



17 July 2025

## Update on community housing clinics and housing complaints, January 2024 – April 2025

Since January 2024, as described more fully in this [post](#), Take Back the City activists have been organising clinics and other sessions to work with people at the sharp end of the housing crisis. Together people have documented their housing circumstances, held their landlords and housing authorities directly to account and collectively monitored the response.

This work has complemented ongoing efforts to more generally track rising levels of [homelessness](#) and housing stress across the north and their impact on particular groups such as [children and young people](#).

Over this period, complaints were submitted from **at least 98 families comprising 317 people**, as well as collective complaints from groups.

The family complaints included:

- 74 primarily directed to the NI Housing Executive
- 12 primarily regarding Mears (operating under its Asylum Accommodation Support Contract with the UK Home Office)
- 6 primarily directed towards specific housing associations
- the remainder, private rental (it is important to note that some of the letters directed primarily towards the Housing Executive had a private rental component, for example people seeking FDA status after eviction by a private landlord)

### 1. Overview of Housing Executive complaints

The 74 Housing Executive complaints covered at least 245 people and reflected every facet of the housing crisis including, most frequently: eviction, homelessness, poor conditions, overcrowding and unsuitability of emergency / temporary accommodation. Many documented failures to provide effective remedy for issues that people had raised and sought redress for repeatedly in the past.

#### **Eviction and homelessness**

Complaints were submitted by at least

- 38 families of newly-recognised refugees **evicted from asylum accommodation** (generally to temporary accommodation in hotels)

- 15 families dealing with **other sorts of evictions** (mostly from private rental – for a closer look at some contributing factors, see [here](#))

Of the evicted families, at least five were **sofa surfing or sleeping rough** at the time of writing their complaint. These included one individual and one family of 4, after eviction from asylum housing after getting refugee status; and three families with children (totalling 11 people in all) after eviction from private rental tenancies.

### **Emergency / temporary NIHE accommodation**

TBTC has been working to [track](#) the Housing Executive's use of emergency ('non standard temporary') accommodation.

Forty six individuals or families submitted complaints to the Housing Executive related to emergency / temporary accommodation, of which nearly half included the refusal to help a family (even those with pregnant mothers, babies or very small children) secure accommodation until after they had **already been evicted** from their previous home and had nowhere else to go.

Many referenced the **long wait** to be allocated a permanent home: one family recounted being recognised as homeless since 2019.

Multiple families with children recounted being placed in hotel accommodation where they had no **basic amenities**, including no way to cook for their children or wash their clothes (see more on this issue [here](#) and [here](#)).

Over two thirds of families were moved so far from their former homes that they were unable to attend **essential activities**. Several reported having to quit their jobs. Others were unable to attend important doctors' appointments, antenatal appointments, ongoing medical treatment (in one case impacting cancer treatments), vital lawyers' appointments and PIP assessments.

Similarly, parents reported having to drop their own and their children's schooling indefinitely. (Education Authority policy in these cases is to 'hold' the existing school places of children who are placed in distant temporary accommodation due to uncertainty about duration of stay in the temporary area: for more see this FOI [post](#) and this [policy brief](#)). The older children of 3 families were placed too far away for them to be able to sit vital GCSE and A level exams, despite having spent the whole previous school year preparing for them.

**Frequent repeat moves** causing strain and distress were common. Over one third of families conveyed the hardship caused by **prolonged overcrowding** (in multiple cases, families of five or even more in one hotel room).

One third of families reported additional issues with the **physical conditions** of their temporary accommodation (including in poor repair; serious damp/mould; problems with heating).

**Unsuitability** of the placement was very frequent, with parents and small children being moved to remote areas with no bus service or footpath; people recovering from addiction being placed in locations with high exposure to substance abuse by others; or people with compromised immunity being placed in shared housing.

In 19 cases, people recounted that their existing **disabilities or medical conditions** were not taken into account in assessing suitability of the moves they were forced to make. There were also two reports of **infestation** in the current temporary accommodation (bedbugs/mice).

### **Existing social housing tenancies**

12 complaints from existing NIHE tenants including multiple counts each of **overcrowded conditions**; unsuitability given tenants' **medical or disability needs**; **damp/mould** impacting people's health and wellbeing; and excessively long waits for **transfer**. Other issues included difficulties making rent and vermin infestation.

## 2. Overview of Mears complaints

The 12 complaints directed primarily to Mears covered 45 people seeking international protection via the UK's asylum system. Most included failures to provide **effective remedy** for issues raised repeatedly by the families.

Over half of the families reported suffering ill consequences from the **prolonged wait** to be moved out of asylum hotels to dispersal accommodation. Over half reported long periods of **severe overcrowding**, including families of six or seven people in one hotel room.

Families also reported issues with **food**; staff failure to respect their **dignity**; and failure to adequately respond to **intimidation / abuse** on the street. Issues with **physical conditions** included persistent leaks and damp and mould.

Several families reported suffering harm from being **moved further afield** when their asylum hotel was closed down due to subsequent difficulty in accessing their lawyer, doctor or support network.

Five families reported that their accommodation was fundamentally **unsuitable** due to their disability-related / medical needs (overcrowding and conditions unsuitable to complex mental and physical needs; inability to negotiate stairs; other mobility limitations). In several instances families had to turn down long-awaited dispersal accommodation as it did not meet their **disability-related needs**.

## 3. Overview of housing association complaints

There were at least six households (and one group of residents) who directed complaints to four housing associations.

Over two thirds of the complaints included a failure to respond effectively or in a timely manner when tenants raised issues (**effective remedy**).

Other issues raised included poor **conditions** or extremely long waits for **transfer**.

## 4. Overview of private tenancy complaints

At least seven households (including 19 people) wrote complaints in relation to private landlords.

Most of the complaints contained issues around **conditions**: damp and mould, cold/heating or repairs left undone. Several dealt with **unaffordable rent increases** by landlords. As noted above, multiple complaints that originated in private sector tenancies were ultimately pursued primarily with the Housing Executive due to its responsibilities around homelessness.