

# Value for money in homelessness:

A spotlight on temporary  
accommodation in  
Northern Ireland





**Centre for  
Homelessness Impact**

# Value for money in homelessness

A spotlight report by the Centre for Homelessness  
Impact on temporary accommodation in  
Northern Ireland

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## About the Centre for Homelessness Impact

The Centre for Homelessness Impact exists to improve the lives of people experiencing homelessness through better use of data and evidence.

The Centre is a part of the What Works Network, and has the vision that, in every local area in the UK, leaders at all levels use data, evidence and systems that work to drive and improve the effectiveness of activities to end homelessness. They will ask the right questions, act promptly on helpful insights from good evidence while continually trying to improve practice and strive to maximise positive outcomes for people experiencing homelessness within limited resources.

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# Foreword by the Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive

**The Housing Executive recognises the importance of evidence-led decisions, and I am grateful to the team at the Centre for Homelessness Impact for their work in developing the Value For Money Framework. While the report highlights many well documented challenges facing the housing and homelessness systems in Northern Ireland, we as an organisation look forward to a continued partnership with the Centre for Homelessness Impact in the development and implementation of actions that address these challenges.**

Like many housing authorities across the UK, we have been faced with an unprecedented demand for temporary accommodation and this report highlights the impact on those who avail of our services, and on those staff who are at the front end of providing such vital support and assistance.

I recognise many of the priorities outlined in this report, particularly with regards to the importance of homelessness prevention as a vital tool in reducing spend on temporary accommodation. A holistic approach to homelessness requires a strategic shift towards prevention with current demand for services meaning that too often we are in 'emergency' or 'response' mode. The Value For Money Framework will play a key role in shaping future actions within both our Homelessness Strategy 2022–27 and Strategic Action Plan for Temporary Accommodation, both of which focus on the importance of homelessness prevention. The Homelessness Strategy recognises the impact that prevention can have in avoiding homelessness and the negative impacts it can have on many of the most vulnerable households in our society. A key objective in our Strategic Action Plan for Temporary Accommodation is a minimised need for temporary accommodation and many of the findings in the Value For Money Framework are findings that are recognised as drivers in our action plan.

Our work on delivering the Homelessness Strategy is guided by **seven key principles** and the Value for Money Framework aligns with each of these principles.

- 1. Person Centred** – We believe that each person is entitled to the right response tailored to individual needs. This report highlights the particular challenges we have experienced, including an increase in temporary accommodation from 4,527 in 2019/20 to over 11,000 in 2023/24. As an organisation non-standard accommodation will always be used as a last resort but we recognise the growth in use of such accommodation and the impact this has on the households we serve.
- 2. Evidence Based** – We recognise the importance of data analysis to ensure the decision making and priority setting is informed by experiential evidence and relevant contextual evidence. This report, and the perspective it brings on analysis on value for money, will play a key role in building on the evidence base we have on wider homelessness and societal trends.
- 3. Partnership Working** – This report has been the result of a relationship between the Housing Executive and the Centre for Homelessness Impact and is a relationship that we look forward to building on as we seek to address the findings of this report. Key to our principle of partnership working is the design and delivery of appropriate and collective responses and as other organisations explore the Value for Money Framework we look forward to establishing further partnerships to share our learning as to what is most effective in addressing the many challenges facing the homelessness sectors in Northern Ireland and Great Britain.
- 4. Expert Led** – It is vital that this report has been guided by experts by experience, in terms of those households with lived experience who use our temporary accommodation and those working at the ‘coal face’ of service delivery. Our strategy acknowledges that our work needs to be expert led and we also recognise the knowledge and expertise within the Centre for Homelessness Impact team.
- 5. Responsive** – We understand the need to respond positively to changes in need, supply and throughput in homelessness services. This report will play a vital role in shaping our continuing response to a continued demand for temporary accommodation that would have been unthinkable prior to the pandemic.

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6. **Innovative** – This report, along with much of the Housing Executive’s work in the delivery of both our Homelessness Strategy and Strategic Action Plan for Temporary Accommodation highlights the need for innovation and we recognise the need for innovative solutions as more of the same response will not be appropriate as increasing demands are met with continued challenges in budgets.
7. **Delivering Value for Money** – Our final principle recognises the need to ensure services are economical, efficient and effective with the aim of generating greater value from public funds. This report will play a key role in our commitment in the strategy to develop and implement arrangements to assess value for money in the delivery of the strategy.

I am conscious of the impact that temporary accommodation can have on children and in particular on their development, and I believe that no child should ever have to spend a prolonged period of time in hotel or B&B accommodation. We have worked hard to reduce placements of children in non-standard accommodation, and to ensure the highest possible standards of temporary accommodation. However, there is a level of complexity involved in ensuring the right housing and support solutions are in place and we work with our statutory, voluntary, and community partners to provide these services in extremely challenging circumstances.

I look forward to continuing our work with the Centre for Homelessness Impact in both addressing the findings of this report and also, building relationships with many of the Local Authorities across the UK who face similar challenges. The vision of our Homelessness Strategy is Ending Homelessness Together and if we are to address the challenges outlined in this report it will be from a collaborative effort with our voluntary and statutory partners.



Grainia Long,  
Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Housing Executive

# Introduction: the Centre for Homelessness's impact's work on value for money

**In January 2023 the Centre for Homelessness Impact launched a programme of work on value for money. This is based on the principles of value for money which – put simply – are about using resources to get better outcomes and refer to:**

- economy, or spending less;
- efficiency, or spending the same but in a better way; and
- effectiveness, or using money to get better outcomes.

We have taken these high level principles and tailored them to the subject of homelessness, with the aim of helping to drive practical improvements. The initial focus with this work has been on spending on temporary accommodation in the four nations of the United Kingdom. This is on the basis that temporary accommodation is by far the largest single area of expenditure within homelessness policy. In England, for example, in 2022–23 local authorities reported that they spent £1.74 billion on temporary accommodation, compared to £0.68 billion on other types of homelessness activity.

At the heart of our work is our framework for assessing the value for money of the use of temporary accommodation. The framework was co-created with key stakeholders and local authorities throughout the United Kingdom.

The framework takes the principles of value for money and applies them to the journey that a person experiencing homelessness encounters when entering, living in, and moving on from temporary accommodation. The version of this framework that supported our assessment of the value for money of the use of temporary accommodation in Northern Ireland is shared on Figure 1, on the next page. In Annex A we set out our assessment of the Housing Executive, using this framework.

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We now plan to use this framework to undertake similar value for money work in Scotland, England, and Wales. The reports that we intend to produce as an outcome of this work will aim to both provide useful insight to local authorities that we visit on the value for money of their use of temporary accommodation, and make recommendations to the governments of the United Kingdom on how this could be improved.



## Figure 1: the Centre for Homelessness Impact value for money framework for the use of temporary accommodation

**Overarching value for money question: what is the value for money in the use of temporary accommodation, and how can it be improved?**

**Economy question: Could temporary accommodation be procured more cheaply? Could it cost less?**

Supporting questions:

1. How much use do you make of temporary accommodation? Has this increased or decreased over the past six months? Do you understand the reasons why?
2. Do you have the cost data necessary to make informed and rational spending decisions about temporary accommodation? Where are the gaps? Which partners would you like more cost information from?
3. What is the variation in the cost of temporary accommodation between different parts of Northern Ireland?
4. Is there unjustifiable variation in the cost of temporary accommodation? Are the causes of this cost variation understood?
5. Is the impact of this on different regions understood?
6. What mechanisms are in place to ensure that use of the least economic means of temporary accommodation (including Bed and Breakfasts and nightly accommodation) is restricted?
7. Are there strong mechanisms in place for procuring temporary accommodation at the lowest possible price (while safeguarding quality)? Are these transferable? Are there, for example, "should cost" models in place?
8. Are there measures in place to ensure that temporary accommodation is procured economically for the system overall, preventing some areas from restricting their costs by boosting those of neighbouring areas?
9. Is there evidence of perverse incentives (including through manipulation of Housing Benefit, or of service charges) that cause public money on temporary accommodation to be spent uneconomically? This may include placing people in temporary accommodation for much longer periods than may be necessary.
10. To what extent are you able to respond to short term homelessness pressures in the most economic means available?
11. What strategic measures are in place to reduce the long term cost of temporary accommodation?

### **Efficiency question: Could money used for temporary accommodation be better spent?**

Supporting questions:

1. What data exists on uses of spending on temporary accommodation, across the system? What patterns are there? What gaps are there? What would be useful?
2. What strategic measures are in place to improve spending on temporary accommodation, across the system?
3. What are the standards for temporary accommodation? Are they monitored, and what action is taken in response?

### **Effectiveness question: How effectively is temporary accommodation being used?**

Supporting questions:

1. Are you able to conduct as much prevention activity as you consider to be likely to be effective?
  2. What information do you hold on the use and impact of spending on temporary accommodation and prevention? Where are the gaps? What would be useful?
  3. How do you know that the prevention activity that you are conducting is effective? Which partners would you like more information from?
  4. What long term horizon scanning is being done on the effective use of temporary accommodation?
  5. What quality measures are there in place across the system for temporary accommodation?
  6. What knowledge exists on the long-term impact of being in temporary accommodation on costs related to key life chances, such as on educational and employment outcomes?
  7. What knowledge exists of how temporary accommodation can be most effectively used to facilitate moving onto more settled accommodation?
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# Key findings on the value for money of the use of temporary accommodation in Northern Ireland

## 1

**The Housing Executive acknowledges that spending on non-standard temporary accommodation does not represent effective value for money when compared with other forms of temporary accommodation.** The length of time that some households experiencing homelessness can stay in temporary accommodation means that the Housing Executive is increasingly required to place people into short-term, non-standard forms of accommodation. This can be costly. The Housing Executive is undertaking a number of strands of work designed to improve value for money, including reviewing the costs involved in family hostels and looking to lease directly from private sector landlords.

## 2

**The Housing Executive could make better use of its financial data on temporary accommodation – especially around rent collection.** Although the Housing Executive holds substantial financial data on temporary accommodation, there are areas for improvement in the intelligence it pulls from this. In particular, the Housing Executive could use its data more to understand how costs of temporary accommodation differ between geographical locations and different types of beds given to people experiencing homelessness. Also, although data is collected for block-booked single lets, this is using a manual process and not via an IT system. The transfer of this system to an IT system is currently being explored and it is anticipated that an IT solution will be in place by the end of 2024. The Housing Executive is aware that a significant amount of rent due in non-standard accommodation is not collected.

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## 3

**The Housing Executive needs a more complete picture of the reasons why people present for temporary accommodation i.e. their circumstances on a given day which leads to the requirement for temporary accommodation and to take a more strategic approach to allocating people experiencing homelessness with temporary accommodation.** While the Housing Executive records the reason for homelessness presentations, there are gaps in the Housing Executive's understanding of the reasons why people require temporary accommodation on a given day, and what their accommodation circumstances were the previous night . In particular, the Housing Executive was not clear on why there has been such a substantial increase in the number of single males entering temporary accommodation. Additionally, frontline staff reflect that people experiencing homelessness can be placed into temporary accommodation on a "first come, first served basis," as they do not have the capacity to undertake full consideration of people's needs, due to a variety of factors outlined throughout this report.

## 4

**Frontline homelessness staff consider the needs of people experiencing homelessness to have become more complex in recent years, and to be difficult to address with current temporary accommodation provision.**

Frontline staff report that the needs of people experiencing homelessness have in recent years become more complex. This can have a significant impact on the workloads of Housing Executive staff. While the Housing Executive is responding to changes in the needs of people experiencing homelessness, there are questions about whether increased provision will be sufficient to meet more complex needs. The Housing Executive plans to be able to respond to this increased complexity in part with greater collaboration with Health and Justice agencies in Northern Ireland. This is evidenced by a commitment from the Ministers for Communities, Health and Justice departments in October 2022 to work collaboratively for those with complex lives including an agreement to continue to support the Housing First and Complex Lives models.

## 5

**Temporary accommodation can play a positive role in the lives of people experiencing homelessness, however, for some in Northern Ireland it now feels permanent, and may no longer match their needs.** People experiencing homelessness whom we met in Northern Ireland often spoke positively about their temporary accommodation and the support of Housing Executive staff. However, people experiencing homelessness can spend an extremely long time in temporary accommodation – the Housing Executive estimates that families placed in accommodation leased from the private rented sector spend around two years there on average, for example. People experiencing longer stays in temporary accommodation can report concerns with the quality of this accommodation, although the Housing Executive states that the majority of temporary accommodation they utilise is ‘own front door’ accommodation such as private single lets. As of November 2024, Single Lets accounted for 60% of all placements in temporary accommodation and were subject to inspection at acquisition and annual review of a range of certificates.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the Housing Executive’s approach to allocating

temporary accommodation properties means that families may find themselves in housing which does not match their requirements. Under the Fundamental Review of Allocations implementation project, the Housing Executive has reduced the number of reasonable offers that people are allowed to reject from three to two, and extended the areas of choice that applicants are able to select from two areas to as many as they wish. The Housing Executive aims for these to enable applicants to be re-housed more quickly.



1 Any property offered by a provider must comply with the criteria listed below:

- Proof of ownership such as solicitor’s letter or copy of deeds
- Electric meter – meter card type
- Smoke, Heat and Carbon Monoxide Alarms to guidance outlined in Private Tenancies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024
- Gas Safe or Oil Boiler test certificate
- Carbon monoxide alarms
- Proof of Public Liability Insurance
- Confirmation that provider is registered on the Landlord Registration scheme
- Confirmation that property is registered with Land & Property Services (LPS)
- Provision of fire blanket or extinguisher in the kitchen

## 6

**There are concerns that Northern Ireland's system for allocating social housing could cause people experiencing homelessness to lengthen their stays in temporary accommodation.** Frontline Housing Executive staff expressed concern that aspects of its allocations policy may delay moving on from temporary accommodation because, for example, it allows applicants to limit where they choose to apply for accommodation to areas where properties are in short supply. This contrasts with the more restricted offers which can at times be made in other parts of the United Kingdom. The Housing Executive is implementing changes to the Housing Selection Scheme and Allocations process. These were consulted upon and agreed in the Department for Communities-led Fundamental Review of Allocations

By means of context the Housing Executive's Housing Selection Scheme was introduced in 1974 and has remained largely unchanged since 2000. The scheme was devised to be fair and open and to give applicants freedom of choice in where they wish to live. The fundamental principle of the scheme is that social housing is allocated based on need and availability. Anyone applying under this scheme will be registered on a Common Waiting List and will be allocated a Housing Executive or Housing Association tenancy according to the rules of the scheme.

## 7

**There is a need to conduct more homelessness prevention work.**

The Housing Executive leadership has highlighted the importance of homelessness prevention in its forward planning. As we set out above, the cost of placing people in temporary accommodation can be considerable – and is growing at a time when the Housing Executive's funding for homelessness is reducing. It is logical that costs can be reduced by working with those at risk of homelessness before they need to be placed into temporary accommodation. Despite this, frontline staff report that the demands on their time restrict their ability to conduct prevention work. Staff also report that people experiencing homelessness may present to them at a crisis point, where it is too late to conduct effective prevention work. Additionally, in contrast to frontline staff in England, Housing Executive staff have limited access to funding to support prevention activity. In June 2024, the Department for Communities published an Equality Impact Assessment in regards to the 2024/25 budget which noted, 'there is a statutory duty to provide accommodation for a household that meets the four tests for Full Duty Assistance (FDA), and the Housing Executive then has to pay for accommodation if required. The nature of this Duty means that the Housing Executive will prioritise funding for it, and focus saving on the third sector/ voluntary and community sector groups, in particular longer term preventative work.'

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# Conclusion

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive finds itself in a highly challenging position. Its spending on temporary accommodation has in recent years quadrupled and looks set to increase further – at a time when the Housing Executive’s available funding for homelessness looks set to fall in real terms. Moreover, as the Housing Executive responds to an increasingly challenging external environment, there is an increasing spend on non-standard accommodation, which does not deliver effective value for money when compared to other types of temporary accommodation. At the heart of the Housing Executive’s need to resort to use of non-standard temporary accommodation, is the fact that much of its long term accommodation is occupied by people who are unable to move on to more settled accommodation. The Housing Executive is taking long term measures to tackle this situation, including: implementing changes to the allocations system following a Fundamental Review of Allocations and subsequent consultation; seeking to increase the amount of homelessness prevention work it undertakes; and gaining a better understanding of how well it uses its staff in hostels. These all appear logical. Nevertheless, as our recommendations set out below, there are a number of areas where our assessment suggests that the Housing Executive could do more in the short term to improve the value for money of temporary accommodation. Most notably, the Housing Executive could quickly improve collection of financial data related to temporary accommodation, and the reasons why people present on a given day and require temporary accommodation. i.e. what were their accommodation circumstances the previous night.

# Value for Money Recommendations

Based on our work in visits to Northern Ireland and subsequent work, there are a number of areas where we propose that the Housing Executive could consider taking action across the three areas of the value for money framework: economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.

## 1

**Make the greatest possible use of all data and ensure that it has all the cost and effectiveness information, with a particular focus on rent collection.**

The Housing Executive should assess the large amount of cost and activity information it holds to ensure that it can use this to answer key, practical questions around temporary accommodation types and different people experiencing homelessness across the regions of Northern Ireland. It should also ensure that it makes best use of all data to maximise its rent collection.

## 2

**Assess the needs of all individuals experiencing homelessness as soon as they enter temporary accommodation. The Housing Executive should also take wider strategic learning from this about the reasons why people are experiencing homelessness.** The Housing Executive states that, following the introduction of its Housing Solutions and Support approach, its staff aim to take a person-centred approach. The Housing Executive also reports that it has conducted research into young people's lives and complex lives. In addition, the Housing Executive should consider implementing rapid needs assessments of all placements of people entering temporary accommodation. The Housing Executive could consider employing a 'Critical Time Intervention' case management approach, an evidence-based model which offers time-limited and structured support during periods of transition, for example moving into accommodation.

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The aim of CTI is to provide continuity of care during periods of change.<sup>2</sup> Using the intelligence it can gather from this, the Housing Executive should undertake a more comprehensive assessment of the reasons why people experiencing homelessness in Northern Ireland enter temporary accommodation. This would also draw on analysis of the reasons why people entitled to temporary accommodation opt instead to stay with friends and family members. This analysis could also be used to establish whether people becoming homeless are presenting with greater complexity of need, and to focus on the groups that it would be most beneficial to conduct prevention work with.

### 3

**Examine how to make best use of temporary accommodation options and ensure each placement is suitable for the individual's needs.** During our visit we observed that people experiencing homelessness may be placed into temporary accommodation which does not match their need. We also observed that provision of temporary accommodation can be on a “first come, first served basis”. The Housing Executive reports that this is in some instances due to the fact only particular properties are available at the point of need, especially during a period of high demand for temporary accommodation. The Housing

Executive is conducting research into how it uses staff in hostels. It could broaden this to examine how the suitability of its accommodation can match needs more effectively, and how this could be achieved through more strategic use of allocations.

### 4

**Establish the prevention work that is currently undertaken, what would be logical to focus on, and consider how this could be enhanced with frontline budgets.** The Housing Executive should establish all of the work its frontline staff are currently conducting which is in effect preventative. Using this, it should take a data-led approach to homelessness prevention work, in which it directs it towards where it would be most effective. The Executive should also assess whether empowering frontline staff with prevention budgets could be effective.



<sup>2</sup> <https://www.homelessnessimpact.org/intervention/casemanagement>

# Part One: homelessness and temporary accommodation use in Northern Ireland

## Methods

**In May 2023 the Centre for Homelessness Impact Value for Money (VFM) team, at the invitation of the Housing Executive, conducted a fieldwork visit to Northern Ireland, examining the Housing Executive's use of temporary accommodation for people experiencing homelessness and who require accommodation.**

Using a set of questions based upon our framework for assessing the value for money of the use of temporary accommodation, we undertook a range of methods including:

- analysis of financial information on temporary accommodation cost data, to answer questions on topics including cost variation and trends in costs;
- a review of Housing Executive strategic documentation; and
- visits to Causeway and Belfast, which incorporated:
  - focus groups with frontline Housing Executive staff working in homelessness services;
  - visits to temporary accommodation sites; and
  - interviews with individuals and families experiencing homelessness and residing in temporary accommodation.

In addition, we conducted a day-long value for money deep-dive workshop with key Housing Executive staff in Belfast, exploring its spending on different types of temporary accommodation and different categories of people experiencing homelessness residing in this accommodation. We built on this to identify areas of value for money concern to the Housing Executive, as well as possible areas where improvements to value for money could be found.

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This report sets out the context of homelessness in Northern Ireland, as well as our findings on:

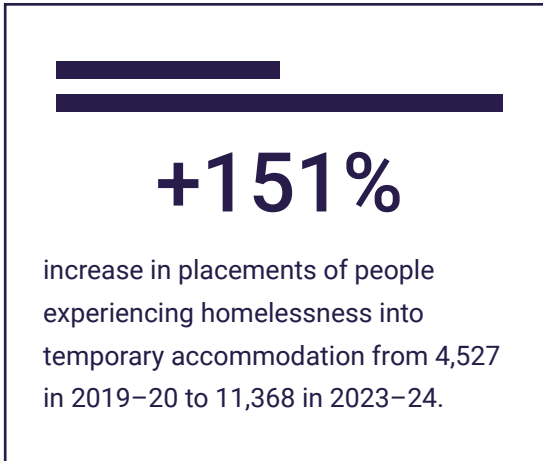
- spending on temporary accommodation in Northern Ireland;
- people experiencing homelessness entering temporary accommodation in Northern Ireland;
- the experience of living in temporary accommodation in Northern Ireland; and
- moving on from temporary accommodation, and homelessness prevention.

Our report concludes by making recommendations on how the Northern Ireland Housing Executive can improve the value for money of its use of temporary accommodation.



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**Figure 2: Key facts about the use of temporary accommodation for people experiencing homelessness in Northern Ireland<sup>3</sup>**



<sup>3</sup> This does not include spending on accommodation through Supporting People

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Under the Housing (NI) Order 1988, a person or household is defined as homeless and entitled to help in a range of different circumstances. These include: having nowhere to stay; living in poor conditions that are detrimental to their health; being at risk of violence in the home; and living in a property that is assessed as unreasonable for them to occupy.

If a household is homeless and in priority need of assistance and includes children or a vulnerable adult, then the Northern Ireland Housing Executive may provide them with temporary accommodation while their case is being assessed. A household may continue to reside in temporary accommodation after the Housing Executive has awarded Full Duty Applicant (FDA) status and while they await moving on into settled accommodation. Entitlement to social housing is gained through the accumulation of points, which can be increased due to a number of factors, including having Full Duty Applicant status, overcrowding, health needs, and intimidation. As of March 2024, 93.5% of allocations to social housing are made to statutorily homeless households.

Northern Ireland's homelessness legislation and practice differs from other parts of the UK in a number of ways including that:

- homelessness duties sit with the Housing Executive, a body which covers all of Northern Ireland, not individual local authorities;
- there is currently no statutory duty to try to prevent homelessness, as there now is in England and Wales, and is due to be introduced in Scotland; and
- The Housing Executive can only discharge its duty once a social rented property has been allocated.

Households can also routinely refuse a reasonable offer of temporary accommodation or leave it but still keep their Full Duty Applicant status. As a result, people experiencing homelessness can move directly into social housing without entering temporary housing. In addition, there is significant movement in and out of temporary accommodation.

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In Northern Ireland there has been a significant increase in the number of people living in temporary accommodation in recent years. As of November 2024, there were 4,908 households living in temporary accommodation, compared with 2,065 in January 2019 – an increase of 137%. Demand for temporary accommodation has increased across all household types, with 6,171 placements of single males in 2023–24, 1,767 placements of single females and 2,654 placements of families. The number of placements of families increased by 72% between 2019 and 2024 and the placement of single males in temporary accommodation increased by 246%. In addition, as of September 2024 there were 30,658 households on the social housing list who are statutorily homeless and who the Housing Executive owes a full housing duty which includes the provision of temporary accommodation where necessary and assistance with the protection of the household's belongings.

The Housing Executive's spending on temporary accommodation has similarly risen significantly, increasing from almost £7.55 million a year in 2018–19 to £34.4 million in 2023–24 – more than quadrupling within five years. Spending on what the Housing Executive defines as “non-standard” accommodation (including hotels and bed and breakfasts) has risen particularly notably, from just over £1.9m in 2018–19 to just over £12.2 million in 2023–24 – a sixfold increase.

In its Strategic Action Plan for Temporary Accommodation 2022–27, the Executive is committed to ensuring value for money for the public purse and meeting the needs of households, for support and accommodation, requiring temporary accommodation.

## Overview of trends

The number of homeless households placed into temporary accommodation in Northern Ireland has increased significantly since before the Covid-19 pandemic. As **Figure 3** sets out, this increased by 151%, from 4,527 placements in 2019–20 to 11,368 placements in 2023–24. The greatest numerical increase occurred in the household category of single males, with the annual number of placements for single males rising by 246% between 2019–20 and 2023–24. The greatest percentage increase was for single females, with a 235% increase in placements over the same period. The placements from April 2023 to March 2024 show that on a pro rata basis the number of placements has continued to increase for all categories in 2023–24 except single females.

**Figure 3: change in placement numbers in Northern Ireland by household type, 2019–20 to 2023–24**

Household Type	Placements April 2019 to March 2020	Placements April 2022 to March 2023	Placements April 2023 to March 2024	Percentage rise in placements during this 4 year period
<b>Single Males</b>	1,782	5,576	6,171	246%
<b>Single Females</b>	527	1,853	1,767	235%
<b>Couples</b>	196	299	387	97%
<b>Families</b>	1,542	2,140	2,654	72%
<b>Pensioners</b>	153	321	350	129%
<b>Undefined</b>	17	64	39	129%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,527</b>	<b>10,253</b>	<b>11,368</b>	<b>151%</b>

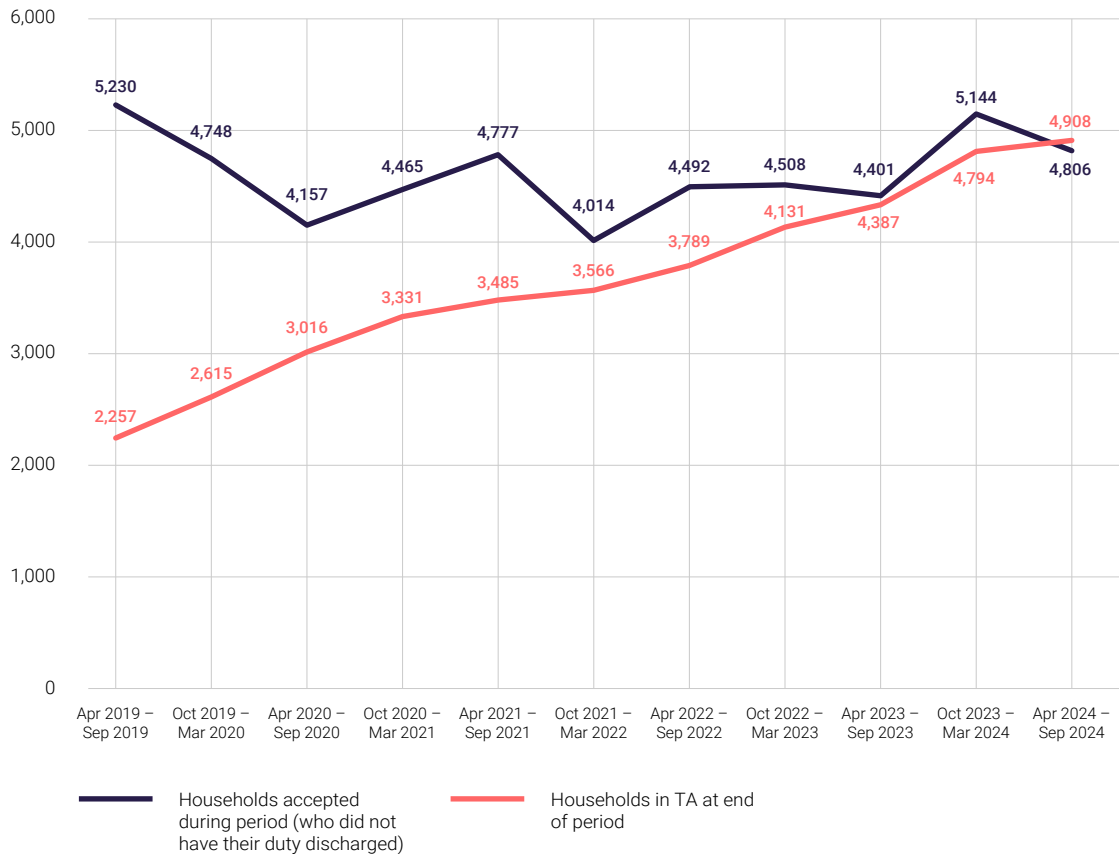
Source: Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Although the number of households being placed into temporary accommodation has increased in Northern Ireland. Between 2019–20 and 2023–24, the number of households accepted as being homeless by the Executive has increased by 2% from 11,323 to 11,537. The number of households in temporary accommodation increased by 88% from 2,615 in March 2020 to 4,908 in November 2024. This demonstrates that the number of households leaving temporary accommodation is consistently lower than those being accepted as homeless and entering temporary accommodation. Over the past four years there has been an unprecedented growth in demand for temporary accommodation. The Housing Executive reports that this is in part because significant numbers of households, most of whom had already been granted ‘Full Duty Applicant’ status, saw their informal sharing arrangements break down as a result of the restrictions imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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**Figure 4.** shows the trend in six monthly homelessness acceptances and the number of households in temporary accommodation from April 2019 to March 2024 using data from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

**Figure 4: Six monthly homelessness acceptances compared to the number of households in temporary accommodation, April 2019 to March 2024**



Source: Northern Ireland Housing Executive<sup>4</sup>



<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that these figures are reflective of data submissions to DfC at the end of September and March of each respective financial year.

## Recorded causes of homelessness in Northern Ireland

Among the 11,537 households accepted as homeless in Northern Ireland between April 2023 and March 2024, the main causes of their homelessness were:

- accommodation not reasonable 31% (3,601);
- sharing breakdown/family dispute 18% (2,097);
- loss of rented accommodation 15% (1,773);
- domestic abuse 10% (1,146);
- neighbourhood harassment 6% (693); and
- marital/relationship breakdown 6% (727).

The 'accommodation not reasonable' cause of homelessness is much more common in Northern Ireland than in other parts of the United Kingdom.<sup>5</sup>

During our visit to Northern Ireland, Housing Executive staff and people living in temporary accommodation were especially concerned about the increase in homelessness that they had witnessed stemming from recent changes in the private rented sector. In parallel, the number of rental properties on the market has fallen by 50% since 2015. As Figure 5 shows, private rents in Northern Ireland, as of November 2023, had increased at a rate far greater than in other parts of the United Kingdom - by more than 40% since 2015, compared to under 20% in Scotland, for example.



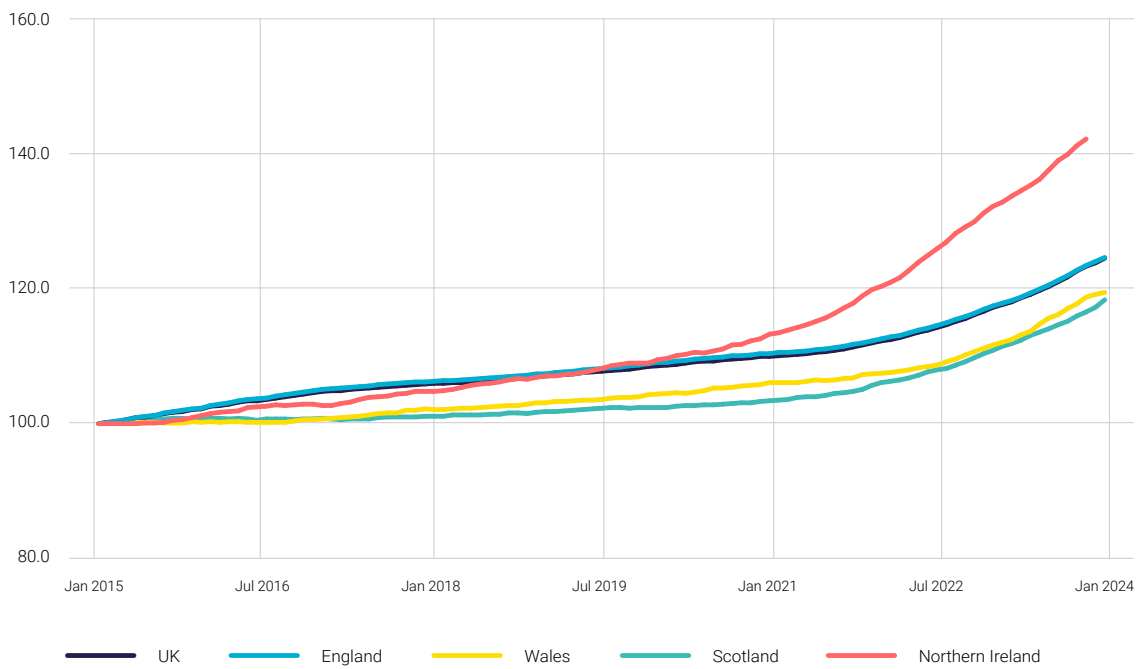
5 The Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1988 states that: "a person shall not be treated as having accommodation unless it is accommodation which it would be reasonable for him to continue to occupy", and that: "regard may be had, in determining whether it would be reasonable for a person to continue to occupy accommodation, to the general circumstances prevailing in relation to housing in Northern Ireland."

Although there are similar provisions in the homelessness legislation in the other UK nations, 'accommodation not reasonable' is not a common enough cause of homelessness to be recorded as a separate category anywhere else in the UK except Wales, where the latest information suggests that homelessness due to current property being 'unsuitable' accounts for less than 4% of cases, compared to 31% in Northern Ireland. 'Overcrowding' is listed as a cause of 2% of homelessness in Scotland in 2021–22.

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During our visit to Causeway, frontline staff reported that average rents for a four-bedroom house had increased from £450 to £700 over the past 18 months. In our interviews with households currently in temporary accommodation we heard about the role that Section 21 ‘no-fault evictions’ have played in forcing some people into homelessness. In Coleraine, for example, we heard from a family forced to give up their long-term tenancy due to the landlord turning the property into a holiday rental. They noted that they were unable to return to another private rented sector property because of the increase in rents. In common with other parts of the United Kingdom, in Northern Ireland Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates were frozen for four years from April 2020. Since then, as Figure 5 shows, rents in Northern Ireland rose by over 30% by the end of 2023. This meant that landlords have been less willing to rent to tenants who can only pay LHA level rents, who are then unable to secure somewhere to live and are more likely to become homeless.

**Figure 5: rental prices have increased more in Northern Ireland than in England, Wales and Scotland since 2015**



Source: *Index of Private Housing Rental Prices from the Office for National Statistics*

From April 2024, in line with the rest of the UK, LHA rates in Northern Ireland have risen to match the government's estimate of 30th percentile rents. This is a significant rise. In Belfast, for example, the LHA for a one-bedroom flat has risen by almost 42% from £98.42 per week to £139.34 per week in April 2024. However, LHA rates have been frozen again and will not rise with rental inflation in April 2025.

## Types of temporary accommodation that people experiencing homelessness in Northern Ireland are being placed into

Of the 11,368 placements into temporary accommodation between April 2023 and March 2024:

- 42% (4,725) were to hotels or Bed & Breakfasts;
- 2% (264) were to property leased privately by the Executive;
  - 0.8% (92) were to Bespoke Facility of Temporary Accommodation
  - 22% (2,449) were to Crash: Dispersed Intensively Managed Emergency Accommodation
  - 1% (161) were to Crash: Voluntary Sector
  - 0.1% (20) were to Housing Association Temporary Accommodation
  - 0.03% (4) were to House in Multiple Occupation
- 16% (1,781) were to private single lets;
- 14% (1,543) were to voluntary sector hostels; and
- 3% (329) were to Housing Executive hostels.

Between April 2023 and March 2024, the Housing Executive made 4,725 placements into non-standard short-term forms of accommodation i.e. hotels/Bed & Breakfasts.

This is despite these types of accommodation only housing 300 households at any one time – meaning that the Housing Executive has to repeatedly place people experiencing homelessness into these short-term forms of accommodation. We learnt from our discussions with frontline staff that these repeated short-term placements generate significant work for the staff involved.

# Part Two: spending on temporary accommodation in Northern Ireland

**Using our framework for assessing the value for money of temporary accommodation, we examined the Housing Executive’s spending in this area, as well as topics including the information it holds on this spending; mechanisms that it has in place for reducing the cost of temporary accommodation; and its ability to respond to short term homelessness costs using the most economic means available.**

The Housing Executive’s spending on temporary accommodation in Northern Ireland has increased significantly in recent years. As Figure 6 sets out, between 2018–19 and 2023–24 its spending on all temporary accommodation rose from circa £7.5m million to almost £34.4 million – an increase of around 360%. The Housing Executive’s spending on “non-standard” accommodation (a definition which includes hotels and Bed & Breakfasts) rose even more significantly, from under £2,000,000 per year in 2018–19 to £12.2 million a year in 2023–24 – a sixfold increase. All data suggests that with the demand for temporary accommodation continuing to increase the placement of households into non-standard accommodation is likely to increase in all categories of households experiencing homelessness.

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**Figure 6: Northern Ireland Housing Executive spending on temporary accommodation<sup>6</sup>, 2018–19 to 2023–24**

Year	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
<b>Overall TA Costs</b>	7,472,594	14,391,090	19,119,131	23,715,264	34,395,077
<b>Non-standard TA Costs</b>	1,932,228	5,092,003	5,766,931	7,621,285	12,221,624
<b>Non-standard Costs as a Percentage of Overall Costs</b>	25.86%	35.38%	30.16%	32.14%	35.5%

Source: Northern Ireland Housing Executive



<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that this is the spend on TA that has been paid from the Housing Executive's revenue budget allocation and that there has been capital costs incurred in 2022/23 and 2023/24 which relates to homeless leased accommodation which following the introduction of IFRS 16 are now capitalised in line with the accounting standard.

## Key value for money issues in the use of temporary accommodation

During our visit to Northern Ireland, we conducted an exercise with the Housing Executive in which we mapped out the costs and lengths of stay for temporary accommodation and associated value for money risks. This was in part to establish the Housing Executive's understanding of certain issues raised in our value for money framework, including its understanding of the costs of temporary accommodation. In this, we identified the key value for money issue that the Housing Executive faces in its use of temporary accommodation. This is that the long-term provision it uses for temporary accommodation (such as hostels) is generally fully occupied by households. This is due to the lack of options for moving families onto more settled accommodation in the longer term, such as in the private rented sector. This lack of availability then causes the Housing Executive to place people and families experiencing homelessness into temporary accommodation which it is able to access, which is often non-standard forms of accommodation. These placements tend to be costly.

Specific areas which we collectively identified as affecting value for money included:

- **The cost of repeat temporary accommodation placements for individuals.** A significant number of single males in particular move repeatedly in and out of temporary accommodation. During our exercise the Housing Executive estimated that, in May 2023, this was costing approximately £90 a night per placement, at an average of 29 days per placement – meaning that each of these placements costs the Housing Executive an estimated £2,600. As we set out above, these repeated placements also cause frontline staff a great deal of work.
- **the ongoing costs of using non-standard temporary accommodation.** On the most accurate data available, the Executive estimated that in the Belfast area alone it spent more than £6,000 per night on placing people experiencing homelessness into non-standard accommodation, such as hotels. Approximately 40% of single males entering temporary accommodation are placed into this.
- **the amount being spent on lengthy stays in temporary accommodation.** The estimated gross cost of keeping a family in temporary accommodation leased from the private sector for their average length of stay of around two years is approximately £20,000. The Executive will, however, be able to recoup much of this spending through Housing Benefit.

Participants in our value for money workshop took the view that Northern Ireland was likely to experience increased demand for temporary accommodation from people experiencing homelessness during 2023.

## **Housing Executive current efforts to improve the value for money of temporary accommodation**

The Housing Executive presently seeks to control the cost of temporary accommodation through the use of block bookings for long term accommodation where possible. When commissioned, voluntary sector hostels are assessed on the value for money of the accommodation and support provided. Officers procuring single let accommodation are required to seek authority from senior officers in order to go above agreed price thresholds. It is not clear, however, how effective these mechanisms are in controlling costs.

In addition, the Housing Executive is also currently exploring a number of measures to reduce the costs of its temporary accommodation. These include conducting a review of the costs involved in the support it provides in family hostels. Additionally, the Housing Executive is exploring the possibility of establishing a leasing scheme, based on securing additional Housing Benefit. This has the aim of improving the supply of temporary accommodation from private sector landlords and reducing the costs of accommodation per property.

## **The Housing Executive's use of data on the costs of temporary accommodation**

Although the Housing Executive holds a wealth of data on temporary accommodation and its cost, it acknowledges that it could take more useful insight from this data. The Housing Executive reports that it is working with its partners to make full use of its data to drive strategic and operational improvements. Currently, however, there are gaps in the Housing Executive's ability to break down costs by bed, by type and by geographical location.

The Housing Executive also lacks outcome measures for people experiencing homelessness placed into different types of accommodation. Notably, although long term hostels can provide wraparound care, the Housing Executive does not collect data on the outcomes of people who access this support. This data gap presents challenges when assessing how different types of temporary accommodation are providing value for money. Our workshop highlighted that data is not readily available in key areas including: user group; type of accommodation; and length of stay by user group. Additionally, the Housing Executive's systems do not allow it to easily track costs across different geographic areas.

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## Information on rent payments

There are gaps in the information the Housing Executive holds about the rents it is able to collect from people experiencing homelessness placed into temporary accommodation. Temporary accommodation residents have to contribute to rent either from their own income or from Housing Benefit, or both. The Housing Executive is, in many cases, responsible for collecting rent from people experiencing homelessness residing in temporary accommodation. Currently, however, data on this is gathered manually, and not automated, due to the Housing Executive's IT systems. As a result, the Housing Executive is not able to easily state how much income it collects or its level of rent arrears. The Housing Executive acknowledged that very little rent is currently collected from people placed in non-standard types of temporary accommodation. It was also not able to tell us how much rent it is collecting overall, or what its target levels for this are. Additionally, the Housing Executive's systems do not allow it to easily track costs across different geographic areas. The transfer of this system to an IT system is currently being explored.



# Part Three: people experiencing homelessness entering temporary accommodation in Northern Ireland

**Based on questions set out in our value for money framework, we examined the reasons why people experiencing homelessness enter temporary accommodation, and the Housing Executive's understanding of this.**

## Gaps in understanding

During our visit frontline staff acknowledged that there were gaps in their understanding of why people approach them for assistance to avoid or exit homelessness. A particular area in which frontline staff consider there to be a gap in their understanding is around the reasons why some single people, especially males, repeatedly move in and out of temporary accommodation. As we set out above, there has recently been a significant increase in this group, and their repeated entry can cause frontline staff a considerable amount of work when making placements. In both Belfast and Causeway, for example, we heard that it was not uncommon for singles to go in and out of temporary accommodation more than 20 times in a year.

## Placement of people experiencing homelessness into temporary accommodation

Frontline staff we met reported that the majority of placements they make are on a 'first come, first served' basis, instead of allocating accommodation to customers based on that which would best meet their needs. This is in part due to the Housing Executive being required to fulfill its statutory duty, and the availability of temporary accommodation during a period of increasing demand. This is also partly due to a lack of capacity caused by staffing shortages due to long term sickness and an inability to fill vacancies. The Housing Executive suggested that its staffing situation meant that it is necessary to approach matters such as allocations on a daily basis, without being able to plan ahead. The Housing Executive reports that it is seeking to plan ahead, but there are associated difficulties regarding budgets.

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Frontline Housing Executive staff also reported that there is a need for coordination to be improved between different areas in Northern Ireland in securing temporary accommodation placements for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. There is a daily ringaround which distributes a list of vacancies to all staff. However, there is limited availability due to demand. Because of high demand, Housing Executive staff contact providers first thing in the morning, making it more challenging to find placements later in the day. The result is what has been described by staff as the 'fastest finger first' scenario, in which officers from several different Housing Executive offices will simultaneously call the same temporary accommodation suppliers first thing in the morning.

There are also potential gaps in the Housing Executive's understanding of the reasons why people require temporary accommodation on a given day, and what their accommodation circumstances were the previous night

Under this, households it has defined as homeless are permitted to stay with family and friends rather than going into temporary accommodation. They are also permitted to remain on the social housing waiting list with homelessness points while in this situation. In Causeway at the time of our visit in May 2023, 113 households were in temporary accommodation, but a further 1,579 to whom the Housing Executive owed a duty were staying with family and friends, in private rented sector accommodation, or in accommodation defined as not reasonable due, for example, to mobility issues. Although this approach has clear cost benefits when compared to everyone being placed in temporary accommodation, it also means that it is possible to be given a full homelessness duty and associated priority in the allocations system when accommodation with family or friends is available to them. Although this can also be true elsewhere in the UK, the prevalence of this approach in Northern Ireland is far higher than it is in the other UK nations. The Housing Executive is currently implementing changes to the Housing Selection Scheme and Allocations policy which were agreed under the Fundamental Review of Allocations led by the Department for Communities.

The Housing Executive reports that it has introduced a Housing Solutions and Support approach and, since this has been introduced, its staff aim to take a person-centred approach to working with people experiencing homelessness. The Housing Executive also reports that it conducts research into young people's lives and complexity of need.

## Complexity of needs

Frontline staff we met frequently reported that they felt the needs of people presenting as homeless have become increasingly complex in recent years. One Housing Executive officer said that they are operating in a “completely different world” compared with before the Covid-19 pandemic. Housing Executive officers we interviewed suggested that the increase in complex needs can have a significant impact on their workload. In Belfast, for example, one team member reported that more than 80% of their working day was consumed with providing housing to a small number of complex cases. This prevented more strategic, preventative work from being completed.

During our visit we learnt from Housing Executive staff that they consider there to be a lack of suitable accommodation for people with complex needs experiencing homelessness. We heard, for example, that often voluntary sector hostels will not accept them or that such placements end in eviction or abandonment. Especially in more rural areas, some clients with complex needs are perceived as becoming ‘unplaceable,’ as they are no longer welcome in locally available supported accommodation. This can sometimes mean the only option being non-standard accommodation, which is usually unlikely to be suitable for households with support needs.

In its Strategic Action Plan for Temporary Accommodation, the Housing Executive has set out its plans to respond to changing support needs. These include commissioning new dispersed, intensively managed, emergency accommodation and a proposed expansion of the Housing Executive’s Housing First provision. The Housing Executive is also looking to respond to this increased complexity of needs in part by collaborating more effectively with Health and Justice agencies in Northern Ireland. As evidenced by the earlier reference to a commitment to collaboration from the Ministers of Communities, Health and Justice.

## Frontline staff

Staff often reported that they were motivated by “making a difference” in the lives of people affected by homelessness. However, it was also clear from our discussions that there is a risk of frontline staff in the Housing Executive becoming burnt out. Officers reported that this was due to heavy workloads, both caused and exacerbated by high levels of sick leave and recruitment and retention challenges. Staff retention is an issue across the wider public sector at the moment. The burn out risk appeared to be especially acute in the Belfast area, which at the time of our visit was not fully staffed due to long-term sickness and issues in retaining staff.

Frontline staff also reported that, in addition to customers presenting with increased support needs, in recent years there has also been an increase in customer expectations. This is demonstrated by the example of an out of hours emergency telephone service operated by the Executive. The Housing Executive took this over in 2019 from the Health and Social Care Trust and has witnessed a significant increase in demand since, with the number of calls increasing from approximately 50–60 a month four years ago to over 900 calls per month in 2023/24. Participants in our discussions noted that, although many people are aware that this service is for emergencies only, they still choose to use it as a means of accessing non-standard accommodation. The statutory duty placed on the Housing Executive has meant that staff feel they have no other choice than to meet these demands.

The Housing Executive’s leadership is aware of the challenges its frontline staff are facing. In particular, they recognised that additional support needs to be in place for frontline workers who often deal with vulnerable individuals on a daily basis.

# Part Four: the experience of living in temporary accommodation in Northern Ireland

**In our value for money framework, we ask questions around issues including the quality of temporary accommodation and the knowledge held by the Housing Executive on the effectiveness of temporary accommodation. These informed our examination of people's experience of temporary accommodation in Northern Ireland.**

## Experience of Temporary Accommodation

During our visit, we conducted interviews with people experiencing homelessness residing in temporary accommodation in Causeway and in Belfast. Several of the people we met were keen to emphasise how valuable temporary accommodation had been for them. We heard a number of positive stories about temporary accommodation providing people with housing after being evicted from private rented accommodation or leaving overcrowded situations with family members.

We also heard people speak positively about Housing Executive staff based on site at their accommodation. One interviewee, for example, noted that they felt supported by the on site team, who were assisting them in areas including applying for permanent social housing. Another noted how much they welcomed the safety they had felt in their self-contained hostel, enabling them to develop independent skills while awaiting permanent housing.

Nevertheless, not all people experiencing homelessness we encountered in Northern Ireland were positive about their experiences of temporary accommodation. Negative perceptions could be associated with length of stay in temporary accommodation. Some residents of temporary accommodation reported practical challenges including long journey times to schools and not always being permitted to use their own furniture. Others reported that certain aspects of living in the temporary accommodation available in Northern Ireland could be costly – as in Causeway, where residents were struggling with the financial burden of old and inefficient heaters while living on low incomes.

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The Housing Executive has a goal of introducing quality measures for temporary accommodation. However, these are not yet in place. The Housing Executive reports that it inspects the properties at acquisition and these are also subject to an annual review of a range of certificates.

## Time spent in temporary accommodation

People experiencing homelessness we encountered also expressed the concern that the length of time they spent in temporary accommodation meant that it was becoming permanent. Some families we interviewed had been in temporary accommodation for more than two years and had growing families living in visibly overcrowded conditions. The Housing Executive publishes an annual report setting out information such as overall trends, although, it does not publish robust aggregate information about the amount of time that people spend in temporary accommodation, it estimates that families in temporary accommodation can stay in hostels on average for more than 400 days and in properties leased from the private sector for around two years on average.

## Suitability of temporary accommodation

As we set out above, the Housing Executive's allocation of temporary accommodation is often on a "first come, first served" basis. This approach is in part being driven by the scarcity of supply in Northern Ireland, with local areas finding it increasingly challenging to secure single let properties in the private rented sector. The Housing Executive's approach to allocating temporary accommodation creates the risk of accommodation and any associated support not being well matched to people's needs. We heard, for example, that families are often placed into hostels as opposed to single let housing on the basis of what is available on the day. This can mean long periods staying in accommodation with visitor restrictions and CCTV surveillance for families with no identified need for this type of accommodation. There is also a risk that households are sometimes being placed in accommodation with costly support on hand when it is not always required. The Housing Executive has begun work to better understand how its staff are being used in its family hostel accommodation, and the effectiveness of this support.

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## Potential safety issues

The Housing Executive places a number of single people into voluntary sector hostels that may only be able to provide communal living, which is not in accordance with the wishes of a lot of people accessing it. There are concerns that hostels for single people can be potentially high risk environments. As a result of this, voluntary sector hostels can be restrictive about who they will accommodate, and turnover in this accommodation can be high.



# Part Five: moving on from temporary accommodation and homelessness prevention

**Using our value for money framework, we assessed the prevention activity that the Housing Executive is able to conduct with people at risk of homelessness, as well as on how effectively temporary accommodation supports people experiencing homelessness to move into more settled accommodation.**

## Moving on from temporary accommodation

As we set out above, many families at risk of or experiencing homelessness who are placed in temporary accommodation in Northern Ireland can stay there for months if not years. Housing Executive staff expressed concern that aspects of its allocations policy may delay moving on from temporary accommodation, because it allows applicants to limit where they choose to apply for accommodation to areas where properties are in short supply, and because households living in good quality temporary accommodation receive fewer points than others with an FDA who do not accept temporary accommodation and are living in accommodation which is less suitable.

The people experiencing homelessness we spoke to in temporary accommodation were typically aware of the number of housing selection scheme points they had to enable them to move into longer term social housing. The lack of points was frequently reported by people we spoke to as a barrier to leaving temporary accommodation. The Housing Executive is examining how it can enable people experiencing homelessness to move on more swiftly from temporary accommodation. This will include whether it will be possible for the Housing Executive to fulfill its duty to people experiencing homelessness by placing them in properties in the private rented sector.

The Housing Executive is undertaking work to manage expectations and increase individuals' chances of securing a tenancy in the social rented sector. For example, it is encouraging homeless households to look at as many locations as possible in their areas of preference for a tenancy.

In our mapping exercise, the Housing Executive identified that to be more effective at helping people in temporary accommodation move on they would welcome stronger partnership working with other key bodies. Participants suggested, for example, that more work could be done with Housing Associations to encourage them to accept pensioners from temporary accommodation. The mapping exercise also identified that there may be empty properties within Housing Executive stock which could be used for this group. An example of current partnership working which Housing Executive staff considered to be useful was the introduction of a Health and Homelessness Nurse in the Causeway area. We heard from one participant that this 'has opened doors to having relationships with other agencies such as the Trust and Women's Aid'. However, in both areas we visited staff expressed their desire to see more joined up working with health agencies.

## Homelessness Prevention

The Housing Executive's 2022–27 Homelessness Strategy sets out its aims of moving to a greater focus on prevention. Between April 2023 and March 2024, the Housing Executive recorded 81 homelessness preventions – whereas there were almost 17,000 cases of individuals and households presenting as homeless in this period. In reality, Housing Executive staff that we met suggested that a substantial amount of the work its frontline staff are undertaking with people experiencing homelessness is in effect prevention, despite not being recorded as such – and could be built upon. Frontline staff also report that the demands on their time restrict their ability to conduct prevention work and that people experiencing homelessness may present to them at a crisis point, where it is often too late to conduct effective prevention work.

The Housing Executive delivers funding to a number of key services provided by partners in the third sector. These services carry out important intervention work and provide support to a range of individuals and households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. As part of the reporting process, these Outside Agencies report on outcomes in respect of homelessness prevention in line with the P1E definition.

The Housing Executive chairs and facilitates a number of Homelessness Local Area Groups which represent most of the district council areas across Northern Ireland. The groups are attended by a range of local statutory, community and voluntary partners. The groups work closely to create new partnerships, improve collaboration and seek to address issues and challenges in the local area, raise awareness of homelessness with the overall aim to prevent homelessness within the local urban and rural areas in Northern Ireland.

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Housing Executive staff suggested that the budgetary implications of the Northern Ireland political situation impinge upon their ability to conduct effective prevention work. As a result of this, services are only commissioned annually and often late in the financial year, when the overall budget is clear. The budget for 2023–34, for example, was set in late May 2023. The main funding source for prevention is the Homelessness Prevention Fund. This is generally advertised for grant applications as late as in September for a programme that needs to be closed by the end of March the following year. Housing Executive staff we spoke to reported that this means that by the time that prevention projects are up and running they will in effect need to close or find alternative funding. The leadership of the Housing Executive has publicly called for increased investment in prevention, as well as for this to be made a statutory duty.

Types of prevention activity which frontline staff considered effective included negotiating with landlords and family mediation. Housing Executive staff also spoke positively about using Financial Inclusion Managers, who they considered to have been an asset during the cost-of-living crisis. However, in all cases Housing Executive staff reported that there was a need to conduct more prevention work than at present with people at risk of homelessness. They also reported that types of prevention could be challenging to access.

Frontline staff considered there to be a substantial barrier to effective prevention working in that they are unable to access prevention funds of any value themselves. This differs from the approach taken to prevention by local authorities in England, for example. Staff took the view that greater access to funding, combined with their knowledge of people at risk of homelessness, would enable greater and more effective prevention work.

# Annex A

## Overarching value for money question: what is the value for money of the use of temporary accommodation, and how can it be improved?

### Economy question: could temporary accommodation be procured more cheaply? Could it cost less?

- |                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. How much use do you make of temporary accommodation? Has this increased over the past six months? Do you understand the reasons why?                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use of temporary accommodation has increased significantly, including that of “non-standard.”</li><li>• Housing Executive understands the overall reasons for the increase. However, it also acknowledges gaps in understanding e.g. around increase in single male households requiring temporary accommodation.</li></ul>                       |
| 2. Do you have the cost data necessary to make informed and rational spending decisions about temporary accommodation? Where are the gaps? Which partners would you like more cost information from? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• While the Housing Executive may hold the data, it acknowledges that it could use this more efficiently e.g. on types of beds offered to people experiencing homelessness and their relative costs.</li><li>• The savings on TA costs which could be realised by greater expenditure on homelessness prevention are not well quantified.</li></ul> |
| 3. What is the variation in the cost of temporary accommodation between different parts of Northern Ireland?                                                                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• While there is variation in costs between different parts of Northern Ireland, this is an area where more information would be useful.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

**Economy question: could temporary accommodation be procured more cheaply? Could it cost less?**

<p>4. Is there unjustifiable variation in the cost of temporary accommodation? Are the causes of this cost variation understood?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As above, this is an area where more information would be useful. For example: whether the higher cost of voluntary sector hostels compared to single lets is justified by better outcomes for those accommodated.</li> <li>It is clear that non-standard accommodation has a high cost which is not justified by the quality of accommodation or support provided.</li> </ul>
<p>5. Is the impact of this on different regions understood?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As above, this is an area where more data would be useful.</li> </ul>
<p>6. What mechanisms are in place to ensure that use of the least economic means of temporary accommodation (including Bed and Breakfasts and nightly accommodation) is restricted?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Due to current demand levels, the Housing Executive does not consider itself able to restrict the use of “non-standard” accommodation.</li> </ul>
<p>7. Are there strong mechanisms in place for procuring temporary accommodation at the lowest possible price (while safeguarding quality)? Are these transferable? Are there, for example, “should cost” models in place?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Voluntary sector hostels are commissioned by Supporting People, who assess based on value for money of the accommodation and support provided.</li> <li>Officers procuring single let accommodation are required to seek authority from senior officers to go above agreed price thresholds.</li> <li>The Housing Executive is considering adopting a leasing scheme to improve value for money compared to single lets and block booked accommodation.</li> <li>It is unclear how effective these mechanisms are in controlling prices.</li> </ul>

**Economy question: could temporary accommodation be procured more cheaply? Could it cost less?**

<p>8. Are there measures in place to ensure that temporary accommodation is procured economically for the system overall, preventing some areas from restricting their costs by boosting those of neighbouring areas?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As above, there is a block booking scheme, and a central system for procuring short-term accommodation.</li> </ul>
<p>9. Is there evidence of perverse incentives (including through manipulation of Housing Benefit, or of service charges) that cause public money on temporary accommodation to be spent uneconomically? This may include placing people in temporary accommodation for much longer periods than may be necessary.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are suggestions that the current allocations system for social housing could enable lengthy stays in temporary accommodation. Changes to the system are being implemented following the allocations fundamental review.</li> </ul>
<p>10. To what extent are you able to respond to short term homelessness pressures in the most economic means available?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This is currently constrained by lack of availability, leading to increased use of “non-standard” accommodation.</li> </ul>
<p>11. What strategic measures are in place to reduce the long term cost of temporary accommodation?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Although few in place currently, the Housing Executive has identified strategic goals including increasing the use of prevention and potentially introducing a leasing scheme.</li> </ul>

**Efficiency question: could money used for temporary accommodation be better spent?**

<p>1. What data exists on uses of spending on temporary accommodation, across the system? What patterns are there? What gaps are there? What would be useful?</p>	<p>As set out above, gaps in the use the Housing Executive makes of its spending data. Particular gap around rental information and success in rent collection. Clear that overall pattern of spending does not constitute value for money. Better data on savings and potential savings from homelessness prevention would be useful.</p>
<p>2. What strategic measures are in place to reduce poor use of spending on temporary accommodation, across the system?</p>	<p>Little currently, although Housing Executive is seeking to increase prevention activity</p>
<p>3. What are the standards for temporary accommodation? Are they monitored, and what action is taken in response?</p>	<p>Standards for single lets, but otherwise no quality measures in place at present, although Housing Executive is planning to introduce them.</p>

**Effectiveness question: How effectively is temporary accommodation being used?**

<p>1. Are you able to conduct as much prevention activity as you consider to be likely to be effective?</p>	<p>Housing Executive frontline staff acknowledge that they would like to conduct more prevention, and its leadership is seeking to increase this.</p>
<p>2. What information do you hold on the use and impact of spending on temporary accommodation and prevention? Where are the gaps? What would be useful?</p>	<p>The Housing Executive does not currently collect information on the effectiveness of types of temporary accommodation, such as hostels, but is conducting research in this area. There is a disconnect between the amount of recorded prevention and the work that frontline staff conduct.</p>

**Effectiveness question: How effectively is temporary accommodation being used?**

<p>3. How do you know that the prevention activity that you are conducting is effective? Which partners would you like more information from?</p>	<p>The Housing Executive collects some information on its commissioned prevention work, but does appear to record substantial information on its prevention work overall.</p> <p>Frontline staff would like more information from health bodies.</p>
<p>4. What long term horizon scanning is being done on the effective use of temporary accommodation?</p>	<p>Substantial work in the past, and work such as the Housing Executive’s strategy lays the ground for this.</p>
<p>5. What quality measures are there in place across the system for temporary accommodation?</p>	<p>As above, none yet, but the Housing Executive plans to introduce them.</p>
<p>6. What knowledge exists on the long term impact of being in temporary accommodation on costs related to key life chances, such as in educational and employment outcomes?</p>	<p>As above, the Housing Executive does not currently collect substantial information here, but work such as its review of hostel staffing could provide a useful start.</p>
<p>7. What knowledge exists of how temporary accommodation can be most effectively used to facilitate moving onto more settled accommodation?</p>	<p>This is an area which the Housing Executive is examining with its fundamental review of allocations.</p> <p>There is currently little or no tracking of outcomes for those who leave temporary accommodation before the Housing Executive’s duty to them ends.</p>



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