

General Election 2024

Act now to protect children from harmful impact of living in temporary accommodation

Why do children in Leicester need your support now?



Across England, there has been an alarming rise in the number of homeless families accessing temporary accommodation. 142,490 children were recorded to be living in temporary accommodation in England at the end of September 2023. The number of children in temporary accommodation has increased by 14% (16,960 children) since September 2022 and is the highest number since records began (June 2004).¹

These families, and in particular children, are at a severe disadvantage, their future uncertain and at risk of significant disruption to their education and development.

In the past, Leicester City Council has been very successful in ensuring that homeless families are not placed in temporary accommodation. However, the unprecedented increase in homelessness has made this increasingly difficult. As of 22nd April 2024, there were 491 families living in emergency accommodation in the city, around 50% of whom are housed in B&Bs or hotels.² This figure does not include the families placed in the city by other local authorities and agencies.

For 10 years, Action Homeless has provided additional support to children living in one of its temporary accommodation projects through a Children in Need funded initiative called Building Blocks. Our experience of working with these children, shows that their lives are full of uncertainty as they do not know how long they will be living in temporary accommodation or where they will be resettled. Their sense of home is completely disrupted in the formative stage of their life, and it is widely acknowledged that this makes them more likely to experience homelessness again in the future. Their education is often impacted and sometimes put on hold until they can be placed in a new school or pre-school setting due to their frequent changing of address. Action Homeless also knows that children who have been homeless are much more likely to become homeless in adulthood. We have seen this

¹ DLUHC, Live tables on homelessness, Statutory Homelessness Live Tables, Table TA1.

² Leicester City Council presentation, Pathways out of Homelessness (Leicester's Homelessness Charter), 1st May 2024

first hand as we've supported adults who lived in our temporary accommodation with their parent as a child.

Practically, temporary accommodation often means that children are living in one bedroom with their parent/s and siblings, sometimes with very limited or no cooking facilities. This is particularly challenging for school age children as they have very little space of their own to unwind or to complete homework without interruption. Establishing healthy sleep routines is very difficult given the space constraints and this is detrimental to children's wellbeing.

As well as homelessness, children's lives are also commonly impacted by poverty, poor parental mental health and trauma. The children whom we've worked with typically exhibit challenging behaviours, developmental delays, low self-esteem and confidence, extreme separation anxiety and strained relationships with their parent.

All of this is compounded by the fact that families, due to their circumstances, face additional challenges in accessing support or facilities in the local community. This, coupled with the lack of familial financial resource, means that children miss out on opportunities to play, take part in age-appropriate activities or make new friends.

As an organisation, Action Homeless is extremely concerned about the welfare of children and parents living in temporary accommodation in our city. Given the wider housing crisis that exists in Leicester, the increasing numbers of children having to live in temporary accommodation is an issue which is unlikely to be resolved in the near future. The impact of this will be felt wider and likely mean that agencies across Leicester will have to deal with the consequences of this crisis with the impact being felt in schools, social care and health services.

What can be done to protect these children and to minimise the harmful effects of living in temporary accommodation?

The families and children living in temporary accommodation are readily identifiable, having been housed by local authorities, and therefore are easy to locate and approach. Many are already being supported by statutory agencies, however additional support could be provided by other partners to help mitigate some of the impacts of living in temporary accommodation, such as:

- Ensuring that families have access to food and other items that are appropriate to their living conditions, e.g. nutritious ready meals and access to fruits and vegetables.
- Items that might help them manage in their accommodation, e.g. aids to encourage safe sleeping such as cots, age appropriate bedding and baby products which are fit for small spaces e.g. sterilisation equipment
- Support to get children into childcare or schools that are accessible from their accommodation and help to get practical items such as uniforms and stationery
- Priority access to breakfast and aftercare clubs with particular engagement on how we support families through the school holidays, ensuring they are able to access holiday activities.
- Ensuring they have emotional and practical support and access to family centres.
- Money and budgeting support.
- In the longer term, access to psychological and informed support for parents and children, similar to the Building Blocks initiative we have run.

As a City, we must do all we can to alleviate the devastating impact of homelessness on their young lives and also prevent a future generation from being locked into a cycle of homelessness.

How can you help as a Prospective Parliamentary Candidate?

As a parliamentary candidate, you can help us to improve the lives of families affected by homelessness by getting to know more about the challenges that children in your constituency area face. At this stage, we'd like to invite you to meet with us and to hear directly from the families who are impacted to understand more about the current situation in Leicester. Going forward, we're appealing to you to be part of the solution which will require committed cross party and cross departmental partnership working. Your support could mean that we are able to break the cycle of homelessness for some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children in our community.

We know that there will be huge pressures on your time in the run up to the election, and are happy to facilitate an online meeting, phone call or project visit. Please contact Eilidh Stringer on 0116 2211851 or by email at eilidhstringer@actionhomeless.org.uk to organise next steps and a further conversation.