This case study highlights some of the challenges for children placed out of borough:

“It is quite a commute now; I must leave at 7 o’clock. If I miss one tiny thing and I’m late it messes up the whole journey. I am in year 11 now and they expect us to do booster sessions and so we must arrive even earlier. I cannot wake up earlier than I do because I will not get enough

sleep and I worry this would affect my attainment at school.” (young person) pupil

It also highlights the challenges when two children aged over 10 share a bedroom.

“When my sister used to live here it was quite hectic because it was one male, one female – me and sister had to share the room because she is much older than me which was a problem. It was the little things. I had to wait for her to get done. I hardly had any space to be myself because I like being by myself every now and then, its calming for me, sometimes and the last thing I need to hear is a knock on the door saying I need to use the room. Even now I don’t have an area to study in, I have to study here (kitchen) and sometimes it does raise a problem.” (young person)

The lack of space was clearly having a detrimental impact on the emotional and physical wellbeing of family members:

“It is hard to get some peace and quiet and I revise quite a lot when I have a chance and the times when I want to unwind and not do anything it is hard because of all the noise. It is rarely quiet here because if it’s not my mum and my dad making the noise, it’s the TV, if it is not them it is the people outside yelling and screaming. It affected me to the point that I can’t really sleep.”

“There is no space, my room is quite small, I cannot really have a friend over. There is some space in the living room, but I would rather have my own space it is just awkward.” (young person)

Being placed out of borough was creating barriers to socialising with friends:

“Most of my friends live close to school, so I rarely meet with my friends. My

friends ask me to come over, I say no despite how much I really want social interaction with my friends.”

It also highlights the need for a more flexible support for pupils in this position:

“Teachers need to be aware; I would suggest being more lenient on the sanctions because, on top of everything they give me a 1-hour detention for being late that really doesn’t help. The last thing I need is one hour after school for the rest of the week because of my attendance and that’s pretty much wasted time that I usually spend revising after school.” (young person)

The mother and father summed up the sense of abandonment:

“We moved here ten years ago, and no one has come to see how we are getting on. We feel abandoned and want to thank you for talking to us.”

Case Study: Family Two

Family Two lived in a two-bedroom property in the Private Rented Sector in the London Borough of Newham. The household comprises a parent and their 12-year-old son and 16-year-old daughter. The property has two bedrooms, but they have been advised not to use the second bedroom for the past two years as there is a severe mould problem that has previously affected their physical health. The landlord has indicated that they are willing to renovate the property, but they would have to vacate the property during the renovation works, but the tenant was unable to find an alternative property in the area. The desire to stay in the area was partly informed by the fact that their son is settled and making good progress at school.

“I am working full time, the universal credit supports me, the estate agents have said no your income is too low, so they cannot help me (find private rented sector accommodation) because in this area, a three-bedroom is expensive.”
(parent)

The key problem for this family is the poor state of the repair of the property and overcrowding. This has resulted in frustration for both children as there is a lack of privacy and a need to find space to study:

“He says I’m trying to get dressed, or to do my homework. So, it’s very bad. Sometimes I get stressed because I need to go to bed, but my daughter says nobody can come in because I’m learning so I sit down and wait. Sometimes the boy will say no I’m coming in and then there will sometimes be fighting. My daughter starts sixth form soon and really needs her own room. It is very sad”.

Both children are making good progress at school despite their situation although it was felt that this was limiting their academic and career choices:

“My daughter finishes secondary school this year and she tells me mummy I’m doing a job to help you because your situation is very hard, especially the property. I want her to continue her studies.”

They have been bidding through the choice based letting scheme each week for two years without success as they have not even been shortlisted to view a property.

Case Study: Family Three

Family three live in a two-bedroom council property. The household comprises one parent and two children, a boy aged 14 and a girl aged 16. They had been rehoused from a similar two-bedroom property in 2012. They had been advised in 2016 that they had been categorised as being in priority need (because two children of the opposite sex were sharing a bedroom) but have been bidding without success for a three-bedroom property since that time.

The flat is well maintained although there was a problem with the bathroom that is still not fully resolved. They are considering partitioning the small lounge to provide a third bedroom:

“They all say that when children are, I think it is ten or eleven, the boy and the girl are supposed to separate. They are still living in the same bedroom. They are now 14 and 16. I started applying for a three-bedroom in 2016. That is when I was short-listed, and they even promised that I was on the urgent list – the priority list since 2016. I bid weekly but 600-plus households are bidding for the same property. I have been doing that every Saturday at midnight and I have never had a response or even viewing in that time...If I do not bid, they will take me off the list.”

The key challenge for this family was lack of space/privacy:

“My daughter is always complaining. You know at that age she needs her privacy. You know, when she goes to bed sometimes the other is asleep, and she can’t change when he is there. This one has to come in here. It makes them want to go out, my daughter spends most of her time with her cousin because she complains ‘I can’t manage with this boy in this room’...it has got worse as she gets older”.

Both were making good progress but there is a sense that they could do better:

“They are doing well despite all those problems but, like I said, they could be doing much better because the children have also been resilient because we have been through so much together – they try to cope, that is the thing I can say, but it’s not easy.”

Case Study: Family Four

Family four had a particularly traumatic housing history. The household comprises one adult and four children aged between 4 and 12. At the time of this interview they were living in shared accommodation in the private rented sector where they had been living for the past two years. Before this, they were rehoused out of the borough (more than 120 miles away by a different London Borough). This move had a negative impact on the household as it impacted their social/family support networks and meant the children had to change school and her mother (the children's grandmother) was not able to help with the children.

The family encountered substantial problems both with the property they were rehoused to and the property they were living in now. When rehoused out of the borough the roof fell in, injuring one of the children. They returned to London and the council offered to rehouse them, but again in an out-of-borough placement a similar distance to the last placement.

They refused the offer, and the council dispensed their responsibilities to them, in other words they were classified as intentionally homeless. The family were then rehoused into shared accommodation. They had two rooms and a shared kitchen and bathroom. The property has a damp problem and has been painted twice to address this. They are very severely overcrowded and unable to bring friends home to socialise. There is an outdoor space/garden, but their access is limited because they are told by others in the shared property that they are not allowed to make noise.

The housing situation had clearly impacted on their physical and emotional well-being, social networks, and educational engagement. Two of the children had asthma and used inhalers, one child was emotionally withdrawn, and the mother experienced chronic insomnia and depression. Whilst living out of the borough they experienced difficulties attending school as it was a long

journey requiring them to take a taxi there and back. St Bonaventure's was identified as a source of stability:

"It has affected them very badly. And he said if he moves, he will refuse to go to school. He loves St Bons and is settled there...they all love going to school."
(mother)

"It may have an effect on my younger sibling's social interaction with their friends because they can become very sad if they change schools." (Oldest son)

Case Study: Family five

Family Five comprised a parent and a 16-year-old son who have lived in the same one-bedroom property since 2001. The main problem for this household was that parent and son had been sharing a bedroom for 16 years, resulting in a lack of privacy and a lack of space:

"I understood that I could have him in the same space as me until he was eight, that's what I understood... I have been bidding every week for four years for a two-bedroom property since my son was 12. I have never even viewed a property. It feels like there is nobody there. You're literally just a binary code, you put your information and that is it. They say try for a mutual exchange, sign up for this, sign up for that. The worst part of it is I tried, I applied to buy a two-bedroom shared ownership property but my salary is below the threshold so I can't even buy a two-bedroom, shared ownership."

A key challenge for this household was lack of privacy and its impact on emotional wellbeing:

"I have no privacy. He has no privacy. This is where he does all the gaming, everything, because there's no space, so he's on the games and I am here watching TV, there's no privacy. I suffer from anxiety and depression, there is no space to sob other than the shower, that's it. It is the only time unless he is at school and I'm at home. He's not able to express himself I think, as a teenage boy should. He can't bring his friends round because we're already on top of one another so, it is not comfortable."

Her son was a keen student whose aspiration was to study at the University of Cambridge. However, studying at home is challenging:

"Well, with him and his studies, he needs

a quiet place where he can do his work uninterrupted, undisturbed and he does not have that. When he was younger it was a smaller bed and it had enough space to fit a small desk, he doesn't have that anymore. He is combating coming home. his grades have gone down, and it is a lot to do with not having that independent space. He doesn't get a break from that. It's mentally draining for him, he goes to school, he's interacting, he's doing that and then he's coming home and he doesn't get any downtime, doesn't get to go into his room and just do nothing."

The lack of space/privacy had impacted on his social relationships:

"Previously he had more of a social life than I did, it was fantastic, but he has not brought a friend home since he was in primary school. I don't know anything about his friends now, it feels like he is being secretive, but really, he is trying to have some privacy and I get that. It doesn't make it easy; it causes a lot of friction."

The school had been supportive:

"I am so grateful to all the teachers that he has had along the way who have been supportive of his progress and even when he starts slipping, they set up interventions and you can't go wrong with that. But then, it's the imparting of that knowledge of support to him because he may not see what is on offer as an offer, it may be seen as an intrusion, an addition, something else he has to think about. The school-home partnership is key for me."

An online Survey with Parents – Second wave

In October 2023 we distributed a survey to the parents of year 8 pupils. Just 24 parents responded and therefore, we have excluded any quantitative findings and have concentrated our analysis on qualitative comments.

Six parents provided an insight into their housing problems, that illustrated a range of problems ranging from disrepair, infestations, overcrowding and insecurity:

“We live in a house infested with mice, there is damp and mould in all the rooms. Peeling walls and ceilings, leaking roof, paints peeling off the wall. Constantly blocked toilet that smells like sewage.”

“My son has never owned his own room that’s why he has to share a bed with me his mother.”

“I do not have my own kitchen or bathroom and the rooms are not adequate.”

“We have damp and mould, and we genuinely cannot afford to fix it.”

“Various areas in the house have damp or mould.”

Six parents provided additional comments to illustrate ways in which their housing situation impacted on their children’s emotional and physical wellbeing:

“He’s unhappy to come home because of the issues, smell, mould, damp, and mice infestation. He hates going into the shower because of the mould and smell that comes out of the toilet. Imagine going to the kitchen and you see mice running around in the house, that scares him.”

“When he has friends over after school, sometimes they ask about seeing his bedroom. He changes the subject as he has never been able to have a friend staying over at night, he always asks me if he will ever have his own room.”

“Unwell, Congested, Social anxiety.”

“Lack of spaces to study because we are over-crowded, no space for playing, lots of mice and rats. This is not a safe place for children to live in.”

“My kids are stressed and afraid due to the area we live in. We have a lot of antisocial behaviour going on.”

Finally, parents were asked to think about how schools could support pupils living in inadequate housing. 10 parents provided additional comments, and these related broadly to the following three areas:

1. The potential for schools to support parents by writing letters to relevant authorities.
2. Offering extended hours both before and after school to enable pupils to complete their homework.
3. Offering pastoral support and understanding the particular challenges for children and young pupils living in inadequate housing.

Conclusions

1. This chapter provides a detailed insight into the housing situation of pupils at one secondary school in Newham.
2. The housing crisis is resulting in significant stress and impacting on the educational experience of a small but significant number of children and young people.
3. The lack of housing means that it is not unusual for a parent and child or indeed a whole family to share a bedroom resulting

in a severe lack of privacy.

4. Pupils living in inadequate housing are less likely to be able to bring friends home to socialise and more likely to identify specific impacts on their emotional and physical wellbeing because of lack of privacy/space.
5. Out of borough placements resulted in some very particular challenges for children and young people.
6. Inadequate housing was causing severe stress for all family members.
7. Families in housing need felt abandoned by statutory authorities and were bidding unsuccessfully for several years without success. The choice-based lettings scheme was a source of frustration and anxiety for households and did not appear to be fit for purpose.
8. Parents had high aspirations for their children and placed significant value on education but were concerned that their housing situation was impacting on their progress and would therefore limit their potential.
9. The UK is a signatory to the UNCRC. The UNCRC includes a range of rights and those most pertinent to this issue are Article 27 (adequate standard of living) Every child has the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and social needs and support their development and Article 31 (leisure, play and culture) aimed at ensuring every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities. Based on the evidence we have gathered, it is clear that inadequate housing is impacting on children's rights.
10. Policy makers should work with Children and Young People to develop a charter

of basic minimums rights aimed at addressing the impacts of inadequate housing on educational experience.

Chapter Six: Perspectives of recent migrants on the impact of inadequate housing on Educational Experience

In this chapter we explore the perspectives of recent migrants on the impact of inadequate housing on educational experience. TELCO works with several community organisations in the London Borough of Newham. One of these organisations is Shpresa that offers support to Albanian people in the UK. Shpresa works closely with a range of service users including families with school-aged children and they agreed to work with us on this action research project as their service users are particularly affected by inadequate housing. We begin by outlining the methodology applied and then we go on to analyse the findings.

Methodology

We worked closely with the Coordinator of Shpresa and service users to devise an appropriate methodology that would enable us to understand the challenges confronting their service-users. We attended a weekly drop-in session held at a local library early on where we spoke informally with service users about their preferred approach to the research. We discussed the possibility of using focus groups, but the service users advised us that they would not want to share their stories/experiences in a group setting and would be more comfortable doing this on a one-to-one basis in a semi-structured interview. We therefore decided to hold face-to-face semi-structured interviews. We devised an interview topic guide that covered housing histories/challenges; the impact of their housing on emotional and physical well-being, the impact of their housing situation on their children's educational experience; the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their children's educational experience and ways in which schools might support them. We worked with the coordinator to recruit parents with school-aged children who would be willing to be interviewed and whose circumstances were reflective of their service users generally. Each interviewee provided informed consent.

We interviewed seven families, including three

asylum seeking families and four families who had leave to remain. We also interviewed the Co-ordinator of the project. The interviews were undertaken between March and May 2022 at Shpresa's offices in Canning Town. A community worker who worked at Shpresa sat in on some of these interviews and translated where necessary. Some details about interviewees have been changed to ensure anonymity.

The interviews revealed a pattern of housing misery endured over several years. We have analysed the interviews thematically under the following headings; housing histories; lack of space/privacy; impact on we then move on to lack of space/privacy, before moving onto.

Housing Histories

Family One was a family of four (mother, father and two children of primary school age) who had leave to remain. They have been living in a one-bedroom council flat for the past seven years. They had been bidding each week under the choice based letting system without success.

Family Two was a family of five (Mother, Father, and three children ranging in age from 5 to 14) who had leave to remain. They had been living in a one-bedroom property in the private rented sector for 14 years. Neither their kitchen nor the bathroom has a window, and the property has a problem with mould and damp. They moved into this flat when their youngest child was 3 months. She is now 14. In other words, her daughter has spent her whole life living in overcrowded conditions/inadequate housing. They have been bidding for two years for a council property through the choice-based lettings system:

“There is a long waiting list and I need a three-bedroom property, when I bid, I am told I am 230th or something like that.”

Their landlord had offered to address the damp/mould problem:

“He said ‘I’m going to fix it (the mould)’ but hasn’t. The concern is that it is too small for all of us. There are five family members in one room. The concern is if we go out right now to fix the mould, we don’t have another space to go.”

Family Three (Mother and two children who were now 15 and 21) had leave to remain and had recently been rehoused but described years of housing misery prior to this, that involved living in hostels and emergency accommodation:

“It was dark, they placed me in an emergency hostel and emergency accommodation. The conditions were terrible. It was bad. There were people taking narcotics and drinking alcohol and it was dirty. My kids told me they would prefer to live on the street than in there. Redbridge and Newham were passing responsibility from one to the other and that made it more difficult for me. My oldest daughter had epilepsy and I advised them that she feared rats and mice, but they did not seem to take that into account.”

Family Four (Mother, Father and 5-year-old daughter) were currently seeking asylum. They had been placed in temporary accommodation and had been living there for three years:

“It is shared accommodation, I have only one room, it is one kitchen that we use to cook. We share this with three other families. At one point it was six. It is difficult especially evening time because everyone wants to use the oven and the sink. It is very difficult. There is no living room, no washing machine, it is really dirty...It is not nice. All the taps in the kitchen are broken. Everyone has their own toilet in their room. It is very small, we can barely go in when we take

shower, it is too tight. Outside there is a smell of drains, so we cannot open the window otherwise an unpleasant smell comes into the room.”

Family Five (Mother and 4-year-old daughter) were currently seeking asylum. They were living in one room in a house that was shared with four other families. They shared a kitchen and a bathroom with other residents in the house.

“I am upstairs in a small room; I have a bed and nothing else. There isn’t even space for food. If she wants to go to the toilet (her daughter), I carry her downstairs at night, it is very dirty for a small child. I take a spray to clean the toilet before my daughter can use it. I do not want to ask for much, just my own room and kitchen because most people stay in there at night and smoke in the kitchen.”

Family Six (Mother, Father and child aged 5) live in a one-bedroom flat in the private rented sector and have the leave to remain:

“I came in 2000. For eight years I needed to just stay somewhere. Friends helped me. In 2011 I got the letter stating that I have the right to remain. I have been in this house for the last 12 years (one bedroom flat). When I came, I did not have children, but she is now five years old. There is damp in the kitchen, when you say to the landlord, please can you come and fix it he says it is not my job to do anything. If you do not want this one, you can go. If I want to find another house privately, you need so much money, you need a guarantor. I keep bidding, it tells me there are 400 people before me. But I was using the wrong password and now I have moved up and I am in position 9.”

Family Seven (Mother and 6-Year-old daughter) is an asylum seeker who came to the UK in 2015

when she was pregnant with her son. She has been staying with friends since 2015 and this is clearly placing housing pressures on her hosts who have a three-bedroom house and three children of their own. Her host family did not imagine she would stay for seven years, and it is affecting family life for both families. The mother is occupying a very small room in the house and sharing a bed with her daughter. The host children store their clothes in a wardrobe in their room affecting their privacy. Recently the situation has become difficult, and the host family have indicated they may not be able to continue with the arrangement for much longer:

"I was ready to be homeless because they said they could not help me anymore. Originally, I had been refused emergency accommodation and now they have said I can join a waiting list. I do not know what I am going to do, to be honest, because I have only £79.00 per week for me and my son, and I don't have anything else."

Each of these situations offer insights into the lived experience of inadequate housing. We now move on to explore in more detail the specific impact of inadequate housing on children and their families:

Lack of privacy/Lack of Space

A key impact of living in overcrowded housing and/or shared accommodation is that it results in severe lack of privacy and space that impacts all family members:

"We have no space or privacy. It is now a problem, if it was just me and my daughter it would be okay, but I also share with my partner, that's why it's difficult for me and difficult for her... she knows everything that I don't want her to know about my situation, that I haven't any money, that I haven't any clothes for her. I do not like to put this in her brain".

"This affects them. The boy is 14 and the girl is 12 and you know, when they need to get changed after having a shower it is difficult."

"I don't have privacy. For five years, we were together (refers to sharing a bed and bedroom with her daughter)."

"I see he wants his own space because he doesn't have it. I sleep with him, he's seven and we have one bed, so we sleep both of us there."

Lack of space creates some very real challenges, in terms of the ability of children to get a good night's sleep:

"She goes to bed at eight o'clock. I'm not going to sleep at eight, I need to do everything in the house. When I go in, she says 'mummy don't do noise I am sleeping...', but you can't do anything but sleep outside. There is no other choice."

"I swear to God we had three days where he said: 'Mum I sleep just a little bit in my class, my eyes were closing, and I go like this, and I open my eyes'. He doesn't sleep as much as he needs to sleep."

"A lot of time my daughter does not get enough sleep, because they are always screaming (lives in shared accommodation). Sometimes I ask them to be quiet and they say 'you are an Albanian, you do not have the right to speak here'... She does not sleep well so she is sometimes late for school."

Inadequate housing and its impact on children's ability to study and play

Interviewees made clear that lack of space made it difficult for their children to study or play:

"The bedroom is very small, barely fits

the beds...It does affect his education because he does not have his own time to study, to read, to do his homework."

"Day to day she asks for things, she says mummy why we do not have this? Why do we not have that? The situation is that she is very down. I do not even have any space to play with her because we have the bed and that is it. Some of the ladies here wanted to give me toys for my little one, like a toy farm, but there isn't the space, so we had to refuse the toys. There is no space for toys."

One interviewee compensated for the lack of indoor space by making use of outdoor space:

"We have a garden so when it's summer he is in the garden but when he is inside the house there is no space to play. So, I always take him outside to play with toys."

This was not always possible:

"So, there is no space inside to play, she has a little garden, but it is very cold and sometimes there are rats outside and she says, 'I don't want to play because of the rats.'"

Inadequate housing limits the opportunity for children to socialise with friends

Living in inadequate housing was limiting the potential for children to socialise with friends at home and this was resulting in sadness and low mood for children:

"He asks why his friends can't go to his house and he always feels depressed, I say depression. I don't know how to explain it because if you listen sometimes, you can hear when he is talking. I'm feeling guilty when I listen to him because he doesn't have anything that he needs to have."

"My daughter asked if she could bring a friend to the house and I tried to avoid her questions, but I can't avoid them because she's a child she understands because she wants it, she wants her friends over sometimes. Because she asked for this, I was feeling bad and started crying in front of her. She is very clever; she says sorry mummy and she hugged me and said everything is going to be good."

"They want to bring their friends over to play or have a sleepover but unfortunately there is no space for them."

"She come to me and say to me I'm sad... why can't I never have anybody in my room. She says I'm not a doll, why can't nobody come to me and play with me and have fun with me? Why are we always together and staying in this bed?"

"She has friends and she keep asking always, I want to go today to my friends, it is because she doesn't have to stay home, because she doesn't like home and that was difficult for us because we cannot do anything about it."

"On his birthday he asked why he couldn't have a birthday party at his house?"

"She's never known what Christmas is, never know what Ramadan or Eid is. She doesn't know any ceremony – Christmas, birthday, she doesn't know any of them, because there is no space."

Inadequate housing and physical and emotional well-being

Inadequate housing was having some very detrimental impacts on the emotional and physical wellbeing of children. The physical condition of housing created some very real

hazards for children, resulting in respiratory problems and allergies. Living in inadequate housing was clearly impacting on the emotional wellbeing of all family members:

"It affects me, I had too many panic attacks and I was in a bad situation a lot of the time. I could not breathe, and she says mummy, mummy please do not be sick, I'm going to be sick like you and I do not want her to see me like that but yes, sometimes I am too tired. Even when she says, 'can you play with me?'"

Parents had to manage their children's expectations and low mood/sadness about their housing situation. For example:

"It affects her mood because we used to go, for example, to her friend's house and she is always asking why she has her own room with lots of toys and why I do not have a bed for myself, why are we all sleeping in one bed. That is why she feels sad, and I feel sad too."

"She is always asking us about when we are moving, are we staying here forever mummy? What can I say to her?"

"Even when he is upset, he says he is not. I see him crying and he says I am okay mum I am okay."

Progress/aspirations

We were interested to understand more about interviewees' perceptions of the impact of inadequate housing on their children's educational progress. It was clear that whilst on the one hand interviewees had high aspirations for their children and many felt their children were doing well, there was also a sense that they could be doing much better if they were living in more spacious/suitable housing. For example:

"My son is clever; he does not like too much reading, but he reads. In Maths, he is excellent and meeting expectations

for year One."

"Yeah, it affects them a lot because they have no space to study which will make them less educated so they will have bad grades, if that makes sense. The teacher asked me why the children are not doing their homework and I said we don't have enough space."

"He is doing well but could be doing much better with more space to have a desk at home."

"The teacher said she is good, but I don't know, the school said it is learning through play and it is difficult to do that in our house."

"She started reception in September and now she spends more time in school, and it is good for her. She finds it easy to sit and to learn if she had a desk and a place to study it would help. She pretends to be a nurse with toys. It was science day today; she wore the white lab coat. She is very smart; she wants to be a ballerina like every child."

Inadequate housing and online learning during the pandemic:

The COVID-19 pandemic drew attention to the challenges of inadequate housing/poverty on home learning. We were interested to understand what challenges these families had experienced during the pandemic. It was clear that their housing situations were particularly challenging and impacted on their access to and ability to engage with home learning. Interviewees recounted a range of challenges linked to the ability to access online classrooms in a quiet space and participate in activities. For example:

"During Covid the school gave him lots of projects. For example, for cooking but he couldn't do it because all the family was inside so we cannot go in the

kitchen and say can you stop now because we need to film and send it to school so we could not do that stuff”.

“It was a big problem for them because it was online and we did not have enough space for them to go online at the same time, so was a big problem.”

The role of schools and voluntary organisations in supporting families:

Schools and voluntary organisations are playing an important role in compensating/mitigating the impact of inadequate housing. For example:

“School is very supportive, they have clubs, communication hub. It is very supportive, they have a lot of community coffee mornings, they really care about you. The teacher keeps on asking how you are? They are nice. I do not want to change his school; I just do not want to lose this school.”

Some parents had reported their housing situation to the school and felt that this had been beneficial as schools were able to understand their housing situation and offer support. Others were more reluctant to share their very difficult circumstances with their school.

Shpresa was also playing a vital role in supporting families. They had developed a range of innovative services to support families. This support ranged from offering advice and support with housing problems; a community café where families in shared accommodation can socialise and children can play; therapeutic interventions to support the socio-emotional needs of their service users, a storytelling service for those in shared accommodation, ‘Walk, Talk and Watch,’ where families and their children are encouraged to visit parks. The families we interviewed confirmed that Shpresa was offering them vital support. For example:

“I do not know what we would do

without Shpresa, it is a lifeline.”

“Shpresa is the only service that has offered me any support, I can contact them anytime.”

“We were lucky because Shpresa gave all the children tablets and found someone to read a story on zoom so that was good.” (During the pandemic)

It was clear that with more support/additional resources they have the potential to provide more bespoke support to families. For example:

“We could support people when they get a home to help with basic standards, carpets and recycling.” (Shpresa Coordinator)

Key Findings

1. Families were spending several years living in dire housing conditions, and this was having a detrimental impact on all family members.
2. Lack of space was having a severe impact on their quality of their life and limiting the potential for privacy and was impacting detrimentally on the emotional and physical well-being of children and young people.
3. Children found it very difficult to find a quiet place to study at home and their ability to play and relax at home either with friends or on their own was severely restricted.
4. Families who were claiming asylum were living in particularly challenging housing circumstances and were more likely to live in very cramped accommodation with shared facilities. A key problem was that for asylum seekers, housing was subject to a different regulatory regime, i.e., the Home Office rather than the borough in which they were based.
5. Schools were playing an important role in supporting families living in inadequate

housing and this was appreciated by families.

6. Shpresa was offering vital support to families, and it was clear that they have the potential to play a more significant role in supporting children and families.

About the Authors:

Penny Bernstock

Penny Bernstock has written extensively on housing and urban regeneration in East London. She was previously Head of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of East London and Head of Education and Society at the University of West London. She is currently a Visiting Professor at UEL's Housing Knowledge Exchange Unit and co-chair of TELCO's Olympics Strategy Group.

Andrew Holt

Andrew Holt has over thirty years' experience drawn from across the public, private and not-for-profit sectors. He worked as an Associate Director at a large consulting firm, running public-sector research teams for several years. He now works as an independent consultant.

Frankie Webb-Huseyin

Frankie Webb-Huseyin helped carry out the research as part of a paid post-graduate research internship whilst studying for her Masters in NGO and Development Management at the University of East London. She is now Grants Officer at the Essex Community Foundation.

Debbie Humphry

Debbie Humphry has been a researcher for over twenty years with a focus on community, housing and neighbourhood, situating lived experiences within wider social and political contexts. She has conducted research for academic, voluntary and public sector organisations and is currently a Research Fellow at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, looking at housing and health: [National Evaluation of the Health and Social Impacts of Selective Licensing for Private Rented Housing in England](#)

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