

Croydon Temporary Accommodation Campaign

Date: 08.12.23

Dear Croydon Cabinet Member for Homes, Susmita Sen and Mayor Jason Perry,

We are writing to you as a concerned group of residents accommodated in uninhabitable temporary accommodation located in the borough of Croydon.

As part of the Croydon Council's commitment to improve the conditions of temporary accommodation we want to work with the council and request immediate improvement regarding the poor conditions of temporary accommodation in Croydon; as many families are made to stay in what is listed as emergency accommodation for numerous years, there needs to be urgent change to aid families.

In addition to the quality of accommodation, we are requesting an updated change in how cases are handled as many homeless applications and cases could have been avoided had proper care and consideration been taken from the start. In turn saving the council potentially hundreds if not millions of pounds and being able to invest the council's money into multiple sectors to further help the community.

The poorly maintained accommodations in question are: Concord House, Windsor House, Gilroy Court and represented in this group are tenants of these blocks and tenants previously placed in Sycamore House who are part of the Croydon Temporary Accommodation Campaign.

We understand that Croydon Council is currently operating under special measures.

However, the local authority does have a duty to support the most vulnerable people in the borough, so as a collective we have composed a few of the concerns we believe to be more pressing and heavily impacting vulnerable people and the safety of small children.

1. Communication

People across Croydon have been in temporary accommodation for a number of years without any indication as to what is happening with their case.

We would like to be acknowledged.

The council need to make contact information as clear and easy as possible for current residents in temporary accommodation. Additionally, Croydon Council should resource its housing team to be able to contact temporary accommodation tenants every 6 months as a minimum. This will allow tenants to understand what is happening with their housing case and allow the housing team to identify any concerns.

This will help not only residents but housing and homelessness staff members of the council be more up to date and not need to go through multiple third parties which can take a minimum of 20 working days to source information that should be at hand. So by bettering the resourcing for the housing team, there will be cost saving to Croydon Council by

preventing legal challenges and reducing the knock-on costly effects that temporary accommodation has on statutory services such as health and education services.

2. Transparency with bidding

People have been left without bidding numbers for many years. This is a concern as people do not have the freedom to bid for accommodation on the choice-based lettings system or to check that they have given the correct priority banding they are entitled to.

The group feel there is a lack of clarity surrounding the bidding systems and why some temporary accommodation households have been offered a bidding number while others have not.

By not supplying a bidding number and banding information households living in temporary accommodation are prevented from engaging in choice-based lettings. Households living in temporary accommodation may be entitled to a higher banding than they are allocated but have no way of telling this as they do not have their banding information.

This lack of information has also proved to be extremely detrimental to the residents health, with many reporting low moods, helplessness and even as far as suicidal thoughts due to no actual answers other than to look into housing options such as private renting which are evidently even more impractical and impossible.

3. Clothes washing facilities

For some temporary accommodation there are no clothes washing facilities at all. In some blocks there are many people having to use one laundry facility and other blocks there is no laundry facility. This means that families are having to travel with bags of clothes to wash and this is coming at a large expense for families who don't have the spare income. For some households this is a minimum of £40 per week.

This is especially hard for households with multiple children or household members with disabilities or health conditions where they need to regularly wash clothes. This physical and financial burden is making temporary accommodation even more financially unsuitable for households.

4. Outside and Play Space

Most of the households in the above listed blocks are living in one room spaces with a kitchenette (often one cupboard, small fridge and sink), one bed and a small bathroom.

In many instances there are multiple people sharing these spaces. There is no other space for children to play or develop. To make the properties more suitable we would like the council to work with this group to create outdoor space for people in the above blocks.

5. Maintain and increase staff

We understand that the current unsatisfactory service we are receiving could be made worse by further cuts and restructuring. We demand that staff are maintained and increased to ensure the housing team can provide a suitable service to those in temporary accommodation.

Regular pest control checks should be completed due to 100s of residences sharing the same building and bins and many reporting sightings of rats, mice and/or bed bugs.

6. Furniture shortage and general checks

Many residents are not allowed to bring in personal furniture but are also not given adequate storage or sleeping arrangements to support the families. Many have no option but to use broken, small or bed bug ridden beds and bedding. Leading to further NHS costs due to regular hospital or doctors visits from residents with health concerns.

Moving forward when moving people out or into accommodations all furnishing and the room itself should be checked.

7. Water quality

Ex- office buildings are unfit for human habitation because they were designed for office use, not for vulnerable people to share a room for years. The water causes damage to hair and skin and irritation to areas that are delicate. This is a risk to babies and young children because the water is so hard.

People and young children shouldn't be expected to live, cook and wash in these blocks for such length of time.

8. Fire safety

These blocks and any other blocks within Croydon should be completely safe. The blocks being used as temporary accommodation were not built as long-term accommodation for vulnerable residents, or for families with young children to be sharing a room. Any fire safety failing within these blocks should be immediately addressed and residents should be informed of what ongoing fire safety measures are in place for these blocks.

Whilst we thank you for taking these points on board we do not want to be reminded of the financial situation facing Croydon Council or the short supply of council housing - by definition you need to have a vulnerability to be in temporary accommodation and we expect these demands to be prioritised. Change needs to happen now.

From

The Croydon Temporary Accommodation Campaign