

Housing and Homelessness:

The BASW Position Statement
& Recommendations



BASW

The professional association for
social work and social workers

FOREWORD

The provision of suitable, affordable housing plays a vital role in supporting individuals and families, it is thus of central importance to social work and social workers. Social work looks at the needs of the whole person, and housing is part of meeting those needs. Suitable, affordable housing is crucial to effective support and ensuring everyone can be a participating member of society: for example, in terms of adult social care, care leavers, people with mental health problems or families in need.

However, the UK has a major housing crisis.



The housing crisis has a direct impact on many of the people who use social work services including children and families, Disabled people, older people, refugees, those destitute through NRPF and care leavers. Further, the housing crisis disproportionately affects people from a range of Black and other Ethnic Minority backgrounds. Nor is the housing crisis something 'out there'. Many social workers are directly affected by the housing crisis too. This Position Statement therefore connects how social work service users and social workers are both impacted by the housing crisis, albeit to often different extents.

This Statement addresses two distinct audiences: the Government and the social work profession. It addresses the Government, because the scale and size of the housing crisis means only the Government can solve the problem. It addresses the social work profession because social workers are working with service users whose lives are blighted by homelessness or poor and unsuitable housing. While some individual social workers may be involved in housing services (for example, serving on the Board of a Housing Association) social work as a profession is, of course, not responsible for building, managing or maintaining housing.

Prompted by an AGM Motion in 2021 (see Appendix 1 for the full text) and building on previous work undertaken by BASW members and staff the Position Statement flows from examining the evidence. Part 1 explores the scale and scope of the housing crisis, Part 2 asks the question 'How did we get here' while Part 3 addresses the issue of 'Where do we go from here'. This material then leads to the Statement and Recommendations. For those who wish to go straight to the Statement and Recommendations these are summarised on the following page.

There is a large literature on housing, social housing and specialist housing but relatively little on social work and housing. Undertaking a comprehensive summary of this literature would not have been possible, instead the Statement highlights the key issues while referring to more specialist resources in the references and section on suggested reading for those who seek more detail. To avoid cumbersome phrasing this Position Statement uses the word 'housing' to describe both houses and flats.

The voices of experts by experience – those who have to continue to endure poor or no housing – have been a lasting feature of campaigning around housing and homelessness. (The older generation will remember 'Cathy Come Home'). It is time that Government hears these voices and finally takes action.



BASW'S POSITION STATEMENT ON HOUSING

The UK government needs to:

- Make a substantial and on-going investment in increasing the amount of social housing in the UK. Housing is a devolved matter so, alongside England, this funding would be channelled via the Governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This provision should be provided by not-for-profit organisations (local authorities, housing associations, charities) for those in poor or inadequate private sector housing, and/or are on low incomes.
- Make an on-going investment in specialist and/or supported housing in England, and via the Governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, to cater for those with specific needs. This might include (but is not limited to) 16 and 17 year-olds, care leavers, victims of domestic abuse, Disabled people, elderly people, ex-offenders and ex-service men and women.
- Undertake a review of those benefits that fuel the housing crisis (the bedroom tax, the benefit cap, failure to uprate benefits in line with inflation) starting with unfreezing Local Housing Allowance rates and ensuring that they truly do cover the lowest 30% of local private rents.

Recommendations

Many social workers will already undertake the following, however, all social workers need to:

- Be aware of how the housing crisis impacts on the social work role.
- Know the main points of legislation affecting housing and homelessness. This varies across the four nations of the UK.
- Know how housing affects the immediate social work task they are addressing in line with their area of responsibility/expertise (ageing, disability, domestic abuse, neighbourhood abuse, refugees and asylum seekers, and the care experienced).
- Record the impact of poor/inadequate housing on those they work with and acknowledge this in their assessments and decisions.

PART 1: THE HOUSING CRISIS

The housing crisis can be best understood through the needs of five specific groups:

- People who are roofless
- People who are homeless
- People who are living in inadequate or overcrowded accommodation.
- People who are private renters
- People who belong to 'Generation rent'

These groups are described in more detail below, however, it is important to note that there is movement between these specific groups, for example, individuals who may have been private renters, find themselves evicted and then become roofless.



Roofless & Homeless

The term 'roofless' is sometimes used to describe people who are sleeping rough. Rough sleepers are the most visible part of the housing crisis. While this is the *visible* tip of the homelessness 'iceberg', the part of the iceberg that is *invisible* consists of homeless people who may be in hostels, or in temporary accommodation ('bed and breakfast') or staying with friends because they have nowhere else to go ('sofa surfers') or reliant on partners (and their income) for a roof over their heads. This fundamental insecurity in housing leads to difficulty in securing jobs, difficulty in ensuring children can have stability in schooling and profound mental stress. Calculating the number of people who are homeless is complex, since many people who are homeless may not be visible to the authorities, and methods of collection and calculation vary between the four countries, but statistics estimate some 274,000 in England are homeless¹, 27,571 in Scotland², 8,980 in Wales³, and 5,732 in Northern Ireland⁴.

Inadequate and overcrowded housing

The UK's stock of housing is ageing. For example, 76% of the housing in England was built before 1980, and 20% before 1919⁵. Housing needs regular and adequate maintenance and the older the property the higher the maintenance costs. The four nations of the UK measure the physical condition of their housing stock in different ways, however in England 19% of the housing stock failed to meet necessary standards, in Wales 21% failed to meet the standard, in Northern Ireland it was 8% and in Scotland 40%⁶.

Inadequate housing can thus be a broad term describing housing which is in poor physical condition (leaking roof, rising damp, mould) and/or which lacks appropriate amenities (for example, heating, toilets, bathrooms, kitchens), and/or is energy inefficient, and/or is inappropriate for the people living in that accommodation (for example, a mobility impaired elderly person in a terraced house with no toilet on the ground floor)⁷.

'Overcrowded' housing is calculated in a specific way but is best summarised as an inappropriate sharing of rooms. For example, in England in the 3 years to March 2019, an average of around 787,000 (3%) of the estimated 23 million households in England were overcrowded. Overcrowding reflects high housing costs. A monthly rental or mortgage payment will be the same whether one person occupies the property or ten people, so more people will share a property in an attempt to split the bill between more individuals. Families from ethnic minorities suffer particularly from overcrowding; while 2% of White British households were overcrowded, the households with the highest rates of overcrowding were in the Bangladeshi (24%), Pakistani (18%), Black African (16%), Arab (15%) and Mixed White and Black African (14%) ethnic groups⁸.

Inadequate and over-crowded property can be either rented or owned by the occupiers (for example, an elderly owner-occupier living in a crumbling terrace house, or a house in 'multiple occupation').

Private renters

Many people opt to rent private accommodation through choice. They may not wish to buy, value the flexibility provided by renting and can afford the rent on a property which both meets their needs and is well maintained. However, given the shrinking stock of social housing, and soaring house purchase prices, more and more people have no option but to use, and remain in, privately rented accommodation. In 2000 some 10% of the population were in private rented accommodation, and this has now doubled to over 20%⁹.

For many, however, rents are increasingly unaffordable, the property may be in poor condition and renters enjoy no security – for example, in England, under the 'no fault' eviction law (Section 21)¹⁰ renters can be forced to leave the property with a period of notice of just eight weeks, even if they are up to date on their rent payments¹¹. A home should give some sense of stability, and the lack of security for renters undermines this security and at worst can create or exacerbate mental health conditions.

People who are on low incomes, and/or are in receipt of Universal Credit, are the most vulnerable to the worst of the private rental market. There is a cap on the amount that can be claimed for housing through Universal Credit (the Local Housing Allowance or LHA) and in the UK's major cities, and many other areas of high-cost accommodation, actual rental costs are much larger than the rental allowance element of Universal Credit. Further the LHA when set in 2016 was already low and has not been increased in line with inflation.

'Generation rent'

The ever-increasing cost of purchasing a flat or house has greatly outstripped wages. For example, in 1996, the average cost of a house was 4.5 times more than the average wage. In 2021, the average cost of a house was 8 times the average wage¹². Property prices vary considerably across the UK, for example, the average property price in the north-east of England is £140,000, while the average property price in London is £500,000. This means that in London the average property price is more than 30 times the average wage¹³.

The consequences of this are that older people are more often likely to be 'owner-occupiers' since they bought a home when house prices relative to earnings were lower, while younger people, often in broadly the same income bracket, cannot afford to buy and are therefore trapped in rented accommodation. The term often given to this group are 'generation rent'. While there are apparently no formal statistics to support this, anecdotal evidence suggests that often this generational difference is reflected in the social work profession too, as younger social workers are more likely to be part of generation rent.

The pandemic and housing

The owner occupiers of houses are more likely to enjoy more space and more likely to be able to access private gardens¹⁴. Under lockdown many owner occupiers were more easily able to work from home, since their extra space (for example, a spare bedroom) allowed them to do so, while they were also

more likely to have access to a garden, a vital source of wellbeing under lock down conditions, especially for those with young children¹⁵.

In contrast, people in private rented accommodation, or social housing, tended to have less space to work, less space for their children to study at home, and were less likely to have access to open space¹⁶.

The housing crisis and social work

Since access to adequate housing is primarily about having sufficient money, economically poor people are more likely to be roofless, homeless or to be in overcrowded, inadequate accommodation.

Since the users of social work services are often economically poor, social workers will often be dealing with issues where housing, or more specifically lack of appropriate housing, is a major underlying issue. Disabled or frail elderly people may be in housing which does not meet their needs. Parents with young children may be in temporary 'bed and breakfast' accommodation, care leavers may be 'sofa surfing', asylum seekers may be trapped in poor quality private rented accommodation, victims of domestic violence may be unable to leave their abuser because they have nowhere else to live. Those with NRPF may face eviction due to a loss of job and because of their status are not entitled to benefits or social housing. Members of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community, although they may not seek 'bricks and mortar' accommodation, face legislation that criminalises setting up encampments on private land¹⁷ and may result in their caravans and mobile homes being confiscated. These are some examples, but there are many other ways that housing issues impact on the task of social work.

Underlying all these problems are the high costs of housing and inadequate income to meet not just rental costs, but other accommodation related costs, for example, fuel bills. Those groups that are over-represented among the economically poor – single parents, women, Disabled people, people from Black and other Minority Ethnic backgrounds, those with No Recourse to

Public Funds (NRPF) – will also be over-represented in those struggling to meet their housing costs.

Further, overcrowded and inadequate housing generates health and social problems. Inadequate housing (for example, damp and mould) can lead to worsening health¹⁸. Overcrowded housing means, for example, that it is harder for children to do homework leading to educational under-attainment. Poor accommodation has also been identified as a factor in safeguarding children and children coming into care¹⁹.

The BASW England Guide 'Social Work with Families who are Homeless, or have Housing Needs' recommend the approach of Communication, Action, Advocacy, Support and Record (CAASR) as a model of social work intervention and set out possible social work responses in detail with supporting case studies²⁰.

In addition to broad housing issues, social workers have long recognised that specialist forms of supported housing play a vital role in providing for those who have specific needs. This may include sheltered accommodation for the elderly, supported housing for people with a learning disability or therapeutic communities for those who have severe mental health problems or face challenges with drugs and alcohol or those transitioning from street homelessness²¹. A key barrier to establishing such facilities is the sheer up-front cost of purchasing the actual property, which prevents new supported housing schemes becoming available. Property costs also lead to specialist housing being concentrated in certain areas of the country where public bodies can afford it. This creates two problems: these areas often have multiple social problems and are not suitable environments for placing vulnerable people while people are placed long distances away from their families and social networks.

A growing problem is so called 'exempt accommodation' where companies buy up poor quality accommodation to house vulnerable people. Ostensibly not-for-profit, these organisations source government funding for support but there is no minimum standard of support set, or monitoring

required. One estimate calculates some 150,000 households across the UK are in exempt accommodation²². While some companies are providing good services there is increasing concern that many are not²³. Another failure of regulation, is the recent decision in England to allow certain accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds who may need to live independently to be released from meeting a range of basic requirements²⁴.

Social workers also recognise that many people with specific needs, who may be in adequate housing, may need considerable support to remain in their existing accommodation. This may include guidance on paying bills, help to prevent hoarding, the prevention of 'cuckooing', or support to prevent friction with neighbours spiralling into an eviction issue.

In short, housing needs both *create* and *exacerbate* wider social problems, which are both immediate and longer term. Conversely, adequate affordable housing, with appropriate support where needed, can reduce or even prevent many of the most severe social problems occurring in the first place.

PART 2: HOW DID WE GET HERE?

The sources of the housing crisis go back a long way.

While assistance with rent for the poorest has been available in some local authority areas since the Second World War, this financial assistance for rent was formalised in the 1970s by a Labour Government, and subsequently became Housing Benefit, a means tested benefit to help individuals and families meet their housing costs²⁵. The effect of this benefit was for the state to subsidise *individuals* not *housing*. Instead of public money being invested in bricks and mortar it went to the owners of the property - paid as rent.



In the early days of Housing Benefit many of these properties were owned by the local Council. People who rented council housing, received Housing Benefit, who then paid the property owner, who happened to be the local council. Money from the public sector went back to the public sector. However, as the amount of social housing declined, and the private rental market expanded, the amount of Housing Benefit that went to private landlords began to increase. Money came out of the public sector and went into the private sector²⁶. Although the Housing Benefit system was tweaked many times in successive decades, most recently through its incorporation into Universal Credit, and now rebadged as the Local Housing Allowance (or LHA) this fundamental reality has been left unchanged by Governments of all persuasions.

In 1980, under a Conservative government, 'the right to buy' legislation was introduced. This entitled tenants (as they were then) of a council house or council flat to buy the property they lived in. The prices were subsidised and, perhaps unsurprisingly, 'the right to buy' proved immensely popular. Initially the best properties tended to go first, and successive reiterations of the scheme, offered higher discounts to shift less popular types of housing, for example, flats in tower blocks. One possibility might have been that money secured from the sale was reinvested by councils back into new council housing but in fact local authorities were not allowed to invest the money gained by selling the properties (so called 'capital receipts') into new properties. It is estimated that in the period 1980–1997, some 2.2 million council homes were bought, that is moved from public ownership to the ownership of private individuals²⁷.

Initially, the effect of large amounts of housing stock moving from the public sector into the hands of private individuals had little obvious impact. This was because many of the new owners tended to remain in the house they had bought and it was only when these first owners subsequently moved or died, and the house was sold, that this housing was fully lost to the social housing sector. Indeed, some 40% of this stock is not now lived in by owner occupiers but is itself privately rented by an absentee landlord²⁸.

As the stock of social housing diminished, the eligibility thresholds for social housing increased and there was a progressive concentration of people with the most needs in social housing. While there had always been what are sometimes pejoratively described as 'sink estates', the public perception of council housing²⁹, or social housing as it was increasingly becoming known, became increasingly problematic as people with acute needs became concentrated in ever smaller geographical areas³⁰.

Earlier, it was described how much housing in the UK is of considerable age and that an aging housing stock needs considerable ongoing maintenance and repairs, and this costs money. This is true of social housing too. Original build quality and ongoing maintenance is crucial, and both these factors were increasingly reflected in the deteriorating physical condition of many former council estates. This can be a life and death issue. While the public enquiry has yet to report, the tragedy of Grenfell Tower where 72 people died, seems to exemplify poor build quality, cost cutting on the maintenance and a system indifferent to the lives of others over a period of many years.

This 40-year process in shrinking the stock of public sector housing, was paralleled by a process that greatly inflated house prices in the private sector. Although it is barely credible now, in the 1970s and 1980s mortgage payments could be offset against tax - a system called Mortgage Interest Tax Relief. This stoked an increase in house prices since it made sense to borrow more, get a larger house, and pay less tax. (Mortgage Interest Tax Relief payments were progressively reduced from the early 90s and formally ended in 2000)³¹. After 1992 when interest rates briefly peaked at 12%, the UK has had falling interest rates for home buyers and in the years between 2009 and 2022 base interest rates have been close to zero per cent. Over the last thirty years, for those who could afford it, it has been cheap to borrow money, and this has also driven up house prices.

While these are not the only factors, these facts go some way to explaining the reality cited earlier that in 1996, the average cost of

a house was 4.5 times more than the average wage and in 2021, the average cost of a house was 8 times the average wage. For those already owning a house, or those buying a house, this has greatly benefitted their personal financial situation since their home has increased in value year-on-year. For those who are not owner occupiers it is ever harder to get on the housing ladder as house prices climb ever higher. As a result, and in the absence of social housing, more and more people are forced into private renting, the so called 'Generation Rent'.

The combination of soaring house prices and dramatic shrinkage in the amount of social housing available mean that some one million households across the UK are waiting for social housing. To meet this demand some 380,000 properties need to be built a year for the next 15 years of which 100,000 units of which need to be social housing³².

The phenomenon whereby purchasing a property is a near-on guarantee that the investment will grow in value has resulted in those with sufficient money to invest in property³³. At its most extreme this is evidenced by oligarchs buying swathes of premium property in London, which then often sit empty, but it is also visible in second homes across the UK which are only sporadically occupied (for example, at weekends and during the holidays). As an investment these properties don't actually need to be occupied full time by the owner.

The phenomenon of empty property gaining in value, and thus making a profit (any rent is *additional* income) explains why rent control is not the obvious panacea, even if there was the political will to introduce this. Owners simply pull out of the rental market, leaving their properties empty, content in the knowledge that their investment continues to grow.

Since 2010 Government responses to this crisis have been woefully inadequate. Recent initiatives include equity loans (which assume you have both a deposit and can make monthly mortgage payments), shared ownership schemes (which are difficult to access and again assume a deposit and the ability to make monthly payments), and the Lifetime ISA whereby the Government adds

25% to any annual saving by an individual of up to £4,000. This last seems less a scheme to help low- income families to get on the housing ladder and more a scheme that allows those who already have surplus cash to have it further enhanced by a government handout.

Location, location, location

While there are common elements, how the housing crisis plays out varies between the four countries of the UK (England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales), specific regions and between urban centres and rural communities³⁴. For example: those sleeping rough are visible in many cities in a way they are not in the villages of the countryside; housing (and rental) costs tend to be highest in larger cities (for example, London, Manchester, Edinburgh); some areas of 'Red Wall' authorities have more available housing stock, but it may be in poor condition; while some areas have the pressure of second home buyers pricing local people out of the market (for example, the south west of England, parts of Wales). Transport is also a factor. People may not have a car and thus be reliant on public transport which may be costly, inadequate or non-existent. This is a problem for both people in rural areas and people living in 'edge-of-town' social housing.

This *geographical* aspect of housing need plays out not just between cities and regions but within and between specific communities. Where you live has a significant impact on both your quality of life and your life chances. For example, having a specific post code (for example, associated with a so-called 'sink estate') can result in people being denied job opportunities. People may also be trapped by their lack of housing choices forcing them to endure hate crime (racial harassment, harassment due to disability or sexuality) while young people may be vulnerable to recruitment by local gangs.

Individuals can also be 'over-housed'. For example, the frail elderly lady, living in two rooms of the ground floor in a large terrace house while the rest of the property stands vacant. Indeed, Danny Dorling argues that the use of the term 'housing shortage' is often thus both misnaming and

misunderstanding. The housing crisis is often about the wrong houses in the wrong places and in the wrong hands.

Housing is a devolved issue, but within the constraints identified above, the Governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have tackled the housing crisis differently to England. For example, Scotland has managed to build more houses per 1000 people in the population than England, build more social housing and ensure rents are lower³⁵. While Wales secured devolved responsibility for housing later than Scotland, it has for example, slowed the sales of 'Right to Buy' by reducing the discount on properties³⁶. In Northern Ireland, the sectarian divide was very evident in housing and as a result investment in social housing has been significant³⁷. All these examples show that in the face of long-term UK-wide trends, Governments can take action to ameliorate the housing crisis with some success.

The Legislation on Housing and Homeless

The legislation on homelessness and housing need is complex and varies between the four countries of the UK. However, there are some common themes:

- The need for a local authority to have a housing plan;
- A requirement to prevent homelessness;
- A requirement to provide advice to those who may be homeless or face homelessness;
- The need to assess need, and meet 'priority needs'; and,
- The requirement to have mechanisms in place for the discharge of these duties. (The legal duties sit with local authorities but may be delivered by another agency, for example, a housing association).

Categories of 'priority need' (that is, individuals and families who may be provided with accommodation by the local authority) include pregnant women, families with children, people homeless due to an emergency (fire, flood), 16 and 17 year-olds, care leavers, victims of domestic abuse, Disabled people, elderly people, veterans and ex-offenders.

However, legal rights need to be underpinned by resources. This statement is best explained by a hypothetical example. If there 100 households in 'priority need' and 100 homes available, the job is done. If there are 100 households in 'priority need' and only 75 homes available need must be rationed and the thresholds of 'priority' will go up, if there are 100 households in 'priority need' and only 10 homes the thresholds of need will go up again.

As was noted earlier some 2.2 million properties have come out of the public sector and into private hands, so the ongoing reduction in the number of properties available to meet need described in the hypothetical example is not too far from the truth. This excess of need over housing supply explains a whole range of issues: ever longer stays in hostels or 'bed and breakfasts', the type and suitability of accommodation offered giving rise to safeguarding concerns (families with young children offered accommodation with shared kitchens) the use of wholly inappropriate buildings as accommodation (e.g. office accommodation), offering accommodation in a completely different geographical areas (one local authority in London was reported as offering temporary accommodation in Birmingham). If individuals, or families, reject an offer the local authority may consider their duty 'discharged' and refuse to make a further offer.

Given the shortage of social housing expenditure on temporary accommodation has reached an all-time high – an estimated £1 billion in England alone, money which would be better invested in social housing³⁸.

Underpinning this bleak situation is again the reality that any legal rights need to be underpinned by sufficient actual resources if they are not to be meaningless. Given the cost of property, the chronic shortage of social housing and widespread public underfunding of services there is a real danger that even the most modest housing rights under law are both unenforceable and undeliverable. Social workers advocating for housing on behalf of service users may well find their task challenging at best and impossible at worst.

PART 3: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The total available housing in the UK is the product of at least 100 years of building activity. Some 20% of all the housing in England was built over one hundred years ago. This indicates that any attempt to fix the housing crisis in the UK is going to take a major effort over an extended period.

The housing crisis is a UK wide problem and needs a UK wide long-term sustained solution. Because of the scale of the problem, only the UK Government can ultimately solve this, funding and working in partnership with the Governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.



As every owner-occupier knows, buying (and eventually owning) a house is an investment, not a cost. Yes, there are regular mortgage payments, but these go to the repayment of the mortgage, the mortgage reduces, and eventually the mortgage is paid off and the property belongs to the individual. The house is then an asset which can then be lived in until death, sold, or passed on to family members. Assets that could be held as cash are now held as bricks and mortar. There is a parallel for Government, investment in social housing (whether through local authorities, housing associations, or independent charitable providers) simply involves converting assets from one form into the assets of social housing. For a government there are other advantages: job creation and building green houses to reduce carbon emissions are just two.

Recommendation 1: The UK government needs to make a substantial and on-going investment in increasing the amount of social housing in the UK. Housing is a devolved matter, so alongside England, this funding would be channelled via the Governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This should be provided by not-for-profit organisations (local authorities, housing associations, independent charitable providers) for those in poor or inadequate private sector housing, and /or are on low incomes.

Moreover, a sustained effort to solve the housing crisis through investment in social housing will also save resources both in cash and kind. Considerable costs are incurred in housing people in inadequate housing, for example, homeless people in 'bed and breakfast'³⁹. And considerable costs are incurred in supporting people who are in inadequate or inappropriate accommodation: for example, the mobility impaired person who is trapped in an upper floor flat. Tackling and eventually resolving the housing crisis will solve some, and ease many of the issues, that social work service users are required to deal with on a daily basis.

Recommendation 2: The UK government needs to make a nation-wide and on-going investment in specialist and/or supported housing in England, and via the Governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, to cater for those with specific needs. This might include (but is not limited to) 16 and 17 year-olds who are estranged from their family, care leavers, victims of domestic abuse, Disabled people, elderly people, veterans, ex-offenders and ex-service men and women.

Given the current track record, it seems that the UK Government is unlikely to make a significant change of policy away from existing palliative measures into long term sustainable housing, so these recommendations are aimed as much at future UK Governments who are willing to look at the housing crisis anew and take sustained, long-term action.

The impact of the policy of Austerity has been to result in cuts to both public services and welfare benefits. This includes the amounts paid under the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) the benefit cap, and the failure to uprate benefits in line with inflation. In 2020, the UK Government increased LHA rates so that they covered the 30% lowest rates in any given area. This means that a private renter receiving support in the form of the LHA will be guaranteed to be able to afford the 30% cheapest accommodation in the area. The rate was frozen last year. With rents rising, the cost of living increasing and the LHA frozen, people will increasingly be unable to afford their home. Until new housing stock is available to meet the needs of the most vulnerable, failure to raise benefit levels, and to lift the rental cap will result in more people being forced into poor and overcrowded housing, and more people forced into rough sleeping.

Recommendation 3: A review of those benefits that fuel the housing crisis (the bedroom tax, the benefit cap, failure to uprate benefits in line with inflation) starting with unfreezing Local Housing Allowance rates and ensuring that they truly do cover the lowest 30% of local private rents.

The task of social workers

The risk is that poor housing is so commonplace in the lives of service users that social workers cease to notice it. In a phrase used by the BASW Anti-Poverty Practice Guide housing need becomes part of the 'wallpaper of practice', ever present and thus unnoticed. Even if the current government adopted a policy of investment in new social housing and embarked on massive building programme it would take many years to make good the backlog⁴⁰. Since the housing crisis is not going to be resolved any time soon housing issues will continue underpin the social work task. Many social workers will already undertake the following, however, all social workers should:

- Be aware of how housing impacts on the social work task generally
- Know the basic legislation affecting housing and homelessness. This varies across the four nations of the UK.
- Know how housing affects the immediate social work task they are addressing in line with their area of expertise/specialism. (ageing, disability, domestic abuse, gang culture/ neighbourhood, refugees and asylum seekers, care experienced people)
- Record the impact of poor/ inadequate housing on those they work with and acknowledge this in their assessments and decisions



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- 26 Dorling (2015) *All that is Solid. How the Great Housing Disaster Defines Our Times, and What We Can Do About It* London: Penguin
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- ³⁷ P 132 Lund B (2019) *Housing in the United Kingdom: Whose Crisis?* London: PalgraveMacmillan
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- ³⁹ Children's Commissioner (2019) *Bleak Houses: Tackling the Crisis of Family Homelessness in England*. London: Children's Commissioner.
- ⁴⁰ Bramley G (2018) *Housing Supply Requirements across Great Britain for Low Income Households and Homeless People*. London: Crisis/National Housing Federation

Further reading on housing

- Alcock P and May M (2014) *Housing in Alcock P and May M (2014) Social Policy in Britain: Fourth Edition*. Basingstoke: PalgraveMacmillan
- Boughton J (2018) *Municipal Dreams: The Rise and Fall of Council Housing*. London: Verso
- Dorling D (2015) *All that is Solid: How the Great Housing Disaster Defines Our Times, and What We Can Do About It*. London: Penguin
- Stafford M and McCarthy (2006) *Neighbourhoods, housing and health* in Marmot M and Wilkinson R (2016) *Social Determinants of Health: Second Edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Labour Party (2018) *Housing for the Many: Labour Party Green Paper*. London: Labour Party
- Lund B (2019) *Housing in the UK: Whose Crisis?* London: PalgraveMacmillan

Suggested web resources

Centre for Homelessness Impact:
homelessnessimpact.org

Crisis:
www.crisis.org.uk

Homeless Link:
www.homeless.org.uk

Shelter:
www.shelter.org.uk

Suggested resources on housing and social work

- Commission on the Role of Housing in the Future of Care and Support (2021) *A place we can call home: A vision and a roadmap for providing more options for housing with care and support for older people*. London: SCIE
- Cross S, Bywaters P, Brown P, Featherstone B (2021). *Housing, Homelessness and Children's Social Care: Towards an Urgent Research Agenda*. BJSW (00, 1-20)
- Sen R, Smeeton J, Thoburn J, Tunstill J (2022) *Social Work with Families who are Homeless or have Housing Needs: A Reflective Guide for Social Workers and Social Work Managers: Full Version*. Birmingham: BASW.

Other resources

- Growing Older Planning Ahead* is a research project, between a range of partners of whom BASW is one, looking at support and accommodation for older people with a learning disability.
<https://wels.open.ac.uk/research/growing-older-planning-ahead>
- Homes not Hospitals* is a BASW England campaign on the support and accommodation needs of people who wish to move to the community from long stay hospitals. A parallel research project *Why Are We Still Stuck in Hospital* is a research project, between a range of partners of whom BASW is one, looking at the barriers to people moving to the community.
www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/social-policy/departments/social-work-social-care/research/why-are-we-stuck-in-hospital.aspx

HOW THIS POSITION STATEMENT WAS WRITTEN

The authors reviewed the evidence available. This included work done by national advocacy organisations. The conclusions and recommendations were then based on this evidence. A fact check was then undertaken. There was then consultation with the BASW membership on both the content and recommendations. Various changes were then made. The Position Statement was then discussed and approved by PEHR.

APPENDIX 1

BASW is concerned that homelessness and the lack of affordable, social and quality housing remains a key issue in terms of children coming into care, and as issues for older people and disabled people. The level of Rents and Benefits is a major concern. These are also issues for social workers themselves in many parts of the UK. This Annual General Meeting asks BASW to review and update its policies on Housing and Homelessness by the 2022 Annual General Meeting in consultation with key housing and homelessness Non-Governmental Organisations, and with BASW UK members. Further, this Annual General Meeting asks BASW to campaign on housing and homelessness issues, and to make sure in its own workings and investments we take an ethical approach and encourage the development of affordable housing and an improved benefit system.

**On the authority of the Black Country branch
Motion 4 BASW AGM 2021**



Cite as: BASW (2022) *Housing and Homelessness: The BASW Position Statement & Recommendations*. Birmingham: BASW.

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