

No Recourse to Public Funds and Accommodation: The Reality People Face

Wednesday 23 November 2022 14:00-15:30

In person

- Kate Osamor MP (Chair)
- Baroness Ruth Lister
- Stephen Timms MP
- Alison Thewliss MP
- Asfah Kosir (Project 17)
- Sam Pratt (Shared Health Foundation)

Via Zoom

- Alex Procter (Justlife)
- Angie Ouattara (Shared Health Foundation)
- Francisca (United Impact)
- Joy (United Impact)
- Angie Ouattara (Shared Health Foundation)
- Justina Kamara (Manchester City Council)
- William Flack (Solicitor)
- Helen Flynn (Just Fair)
- Oliver Daly (Office of Kate Osamor MP)
- Abi Brunswick (Project 17)
- Audrey Broome (Home4U)
- Bola (United Impact)
- Charlie Berry (Shelter)
- Christine Benson
- Deborah Afflu
- Elisa
- Elizabeth A Abbey
- Faith

- Gillian Cowell
- Hannah (Project 17)
- Hannah Keilloh (CIH)
- Isha Hussain
- Joe Perry (Office of Tony Lloyd MP)
- John Perry
- Josie Hicklin
- Jude Lancet
- Karen Lawrinson
- Leeza Ah-Wan
- Linda
- Mara Junge
- Mary
- Mary Carter
- Matteo Besana (NRPF Network)
- Natalie Sproat
- Natalie Wells Russell
- Oluwatosin (Project 17)
- Owoade Abimbola
- Pearl
- Pouneh (ASIRT)
- Rahni (Imkaan)
- Rebecca Jacques (UNICEF UK)
- Rosalina Frazer
- Sam
- Sharon
- Sharon Palmer
- Sophie Colebourne
- Sophie Lloyd
- Tony Bone
- Carla
- Leila Barker

Apologies

- Alex Firth (Just Fair) – see Alex's report ["I Want Us to Live Like Humans Again" Families in Temporary Accommodation in London, UK](#)

1. Welcome and Introductions

Kate Osamor MP, Chair of the APPG on NRPF

Welcomed attendees to the event, highlighted that impact of NRPF still not widely understood and thanked and welcomed speakers.

2. Alex Procter, Research and Policy Coordinator, Justlife

Working with people in temporary accommodation often they are experiencing a legacy of trauma of the NRPF system. Less likely to access support as don't have faith in systems. As an organisation working with these people, and across the TA focused sector don't always feel they have the knowledge to support the complexity of people's needs following NRPF systemic trauma. Time and listening needed to help people with their needs.

Important various sectors working with those subject to temporary accommodation join up and learn from each other. Great similarities between 2 APPGs today in terms of thinking and learning – rich ground to share information to improve people's experiences and to ask for systems change.

Important to say not an expert – here to learn.

Chair's response

Important to have event, highlight issues and in particular the impact on children, NRPF negatively impacts across people's lives – potential for lots of joint working amongst APPGs.

3. Angie Ouattara - Maternal Health Lead for Shared Health Foundation

Midwife for 20 years in Salford before joining Shared Health Foundation. Work with families placed in temporary accommodation for a year, until things are more stabilised. Homelessness journey is an adverse childhood experience – disrupts many areas of life including education, healthcare appointments. Seeing a whole generation of sons and daughters being raised in temporary accommodation – huge impact on children and women of child bearing age. Share 3 case studies today.

Families who have papers- once they get papers they are placed back at the start of their journey re temporary accommodation as they change systems. These tend to be large families and journey can take years. The change of system means a move of accommodation. One family, child has sickle cell – move of systems meant move of GP- but child needed regular prescriptions. Went from a house to a 2 bed with no cooking facilities. Family trying to get stability, but everything impacted including education.

Project like a baby bank for families in crisis – it's a basic response. Women coming to UK while pregnant on visitor visa, being promised certain future by partners. But if relationship breaks down, left in precarious position. One example, woman travelled to UK while pregnant to be with partner, discovered he had whole other family – after birth of baby presented with hospital bill. Baby is 4 weeks old – what is their future? What is impact on mother's mental health? Future she planned for is gone. Also what about things like baby's immunisation schedule?

When they are subject to NRPF – living in a hotel with a baby where you need to move every few days is tough. How do you link in with social services? Families unable to buy safety equipment eg gates. Some cot and maternal deaths linked to these families we are talking about.

4. 'Francisca' - Lived Experience United Impact member

Went to council for help for 2 years, kept being told to go back to ex-partner as this was the only way they would support her. But had to think of children's safety. Spent 2 years in one bed flat on fifth floor, no lift. With 2 children under 5 developed back pain from going up and down stairs. Due to access issues they spent most of their time in the flat. Very hard for children as flat so small. There was damp, the bath was leaking but they wouldn't fix it. There was mould and it smelt bad – daughter constantly unwell. Eventually floor caved in as they wouldn't fix it. Thermostat on water heater broken, not fixed for months, very dangerous as children could burn hands while washing them.

5. 'Joy'- Lived Experience United Impact member

Following MP speaking to council, assessment was done and family put in a hotel. Didn't give them any breakfast -got Tesco vouchers. Put whole family in one room. A lot of different people living in hotel. When social worker came, told wasn't getting accommodation and would have to go back to husband. New accommodation very far away – had to wake kids early for 2.5 hour journey for school. Oyster card they were given nearly expired. Son didn't want to change school, but it was so cold (around December time) so changed school to closer one. Son cried every day – told new teacher he wanted to go back and no one would play with him. School counsellor saw him every Friday.

Then living with 6 families, sharing same toilet, have 2 rooms to selves. So son uses potty inside room. When complained was told if they didn't want accommodation they would take children from her to a foster home.

6. Justina Kamara - NRPF Manager at Manchester City Council

Lack of choice of accommodation biggest thing. People look at those with NRPF almost as an underclass – saying this as someone who has experienced immigration process. Tend to use B and Bs a lot as can't access stand alone accommodation. Private providers don't like being accessed for short term – eg destitute domestic violence applicant takes 3 weeks for Home Office to sort – private providers feel they wouldn't benefit.

Issues with B and Bs mentioned by others – though all B and Bs they use provide breakfast, but only one has cooking facilities. Distance from schools/GPs a big issue – but do grant subsistence to help with this. Difficulty of using hotels is people complaining about noise of families, but hard for children to find somewhere to play, so have to stay in hotel rooms. Try to keep people in B and Bs for as short as possible and move to stand alone accommodation ASAP.

Have to inspect properties before putting people in them, but issues can happen down the line eg mould. Providers sometimes try to paper over this then question is whether we move the family in this case or keep trying to work with providers?

Manchester City council has scheme in place where if child is so many miles from school they get a free bus pass – but hit and miss as to whether they get them.

Refuges good option in that they tend to provide wide scope of support eg benefits and immigration, but often for people who they know will eventually get their papers. Trying to get a refuge place is very difficult.

Housing Association – there is provision for people with NRPF to access HA - but have to be people not here illegally or not overstaying – tend not to get many of these.

A lot of families face instability – many referrals come from midwives. For those with British children can help more, but all go through instability eg changing schools. A lot of children suffer in terms of their wellbeing, including disabled children who need to be in particular school. Also if people have immersed themselves in the community, moving means losing support network – or potentially moving away from the parent the children don't normally live with. Would like more access to Housing Associations and refuges.

Manchester Homelessness Charter seeks to end use of B and Bs – can see senior managers working towards this. Working on development of medium term strategy.

7. William Flack – Solicitor

Behaviour of London authorities has been appalling, witnessed routine and casual cruelty. All housing provision restricted due to limited supply, so lots of gatekeeping occurs. Housing that is available is of poor quality – when it comes to those with NRPF problem is multiplied – in part fault of message of Central Government about creating a Hostile Environment.

5 years ago the Lewisham 'Robust Front Door' treated people with extremely hostile process. Invited embedded Border Force staff to sit in on meetings for no reason other than intimidation. Children being distressed by how social workers were shouting at their parents. Cases where social workers would contact violent ex-partners and encourage them to take the children in full knowledge of the reasons for the relationship breakdown.

Applicants were asked to provide bank statements to try to prove they had access to funds – any income treated as 'tip of the iceberg' and would have to be explained in detail. Any spending eg Marks and Spencer's/taking child for meal in restaurant for birthday seen as evidence of extravagance. As solicitor has to spend time rebutting all of this before taking judicial review. Solicitors helping migrant families would be routinely attacked and accused of dishonesty. Often could only get accommodation for families by taking legal action. Everyone involved exhausted by getting any accommodation – little hope that those doing assessments would be sympathetic and quality of accommodation would be good. Good idea would be to get people access to immigration advice so they could have NRPF condition lifted.

Does seem to be getting a bit better though, nowadays most errors due to ignorance rather than deliberate abuse of the system by council staff, but fairly sure practices still happening elsewhere.

8. Conclusion

Following brief question and answer session, Kate Osamor thanked all the speakers and attendees and closed the meeting.