

FIGHTING

HOMELESSNESS ON EVERY FRONT



JULY 2021

**SHELTER**



FIGHT FOR HOME

Home is everything. It's a simple belief that I hope we can all agree on. The pandemic has exposed, like nothing before, the depths of our housing emergency and the importance of having a safe and secure home. Over the last year, decades of neglect of the housing system has collided with a public health crisis, leaving millions of people at breaking point.

With 17.5 million people now trapped by the housing emergency, Shelter's work has never been more critical.

As you will read here – whether it's pushing forward legislation to protect millions of renters, challenging decisions that have left homeless people on the street during a public health emergency, or improving conditions of temporary accommodation through collective community action – we are already creating positive change by championing the right to a safe home. But to be effective in all that we do, it's vital that we have a louder voice; one that makes people sit up, listen and take action. That is why, last month, we unveiled a new look and identity.

For me, this new identity better represents who we really are, and what we stand for in all of our work.

From getting help to people who are struggling right now and defending their rights to a safe home, to campaigning to secure commitment to build the social homes that are needed for the future.

Our new identity will inspire a new generation of supporters to join us, get the attention of those in power, and lay the foundations for a nationwide movement for change. Only with bold solutions and your help will we be able to bring an end to the housing emergency.

ALISON MOHAMMED
DIRECTOR OF SERVICES, SHELTER

SNAPSHOT WINS FROM THE PAST FEW MONTHS

INTERVENING TO PROTECT VULNERABLE PEOPLE

When the government asked councils to bring 'Everyone In' off the streets and out of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic last year, local authority staff accommodated thousands over the course of a single weekend. But we know that not everybody got the help they needed.

People who are street homeless with certain types of immigration status were, and still are, being left out in the cold because of the lack of clarity on homelessness assistance available to them. This was the experience of Timon Ncube, who found himself sleeping on the streets during the height of the pandemic. As a former asylum seeker, whose claim for asylum had been refused he had no recourse to public funds. He sought help from Brighton and Hove City Council to find accommodation, but due to his immigration status, the council said that he was ineligible for support and he was left on the streets. In December 2020, we intervened to support Mr Ncube take the council to

court.

Mr Ncube's solicitors and Shelter asked the court to consider whether the council had unlawfully refused to find accommodation for Mr Ncube. The court has now ruled that while the public health emergency persists, local councils can lawfully provide accommodation to those sleeping rough who are otherwise ineligible for support.

We have intervened in many cases like this, when the lack of clear guidance from the government has resulted in people still sleeping on the streets and left without help. Now that the court has made clear what powers there are to help people who are otherwise ineligible for support, the council practice must change.

A ONCE-IN-A-GENERATION OPPORTUNITY FOR CHANGE

The Renters' Reform Bill is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform private renting and create a fairer safer system for the 11 million renters in this country, including more than one million families with children.

Over a third of people who contact our helpline are private renters who need help, and for whom without support, homelessness is a very real threat. The pandemic has only made things worse. Our helpline has seen a 35% increase in the last year of renters seeking help with poor conditions, and millions more are faced everyday with insecure and dangerous housing conditions, unaffordable rents, and discrimination that prevents them from finding a safe home.



In March, we launched a campaign to mobilise our supporters and influence the content of the Renters' Reform Bill when parliament debates it later this year. As a priority, we are calling on the government to scrap unfair Section 21 'no-fault' evictions, and create a national landlord register so renters can make informed decisions about who to rent from.

As MPs return to parliament in late summer, we will lobby MPs and campaign locally to gain local press attention and garner support. By autumn, we will focus on Westminster, and speak to MPs from key constituencies to ensure their support and call on the government to bring the bill forward for debate in parliament.

Due to the current government's large majority, once the bill is introduced to parliament it is likely to pass through with minimal amendments. That is why it is crucial for us to influence the content now, ahead of the publication of the draft. This is our opportunity to win long-lasting change to protect renters' rights, ensure they have the power to use them and give long-term security in their homes.

To add your name to the campaign, please click [here](#).

CHANGE MAKERS IN HACKNEY

For 98,300 households across the country, temporary accommodation has become anything but temporary. People are spending years stuck in unsafe or unsuitable accommodation, because of the lack of permanent, suitable housing available.¹

While we know social housing is the only solution, until it gets built, we've identified collective action in communities as a way of improving the unsuitable conditions people are facing if they are trapped in temporary accommodation in the meantime.

A staggering 68%² of people living in temporary accommodation live in the capital. Of the alarming number of people contacting us for support in London, a significant proportion are residents in Hackney. Tyrone Scott, our London Community Organiser, spoke with people in Hackney to better understand and capture their experiences, address their concerns, and launch a campaign for change.



TYRONE SCOTT, SHELTER COMMUNITY ORGANISER

Community organisers are experts in understanding how to identify, recruit and develop leadership to harness the power in local communities. They reach out to communities and train people in the skills they need to have meaningful conversations to make change happen. We then support those they have trained to be local leaders and deliver campaigns within their communities. These movements bring about lasting and impactful change that result in everyone having access to a safe home and the security to be able keep it.

1. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness#discontinued-tables>
2. Shelter report, 'Report: Homeless and Forgotten: Surviving lockdown in temporary accommodation'

Tyrone: 'Over three months, I spoke with 27 local people about their experiences. Most have at least one child and live in hostels, while others live in self-contained flats or a room in a shared house.'

The findings paint a grim picture of life in temporary accommodation. There is no excuse for so many families to be living without access to basic facilities such as washing machines, WiFi or access to information about their case. People shouldn't have to struggle to find somewhere to wash their clothes.'



I feel so isolated. No visitors are allowed and there's no internet. There are six washing machines for 148 rooms, and five of them are broken. In September I begin university, and it's all online. I don't know how I'll do it.

JOYCE, HOSTEL



Someone robbed me in the hostel. You can get in easy through the windows. The person was found not guilty and they still haven't moved me. My child cries all the time. I feel like I'm dying slowly.

ROMANY-JADE, HOSTEL



I worry about my kids. When everything around them is so stressful, they end up worrying about things children shouldn't have to.

GLORIA, SELF-CONTAINED FLAT

OVER 3,000

HOUSEHOLDS LIVE IN TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION IN HACKNEY, INCLUDING NEARLY 4,000 CHILDREN.²

6 2. www.england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_and_research/policy_library/report_homeless_and_forgotten_surviving_lockdown_in_temporary_accommodation

Our research showed how unique each resident's story is. However, together we were able to highlight several key areas for improvement:

1. All residents should have access to WiFi. So they can work, study and socialise without having to depend on unreliable and expensive phone data.

62%

of residents do not have access to free or paid wi-fi

2. All residents should have access to laundry facilities that work, are within walking distance, and available at a reasonable price – if not free.

33%

of residents do not have access to a free or paid communal washing machine

3. Residents must be given information when they move about where they are moving to, how to access local services, and what rights they have.

66%

of residents haven't been told how long they might be in temporary accommodation

4. Residents should feel supported, with clear access to information about their case and consistent support from the local authority for their wellbeing.

26%

of residents had a housing officer after six months in temporary accommodation

5. Residents should feel empowered. They should be listened to, have their concerns addressed, and be involved in meetings and open-forums and included in the design of services that support them.

Tyrone: 'As our campaign continues to grow, I hope to see confirmation that our proposed changes take place. I look forward to working with residents as they begin to engage with decision makers and seek the change they want to see.'

This is the first step in seeking improvements for temporary accommodation residents not just in Hackney, but across London. I am excited to see how we can replicate this kind of work in other areas of the capital.'

UNSTACKING → THE ODDS AGAINST FORMER ROUGH SLEEPERS

It can be extremely tough for someone to get off the streets and settled into secure accommodation, so for those who are able to, we're making sure the system is on their side and not working against them.

Our Strategic Litigation team are working to identify commonly seen problems or unlawful practices that we can target to overturn.

In autumn 2019, we found that people who had moved into their first settled homes after years living on the streets were facing massive deductions to their Universal Credit personal allowance for court fine payments. These included fines for begging and other activity associated with rough sleeping under the outdated Vagrancy Act 1824. This was because the Department of Work and Pension's (DWP) policy was to deduct the maximum rate for court fine payments in all cases, regardless of the individual's circumstances.

Sophie, a solicitor in our Strategic Litigation team, launched a legal challenge on behalf of four people, all of whom have a long history of rough sleeping and were affected by these 'maximum deductions'. This left them with as little as £51 per week to live on. They were trying to get to grips with managing a tenancy after years of sleeping on the streets. The deductions meant they were unable to cover the cost of bills and food, as well as travel to medical appointments, the Jobcentre, or interviews for work.

In January 2021, the High Court heard our claim together with a similar claim brought by Hackney Community Law Centre.

In March, the High Court found that the DWP's policy and decisions to have a fixed maximum deduction rate, failure to consider financial hardship in individual cases, apply discretion and lower the deduction rate, was in fact unlawful.

As of 5 May 2021, anyone receiving deductions from their standard allowance of Universal Credit for the payment of court fines will now have a minimum fixed deduction rate of 5%, £21 per month, rather than the maximum rate of 25%, £103 per month. This change in policy will help more than 100,000 people who have a deduction to their Universal Credit for court fines, preventing people from falling into further debt and poverty.



SOPHIE, SHELTER SOLICITOR



HOME IS EVERYTHING

I'm Penny. I've been living in the same small two-bed place for the last 13 years. I'm a full-time carer for my husband Paul, who had a serious stroke four years ago.

In February, our landlord told us we'd need to move out by August. I felt like I'd been blasted against the wall.

I've been looking, desperately, for suitable places to move to but I can't find anything. **The rents are just too high, and the places are often too small for me to care for Paul. I'm shocked that there is so little provision for people with disabilities.**

I have looked close to where we live now, and further afield, but the problems are always the same.

I simply don't know what to do, or where Paul and I are going to end up. It's a horrible feeling, when everything's up in the air, and it's starting to affect my mental health.

I've been looking to move down to Bournemouth to be closer to my recently bereaved sister, so that we can care for each other. The council said we weren't eligible for social housing – but Anna, my case worker at Shelter, fought to get us on the housing list.

There are hundreds of people ahead of us, and the council just didn't seem to think we were a priority. Thankfully, Anna's helping us make our case. Mind you, it's been a struggle.

Paul's disability means that a lot of properties aren't suitable. I don't think the council realises how difficult life can be.

You may not think it from our situation, but Paul and I are the lucky ones. There are so many people in much worse housing situations than us. Imagine being a family of three in a one-bed flat, and the rent going up so much you just can't afford it.



Penny shouldn't have to fight eviction, find a home and challenge local authorities alone. That's why I'm standing with her.

ANNA QUADDY
PENNY'S CASE WORKER



As we follow the roadmap out of lockdown, the destination for renters remains unknown. The pandemic has repeatedly exposed just how broken private renting is, leaving many people hanging onto their homes by a thread.

POLLY NEATE
CEO, SHELTER

Sadly, Penny's story is far from unique. Our latest poll, carried out by YouGov, showed it is private renters who have fared the worst during the coronavirus crisis. A staggering one in four private renting adults now fear becoming homeless (2.2 million people). While we will support Penny until she and her husband find a new home, we must focus on fighting for home to see an end to our broken system. Only by pushing the government to reform renting, tackling unfair and discriminatory practises through legal action, and mobilising people through community organising can we turn the tide on homelessness.

THANK YOU!

FOR JOINING OUR FIGHT TO END THE HOUSING EMERGENCY

Together, we can take on the injustices in our housing system, support the people who need us the most, and protect future generations by affecting real change.

Thank you.

Richard Gaskin
Philanthropy Manager

Email: richard_gaskin@shelter.org.uk
Telephone: 0344 515 1216



To protect the identity of Shelter clients, models may have been used in photographs.

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