JL Justlife

Discovering Solutions to Unsupported Temporary Accommodation in London:

ARE TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION BOARDS FEASIBLE?

A HACKNEY CASE STUDY

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Trust for London
Tackling poverty and inequality

INTRODUCTION

This short report presents the findings of a project whose aim was to test and evaluate Temporary Accommodation Boards (TABs) as a vehicle for developing solutions for unsupported temporary accommodation (UTA) in London. TABs are the main recommendation of research published by Justlife and the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) North into how UTA affected the health and wellbeing of residents. The research uncovered a bleak reality facing most residents of UTA in which households would be placed for an unknown and unspecified amount of time and where over 50 per cent reported no working locks on their doors. The lack of safety and poor conditions in the accommodation fed into deteriorating mental and physical health of residents stuck in UTA. TABs were recommended as a solution to these challenges, suggesting that cross-sector collaborative working was central to addressing any existing issues within this accommodation (Rose and Davies 2014; Rose, Davies and Maciver 2016; Maciver, et al 2016). TABs have proven successful in Brighton and Manchester. However, the more complex nature of homelessness and temporary accommodation in London creates an environment unique to anywhere else in the country. In order to assess the feasibility of TABs in London, this project commenced in January 2018 with three main goals:

1 *Learn of the current UTA situation in specified London Boroughs by engaging with relevant stakeholders.*

2 *Host a TAB workshop with relevant stakeholders to collectively understand the problems and to collaboratively develop solutions for UTA.*

3 *Evaluate the process to assess the feasibility of TABs as a short-term solution to the challenges of UTA in London.*

The initial focus of this study was in the London Boroughs of Tower Hamlets and Hackney. However as we commenced our stakeholder engagement, Hackney emerged as the natural choice within which to conduct this project because the majority of stakeholders were from Hackney.

There is often confusion regarding what is temporary accommodation and what is unsupported temporary accommodation. UTA is defined as private rented accommodation in which residents have no permanent residency status and limited access to local authority support to secure settled accommodation. By this definition, some emergency and temporary accommodation used by local authorities may also be considered UTA. Those engaged in this study identified the following accommodation as UTA in Hackney: hostels, hotels, Bed & Breakfasts (B&Bs), Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs), guesthouses and properties planned for demolition.

Many of the identified challenges identified in Hackney in the accommodation listed above exist in temporary accommodation used by the local authority. Therefore, this report uses the term 'temporary accommodation' rather than 'unsupported temporary accommodation' throughout. There is a note in the body of this report explaining the difference and crossover between the two.

This report presents the findings of the project by first exploring the background of TABs and summarising the specific London context as a foundation before, discussing the findings of the Hackney case study and finally, presenting recommendations developed as a result of our learning.

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TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION BOARDS AS A VEHICLE FOR CHANGE

TABs were first recommended as part of in-depth qualitative research with 45 residents of unsupported temporary accommodation between 2013-2016. This research, conducted by Justlife and IPPR North, explored the impact of UTA on the health and wellbeing of its residents and uncovered a troubling reality for those living in UTA. Of the 45 in-depth interviews conducted, we discovered that 23 individuals did not have working locks on their doors, 38 reported problematic drug and alcohol use in the properties, 27 felt any maintenance issues reported to the landlord were not addressed, 38 reported deteriorating mental health, 21 reported deteriorating physical health and 39 felt they had no control over their lives (Maciver et al, 2016). TABs, therefore, were developed after research participants expressed a feeling that many systems already existed to help residents, but that these systems often did not collaborate, leading to disjointed communication, a general lack of effective support and the negative experiences within the accommodation. TABs first appeared as a solution to these disjointed systems in *Nowhere Fast: The journey in and out of unsupported temporary accommodation* (Jan 2016), and were described as:

> *'New formal, local bodies…established to bring together the activities of neighbouring housing authorities, public services and the homeless sector and who would 'gather, maintain and monitor information about local bedspaces and individuals living in them, to inform referrals and signposting towards appropriate accommodation.'* p3

Since this recommendation was first made, two TABs have been established—Manchester (in 2016) and Brighton (in 2017). These activities have improved our understanding of how to practically implement a TAB in order to be most effective.

Emerging understanding and the working model suggests equal collaboration is key to the activities of a local TAB. This equal collaboration leads to: strong cross-sector partnerships between stakeholders, a common understanding of the problem in local areas, and also a collective identification and development of solutions. The success of this collaboration is built on trust, collective ownership and transparent communication between a variety of typically disparate stakeholders—including private landlords, residents, voluntary community sector organisations and local authorities. A culture of blame is not tolerated, which is critical when innovating change for complex social problems.

Positive results from TABs are already emerging. Working in this way has brought about positive change in both Manchester and Brighton. Manchester, for example, co-produced a strategy for improving UTA, with both residents and landlords that will be included in the wider Homelessness Strategy for the city and is informing better coordinated practice, such as safer reporting mechanisms to Environmental Health when residents have concerns over conditions. In Brighton, there has been a two per cent reduction in evictions from emergency accommodation (5% to 3%) in the past twelve months, both this reduction and the reduction in complaints about conditions of the emergency accommodation have been attributed to the collaborative work of the local TAB.

Strong collaboration built on trust and not on blame, provides an avenue for creating change in complex circumstances. TABs, we believe, have the potential to bring about change in the London context which faces more acute problems than any other area in England.

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Temporary Accommodation and Unsupported Temporary Accommodation

The short-term housing market is confusing to understand due to the variety of accommodation it represents. This variety includes, but is not limited too, Temporary Accommodation run by private landlords, Emergency Accommodation, Bed & Breakfasts, Private Hostels, Guest Houses or short-stay Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). The short-term housing often understood as officially recognised and commissioned temporary accommodation is found in this list. However accommodation also used as temporary housing outside of the 'official' system, known as unsupported temporary accommodation, is also in this list. The reality is the line between what is 'official' temporary and what is unsupported temporary accommodation is often blurred, sometimes so blurred that the same property could be considered both because it houses those who are owed a legal rehousing duty by the local authority and those who are not.

The definition of unsupported temporary accommodation—private, short-stay accommodation in which there is no permanent residency status and limited access to local authority support to access settled accommodation—increasingly fits both those who find themselves outside the homelessness priority system as well as those within it. In addition, each local authority area may understand and call the accommodation used within local homeless provision by different names, adding to potential confusion and crossover between temporary and unsupported temporary accommodation.

TABs were developed in response to:

1. Residents of unsupported temporary accommodation feeling hidden and forgotten without support in an impersonal homelessness system. TABs aimed to ensure they were no longer hidden and had access to the support needed, and,
2. Professionals across health, public and voluntary services, landlords and others not having a clear framework or department to look to for responsibility.

Collective responsibility was thus established through the TABs.

These experiences are not limited to those outside the system. The creation of TABs in both Brighton, where the TAB focuses on local authority emergency accommodation, and Manchester, where the TAB focuses on Bed & Breakfasts outside the homelessness system—shows the ability of TABs to address a variety of short-term housing options.

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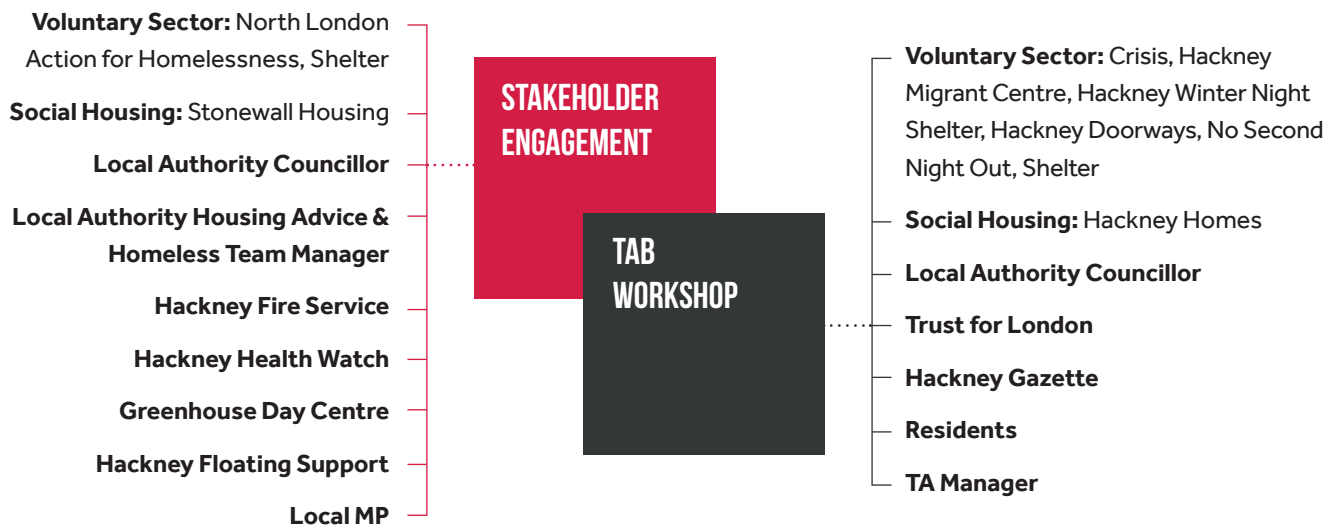
SUMMARY OF THE LONDON CONTEXT

Homeless households, if owed a housing duty by local authorities, are placed into temporary housing until settled accommodation can be secured. Time spent in temporary housing is intended to be short-term, as part of a pathway to a settled home. In recent years, however, the use of temporary housing has increased exponentially. There were 79,000 households in temporary accommodation at the conclusion of 2017, which is approximately 61 per cent higher than 2011 (Fitzpatrick et al 2018). A continuation of the current trend would see temporary accommodation numbers hit 100,000 nationwide by 2020 (Fitzpatrick et al 2018). Even more worrying, this number does not include all homeless households in unsupported temporary accommodation, the majority of whom are not counted in statistics and could reach approximately 51,500 in England (Maciver 2018). It is likely that the most significant concentration of UTA populations are in London boroughs (Maciver 2018).

London has felt this increase most acutely, with 69 per cent of the entire population of temporary accommodation housed in the capital (MHCLG 2018). In London alone, there was a 77 per cent increase in homelessness acceptances between 2010-2014 (Rugg 2016). The demand for temporary accommodation in London has decreased the supply of suitable properties that can be used as temporary accommodation, and the lack of suitable re-housing resources suggests local authorities are struggling to move people into settled accommodation (Crisis 2018). The culmination of these factors has led to a situation where homeless families and individuals live for years in unsuitable accommodation with limited choices and support. Specifically in Hackney, local authority stakeholders shared that there are approximately 3,000 households in temporary accommodation, 13,000 people on the social housing waiting list and only 1,200 lets coming available each year – many have little or no option but to be stuck in short-term housing for a very long time. With solutions such as increased availability of affordable and social housing seemingly a long way off, Temporary Accommodation Boards could provide a vehicle for developing effective solutions to immediate temporary accommodation challenges in London, enabling stays to be as safe, healthy and as short as possible.

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Hackney emerged as the natural choice in which to test the feasibility of TABs in London due to the initial contacts and the subsequent relationships developed. During the course of the project, we spoke with 25 different individuals who had some involvement with temporary accommodation, 22 of which remained engaged throughout the project. These 22 were from 15 different organisations in addition to two residents and one manager of a local temporary accommodation property. The diagram below shows the different organisations and services who have remained engaged in the overall project, including those who attended the TAB workshop:

Voluntary Sector: North London Action for Homelessness, Shelter

Social Housing: Stonewall Housing

Local Authority Councillor

Local Authority Housing Advice & Homeless Team Manager

Hackney Fire Service

Hackney Health Watch

Greenhouse Day Centre

Hackney Floating Support

Local MP

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

TAB WORKSHOP

Voluntary Sector: Crisis, Hackney Migrant Centre, Hackney Winter Night Shelter, Hackney Doorways, No Second Night Out, Shelter

Social Housing: Hackney Homes

Local Authority Councillor

Trust for London

Hackney Gazette

Residents

TA Manager

Through engagement with the above stakeholders, UTA in Hackney was defined as the following: hostels, hotels, Bed and Breakfasts, HMOs, guesthouses and properties planned for demolition. This was collectively decided responding to the wider definition of UTA, 'private accommodation in which households have no permanent residency status and limited access to local authority support to secure settled accommodation' (Rose and Davies 2013). In addition to this definition, stakeholders identified that those living in this accommodation in Hackney are typically families or adults with multiple and complex needs. Pathways into the accommodation are either through the local authority once a homeless application has been made or through a support agency such as No First Night Out, social services or probation. Options for move-on were identified as limited and those involved in this project said they included PRS, social housing or supported accommodation – otherwise individuals typically end up back on the streets, in prison or on a mental health ward.

Our activities to test the feasibility of a TAB in Hackney followed a stepped process, which focused on developing the foundation of the three key elements of collaboration that are necessary for its success:

• a common understanding of the problem
• strong cross-sector relationships,
• collective identification and development of solutions.

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These activities culminated in a Temporary Accommodation Board Workshop in March 2018, the aim of which was to develop these key elements further. The following section is organised into these three elements to create a clearer understanding of what we discovered about the feasibility of a TAB in Hackney.

Common understanding of the problem

It is important within a TAB that stakeholders are able to arrive at a common understanding of the problem as a foundation from which to develop agreed solutions. The main problem identified in Hackney during initial stakeholder engagement and the TAB workshop was the 'perfect storm'-like crisis facing temporary accommodation. There is a desperate need to find solutions to situations beyond anyone's control, i.e. the benefit cap, local housing allowance and the reality that people are living for years in the accommodation with little support. Although a very challenging problem, it is important within the culture of a TAB that stakeholders form an agenda based on a common understanding of the problem as this provides the foundation from which the on-going work of the TAB will be developed.

In addition to this 'big picture' problem – a lack of communication was identified as a specific challenge in Hackney. For example, conversations with residents highlighted that although TA Managers should not charge for key deposits, that when they do, residents did not know if or how they should report this. Improved communication channels between residents, local authorities and TA Managers could lead to the implementation of collectively developed procedures for key deposits as well as other areas such as tenancy agreements, raising complaints, evictions, which will satisfy all parties. As mentioned above, if communication channels were improved and transparent communication between stakeholders was enacted through a vehicle such as a TAB, collectively developed solutions will be easier to implement.

Additional Issues Identified

- High costs (service charges and other costs) to residents, i.e. key deposits, laundry, Wi-Fi, storage, furniture, social cost to visit friends and family as no visitors allowed
- Inconsistent conditions – poor quality upkeep/maintenance, poor living environment (smoking, drugs, alcohol), infestations (rats, mice, cockroaches), issues with other tenants (noise, mixture of needs – families, ex-offenders, vulnerable, complex needs, drug and alcohol dependency, mental health issues)
- Length of stay
- Insecurity of tenure
- Safe routes making/raising complaints for residents without worrying about eviction
- Out of borough placements
- Not enough support for people with multiple complex needs
- Easily evicted then barred from future temporary accommodation or being owed a statutory rehousing duty
- More research needed on UTA

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Strong cross-sector relationships

Many examples of strong cross-sector relationships already exist in Hackney. Our aim was to discover these examples in order to identify existing partnerships amongst the typical stakeholders of UTA – local authority, landlords, residents, voluntary and community sector, health, etc – as well as determining where the gaps were. The existing cross-sector partnerships include examples such as The Greenhouse Centre that brings together the local authority, health and voluntary support services, and Shelter's advice services in the borough where residents and support services come together. Partnerships also exist within other collaborations within the borough, specifically through the activities of Healthwatch Hackney – who are pulling together relevant stakeholders with regards to improving health outcomes in temporary accommodation and recently published a report to this effect at the start of this year (Healthwatch Hackney 2018) – and the local authority's Homeless Partnership Board, which includes representatives from the local authority, voluntary sector services and health.

Gaps, however, were identified in cross-sector relationships, specifically due to a lack of communication between key stakeholders of the accommodation in Hackney:

• between the local authority and voluntary support services and residents
• between TA Managers and voluntary support services.

From our activities it became apparent that some TA Managers did not know what support was available for their residents. One manager specifically said they were unaware of what support Shelter could offer their residents, particularly the most vulnerable ones. In addition to this, residents involved in this project felt there was a lack of effective communication between the local authority and themselves. These residents specifically mentioned a lack of information on the homelessness process, what to expect when entering their accommodation and what support was available.

Harnessing the positive potential of these cross-sector relationships is key to success within a local TAB. The current barriers to lack of communication seem to stem from a lack of trust between stakeholders, which, if left unaddressed, will hinder the opportunity to create a new cross-sector collaborative environment whose collective aim is to improve the overall experiences of the accommodation.

Collective identification and development of solutions

Once common agreement on the problem is reached, the collective development of solutions can begin. The stakeholders engaged in this project worked together in the TAB workshop to identify and develop solutions to the problems highlighted in the first part of this section. This is a key process to occur in order for a TAB to be successful because each stakeholder's voice and experience should be considered equally in solution development, including both residents and landlords of the accommodation. The collectively developed solutions from the TAB workshop were as follows:

Create welcome pack/homeless handbook for residents
• Include information on the homelessness application, what to expect, where to go for help/advocacy, residents' rights, what support is available in the local area

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End 'non-permitted' upfront costs e.g. key deposits
- Increase staff knowledge (council, referral agencies, TA staff) around service charges and agreed costs in TA
- Create a central reporting system to Local Authority for when extra charges occur

Increase support available and create more supportive environment
- Train existing referral and TA staff to ensure they know and communicate the homelessness application process, what to expect and where to go for support (agencies, charities)
- Create a peer support group
- Create more public awareness of UTA and encourage more community groups, businesses and faith sectors to help
- Link in with single homeless forum

Councils should do more checks to increase standards - even doing one more check a year will increase the standards.

Encourage standard facilities in all accommodation
- Laundry, Wi-Fi, cooking

These potential solutions were developed collectively between a group of relevant stakeholders of Hackney's TA, but in order for these to be enacted, it is important that these stakeholders action these solutions together. A key element of the TABs is that each stakeholder contributes to developing and implementing the solutions. This is something that will be addressed at the next TAB meeting in order to continue to create sustainable change within Hackney.

Conclusion

The key to a successful TAB requires the three elements of collaboration examined above: strong cross-sector relationship, a common understanding of the problem and also collectively identified and developed solutions. It was evident through many existing examples of collaboration, that these are achievable in Hackney. The potential effectiveness of a TAB in Hackney would grow with the inclusion of additional stakeholders who, for various reasons, were not able to be a part of the workshop held—i.e. health representatives, probation services and a greater variety of local authority representatives. Nonetheless, the overall information gleaned from the process so far and willingness to continue being involved in a TAB from existing stakeholders suggests TABs are feasible in London boroughs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This project reinforced existing learning and practices already developed around TABs outlined in previous reports and in the above sections. However, the activities in Hackney did result in the following three 'soft' recommendations. These are recommendations we believe might specifically help the feasibility for establishing TABs more widely across London.

1 **Local collaborative bodies should be called 'Temporary Accommodation Action Groups' (TAAGs) rather than Temporary Accommodation Boards (TABs)**
Conversations with stakeholders in Hackney highlighted confusion around TABs and what their role within a wider homelessness system was due to the perception of 'board' as a 'formal governance board,' assuming a TAB would oversee the all work of temporary accommodation in a local area. Although, some local authorities may find this type of board useful, we believe TABs are most effective when collaborating around immediate critical issues of temporary and unsupported temporary accommodation. Therefore, Temporary Accommodation Action Group better captures the essence of the group and its role to feed into existing strategic boards within localities as well as providing a vehicle for creating active change. Both TABs in Manchester and Brighton have opted to use 'action group' rather than 'board' with them each called Unsupported Temporary Accommodation Action Group and Temporary Accommodation Action Group, respectively.

2 **From the outset, TABs or TAAGs should develop a clear common understanding of the problem being addressed**
Each local authority area has particular problems specific to their context, which may vary compared to other local authority areas. It is important to collectively identify which problems are the most acute in either temporary or unsupported temporary accommodation so each stakeholder is clear about what exactly is being discussed and how it needs to be addressed. This will also ensure that each stakeholder will be able to express the problem and identify whether or not there is duplication occurring in any other work within the local authorities. This is especially important considering the confusion that surrounds the variety within short-term housing markets.

3 **TABs or TAAGs should aim to improve cross-sector communication and communication between professionals and tenants in local areas, specifically in regards to managing expectations**
The greatest challenge identified in Hackney was a lack of communication. Residents spoken with as part of this project felt a lack of awareness regarding what to expect from the accommodation, how long their stay may be and what options (if any) exist for them. This inevitably leads to frustration and confusion on behalf of residents and some support services. Often, many may not understand the 'perfect storm' of challenges faced by local authorities in London that leave many local authorities with very few options. Improved communication and understanding between all stakeholders could alleviate some of these frustrations, and target the desire to make change at the parts of the system that can be influenced by the unified voice of stakeholders on the TAB.

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CONCLUSION

This brief project conducted in Hackney to test and evaluate the potential effectiveness of TABs or TAAGs in London has been successful thus far. The collaboration achieved by engaged stakeholders showed the potential held in a TAB/TAAG, a potential strengthened by the desire by many to continue being involved. Experiences in Hackney reinforced much of the learning developed from Brighton and Manchester suggesting the wide-reaching effectiveness of TABs/TAAGs in bringing disparate stakeholders together in the hopes of creating change for those stuck in UTA. TABs/TAAGs may not be able to unlock all challenges presented by temporary and unsupported temporary accommodation, however their ability to give agency to all stakeholders of the accommodation, including residents and landlords in a safe, solution-focused environment does provide an opportunity to improve the impact of unsupported temporary accommodation on those stuck living in it, often for a time that is no longer considered 'temporary.'

Justlife is committed to continuing the work started in Hackney to further evaluate the effectiveness of the TAB and explore it as an option in additional London boroughs.

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