

# Out of Area Housing Policy Brief 2023

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The University of Nottingham

Authored by: Dr Steve Iafrati, Dr Nick Clare &  
Helen Lawrence



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**Nottingham**  
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Out of Area housing is a practice where local authorities discharge their duty to accommodate homeless households by placing them in other local authority areas. It is worth noting that these households are, by definition, vulnerable as they must fit certain criteria in order to have a duty accepted. Based on our findings, alongside previous study on the topic, out of area placements are becoming more prevalent in England with households who are accommodated in this way suffering various consequences.

The purpose of the policy brief is to outline the current situation with out of area housing and provide recommendations to reduce the prevalence of the practice as well as mitigate the impacts for households who are accommodated in this way.

### KEY FINDINGS

- **FOI requests revealed that 36,723 households were placed in out of area temporary accommodation in 2022/23. The responses indicated that Black households were disproportionately placed out of area and that some local authorities do not record ethnicity data.**
- **10% of local authorities declared that they hold a stock of temporary accommodation out of area and distances of placements varied but 75.4% of local authorities placed households over 20 miles away and 41.1% over 50 miles away. DLUHC data is limited and often contrasted the findings of FOI requests.**
- **From interviews with households, we can identify that the mental health of households moved out of area is negatively impacted and that there is a clear impact from the loss of support networks. Ongoing communication and support from local authorities is lacking once placed out of area and negative impacts on children's education and emotional wellbeing are significant. Services such as GPs are difficult to find and access once moved and technological exclusion is felt by many households struggling to access internet services furthering isolation and vulnerability. Further to this households struggle with travel once they have been moved further deteriorating their wellbeing.**
- **From interviews conducted with organisations close to households placed out of area it is seen that the complex language used in the process of homelessness applications leads to confusion for households and organisations often noted that local authority staffing levels mean that ongoing support cannot be provided. Interviews demonstrate that organisations feel that the freeze of local housing allowance furthers the issue of out of area housing and identify that Section 208 notifications are often not completed. It was, however identified that there is a place for out of area housing in some circumstances such as domestic violence.**

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**Recommendations** have been separated into those which are achievable **promptly**, providing relief and mitigation for households in out of area accommodation, those which are **medium term** solutions highly achievable with commitment from government, and those which are **longer term** recommendations which require ongoing input and progress monitoring.

## Short Term Policy Recommendations

1. **Technological exclusion** is identified as being a key isolator for households who are placed out of area with WIFI not being available in many temporary accommodation facilities. Households who are placed out of area are impacted by the loss of their support systems and the exclusion from social media and video calling abilities only further exacerbates this issue. Combined with this is the need for most Universal Credit claimants to need access to their online 'journal' in order to maintain their income.

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*“We have totally lost touch with friends and with family, we would like to facetime at least, but there isn't any Wi-Fi, and we can't get our own contract because we don't know how long we'll be here and it's so expensive we can't afford to”*

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We recommend the [introduction of legislation that establishes minimum standards of Wi-Fi in temporary accommodation](#). This can be achievable and would decrease the isolation and loss of support networks suffered by those in out of area temporary accommodation. [We recommend that analysis is completed to consider the feasibility of associated costs being placed on landlords to consider whether this risks further slimming of the available TA market. If analysis concludes that this strategy holds too much risk we recommend provision of recourse to local authorities to provide such services](#).

2. Our findings identify that **Black households are disproportionately placed out of area** into temporary accommodation. In addition, **some local authorities reported that they do not record ethnicity data at all**. [We recommend that the government advocate for local authorities to take an approach more closely aligned with The Local Government Association's Equality Framework](#), which outlines that data relating to protected characteristics is regularly updated and used to maintain effective priorities (Local Government Association, 2021).
3. Findings demonstrate that households **struggle to access services** in the area to which they are moved. This includes GPs and secondary health provision as well as schools or nursery

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facilities for children. Findings demonstrate that households rarely receive support in gaining new school places, if necessary, and children often miss school for an interim period. We fully endorse the ongoing pilot of a further detailed notification system which is being carried out by The Shared Health Foundation. We believe that the model utilised in the pilot has proven success and will enable services to appropriately share the burden of schooling and healthcare provision to the location where a household has been placed so that there is no interruption in necessary medical intervention as well as children's education. Further information on this pilot can be found here.

4. The data released by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities is limited in use, as cross-sectional data relating to out of area placements, vulnerability and ethnicity is not provided. There are also instances of non-reporting by local authorities and data obtained from FOI requests identifies significant inaccuracies in the data. We recommend that further statutory duties should be enforced upon local authorities to provide data to DLUHC, with those failing to report subject to investigation. This would allow a more transparent picture of the prevalence of out of area placements, increase the validity of official statistics, as well as giving further accountability to local authorities.
5. From interview data collected we note that those who are placed out of area often **struggle with travel** to and from their children's school, workplace and family and friends support network. Limited income combined with a high distance to commute to both personal and professional support has been seen to interrupt children's development, vital health service intervention and employment opportunities. Although children from low income families are able to access free public transport under certain stipulations there is currently no guidance or recourse for family members of these children in temporary accommodation. We ask that all those who are living in temporary accommodation can access free public transport in order to ensure that they are able to continue to attend appointments and take their children to school. This should not place additional onus on households to prove their status, rather it should be an automatic process in order to prevent further trauma. In order to achieve this we recommend a joint funding program from The Department of Education and The Department for Work and Pensions which allocates funding to local authorities. Although children of a certain age and distance away from education, with proven poor socio economic status, already gain access to public transport it is necessary to expand this as above.
6. Findings show that **households can often feel lost** in out of area accommodation and struggle to find shops, health provision and other services. Households identify that they receive no help with these things from their local authority. We recommend the

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implementation of accessible information packs provided to households on their move into out of area accommodation which contains relevant and necessary information about the location of essential services and facilities alongside material regarding local transport networks. In order to fulfill this we anticipate the requirement of further recourses given to housing departments, and ask that consideration is made for the benefit of such additional funding.

7. Organisations who work with those placed into temporary accommodation identified that one of the **key factors leading to increased use of out of area is the freeze in local housing allowance (LHA)**. The widening gap between LHA rates and true rental market figures is increasing leading to local authorities having to turn to temporary accommodation in order to fulfill their duties (Crisis, 2022). This is further evidenced by our finding that use of out of area accommodation is demonstrably higher in regions where the inflation of rent is greatest. We strongly recommend an urgent review of the impact of welfare reforms and that LHA rates are returned to a level whereby they cover the cheapest 30% of true market rent and monitored to ensure that this remains reflective of inflation. Further to this we advise that a further cost analysis is completed in order to ascertain the fiscal impact of raising LHA rates.

## Medium Term Policy Recommendations

8. Another key theme identified within the research is that households often feel abandoned by their local authority and maintain that the **support provided once they have moved is inadequate**.

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“All of a sudden I’m being ignored. It's like they've given me the temporary accommodation and they thought quick, lets wash our hands of her”

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Organisations agreed with this, to an extent, arguing that they do not have sufficient staff or time to ensure that ongoing support is provided. On this basis we recommend that consideration is made by local authorities to have dedicated staff for ongoing support of those in out of area temporary accommodation. In order to facilitate this we urge the government to consider a funding scheme for which authorities are able to bid, allocated on the basis of need for these staff members.

9. Organisations interviewed often identified that they were not made aware of those who had been placed into their area from elsewhere and similarly, some confirmed that they **do not regularly send Section 208 notices** to receiving authorities. The intention of Section 208 is to ensure that information relating to the support needs and vulnerabilities of those

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moved out of area, are available for the receiving authority allowing for an appropriate understanding of any issues or concerns that the household may experience. We recommend that a national list is compiled containing all local authority contact information for receiving Section 208 notices in order to ensure that notifications are able to be sent to the correct team with ease. We advise that DLUHC takes an active role in monitoring whether or not these notifications are taking place to ensure accountability in the process.

## Long Term Policy Recommendations

10. The availability of suitable housing is a concern which is already on the radar of government and local authorities alike. **Organisations recognised a lack of affordable accommodation** options in-region as being key in encouraging an increased use of out of area housing. We strongly encourage an urgent focus on building more affordable housing and sustain that initial focus should be placed on areas with the highest justified use of out of area accommodation and a review of the feasibility of rent controls.
11. From existing literature and supporting findings from this project is it clear that **Black and minoritised households are more likely to be exposed to insecure employment and poor socio-economic outcomes** and are therefore further likely to experience homelessness, leading to a higher risk of being placed out of area. We recommend that further research is done to investigate the position of Black and minoritised household experiences of homelessness and the links between homelessness and insecure employment.

# Out of Area Housing Policy Brief

## October 2023

This brief was developed as part of a Research England funded project looking into the implications of out of area housing.

Organisations who have contributed to the policy brief and advocate for its recommendations include:

- Justlife Foundation
- Pathway Housing Solutions
- Framework Housing Association
- Race Equality Foundation
- Change Grow Live (CGL)
- Shared Health Foundation

### Contacts

Dr Steve Iafrati

The University of Nottingham

[Steve.iafrati@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:Steve.iafrati@nottingham.ac.uk)



**Shared Health Foundation.**  
Reducing the Impact of Poverty on Health.



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