

CIH submission to the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee - children, young people, and the built environment inquiry

The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) welcomes the opportunity to respond to this inquiry. We would be happy to discuss any details of our response and be involved in work going forward on this topic.

1. General comments

CIH is the professional body for people working in housing. Given our remit we will not answer all the questions posed in this inquiry. Instead, **our submission will focus primarily on housing as a critical element in the built environment impacting on children and young people.**

A safe, stable, decent home is a vital part of the foundation that every child and young person needs. **Our homes are critical building blocks for our health and development, and are foundational for our involvement in education, employment, making social connections, and all the other social and economic factors that shape the different health outcomes, or inequalities, that people experience.** However, shortages and unequal access to housing mean that too many people are forced to live in overpriced, insecure, and poor-quality homes. Recent decades have seen a chronic undersupply of genuinely affordable housing. This undersupply is about more than just the number of units. We need homes which are fit for purpose for the existing and future needs of the population (including children and young people), including being well-connected to facilities and services that contribute to thriving places.

Children and young people are not a homogenous group. The needs of a pre-school age child are dramatically different to those of a teenager. Research this year by [Make Space for Girls](#) shows that even where play spaces for teenagers are provided in public areas, girls are almost entirely designed out of these spaces. Children and young people are as diverse a population as 'people' at large and the 'one size fits all' approach cannot work. However, even with that in mind, having a safe and secure home, free from any hazards to health, with appropriate space for all members of the household living there, is a universal and basic need for **all** children and young people. Where we live shapes our health and lives for the future. Whilst government is acutely aware of the need for a good start in life as outlined in its policy paper '[The Best Start in Life: A vision for the first 1001 critical days](#)' this generally does not translate into planning and housing policy. For example, in the current [National Planning Policy Framework](#) the word children only appears twice and 'young people' does not appear at all. Therefore, this inquiry looking at how better planning and building and urban design in England could enhance the health and well-being of children and young people, is most welcome.

In summary, our submission focuses on two key areas:

- Firstly, the impact of poor-quality housing (including temporary accommodation and homes created through Permitted Development Rights) on children and

young people's lives - which permeates all aspects; from physical health to mental wellbeing, achievement at school, and future life changes.

- Secondly, how the building blocks for life can be enhanced through healthy homes and neighbourhoods considering the [healthy homes principles](#) and [20 minute neighbourhoods](#).

2. The impact of poor housing on children and young people

The causal link between poor housing conditions and poor health outcomes is long established. The landmark 2010 [Marmot Review \(Fair Society, Healthy Lives\)](#) identified housing as a 'social determinant of health', meaning it can affect physical and mental health inequalities throughout life. [The Marmot Review 10 Years On - Health Equity in England](#) evidenced that the cost of housing has increased significantly since that 2010 study, impacting on all the other social determinants of health, meaning there is less to spend on other essentials and pushing more families into poverty and ill health. **Poor quality housing, particularly damp and cold homes, directly harm the physical health of children and young people.** Children living in poor quality housing are [more at risk of asthma and respiratory problems](#), highlighted starkly by the tragic death of [Awaab Ishak](#). Poor housing contributes to problems with children's physical and social development, with impacts that are likely to continue into adulthood as explored in [the Institute of Health and Equality's 'fuel poverty, cold homes and health inequalities' report](#).

Research published by the [National Housing Federation in their People in Need report](#) in 2021 revealed that, at that time, almost two million children in England - one in every five - were living in overcrowded, unaffordable or unsuitable homes. According to the findings of this research the biggest single housing issue affecting children in England is overcrowding. There were 1.1 million children living in overcrowded homes in 2021, accounting for almost one in three (30 per cent) people affected by overcrowding. This figure is likely to have increased since then. **Living in these cramped conditions has a detrimental impact on a child's health and development, causing depression and anxiety.**

Housing insecurity (experiencing or being at risk of multiple house moves that are not through choice and are related to poverty) has damaging impacts on children's physical and psychological health. [The University of Sheffield's public health review team's systemic review of the impacts of housing insecurity on the health and wellbeing of children and young people](#) states that the impacts of housing insecurity on children include school-related, psychological issues (often manifested behaviourally), physical health and family wellbeing.

As part of the Health Foundation's young people's future health inquiry [CIH was commissioned to investigate the impacts of living in the private rented sector \(PRS\) on young people aged 18 - 25](#). With young people remaining in PRS for longer due to a lack of affordable alternatives, the research showed a mixed and stressful picture with difficulties around access, quality, and security. It revealed a lack of focus on young people by housing policy makers, and the limited choice and control that they have over their housing options, which has implications for their wellbeing and particularly mental health.

2.1 Temporary Accommodation (TA)

The number of children living for extended periods of time in TA is rising rapidly. The latest [quarterly housing statutory homelessness statistics](#) from the Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) revealed that children in TA increased by 13.8 per cent from the same time last year. **There are now 138,930 dependent children living in TA in England.**

The reality for children living in TA is that it is often very overcrowded and sometimes very poor quality. Children frequently must share beds with siblings or parents, with little to no space for belongings. **Young children have no room to play safely or even learn to walk, and older children have nowhere to do their homework, nowhere to have friends over, and no privacy. Parents struggle to feed their children decent meals without suitable cooking facilities, reliant on expensive and unhealthy takeaways or what they can heat up with a kettle or a microwave. Children and young people are getting to school, tired, late, or hungry often travelling long distances to their schools from their accommodation.** Families placed out of area are cut off from their support networks. The reality is children and families are living in limbo, moving frequently with uncertainty and insecurity always hanging over them.

[Shelter's 2023 Still Living In Limbo](#) report highlighted the devastating impacts on children's lives of living in TA, including:

- Almost six in ten parents report it has a negative impact on their children's physical or mental health.
- One in four parents report their child being often unhappy or depressed.
- Almost half of children have had to move schools.
- More than half of parents report their children have missed days of school and one in four parents say their children are unable to keep up or have performed poorly at school.

This quote from Shelter's report summarises the reality of the situation:

"Living in temporary accommodation entrenches poverty and housing insecurity, separates people from their support networks and decimates their physical and mental health. Depriving children of space to play, interrupting their education and cutting them off from friendships can cause lasting harm to kids' emotional, behavioural and academic development. Ultimately, this undermines their life chances."

[The APPG on Temporary Accommodation call for evidence findings in 2023](#) reported that children living in TA are at greater risk of suffering from poor health, social and educational outcomes, with indirect consequences to their emotional well-being and mental health. Children living in these conditions have a likelihood of accidental injury and developing conditions such as respiratory and gastric infections. Children living in small or improperly spaced TA suffer from lack of sleep, poor concentration and educational attainment. The scarcity of space also results in a subsequently higher risk of

obesity - due to the lack of space for infants to crawl or walk and for children to play and exercise.

The recent [Research Alliance's report A Place to Play - Children's Play Needs in England's Temporary Accommodation](#), published in 2023, explores the challenges that families living in TA face, especially ensuring time, resources, and space for their children to play. The research notes that despite evidence showing the importance of play for children's development, providing and supporting play in TA and housing policy more broadly is widely neglected. The reason for this neglect was identified as being because play cannot be seen as a priority when TA fails to meet a child's basic biological health needs. Yet, play is an essential component of development.

"The matter of play and children in temporary accommodation is thus systematically deprived of voice and perspective".

Interviewees for the report stressed the importance of nearby easy access to children's centres, stay-and-play services, libraries, leisure centres, and charity and faith-group projects. These are not necessarily aimed specifically at families in TA but provide places to go where children can experience good play. Most interviewees for the research also noted outdoor playgrounds as a key facility needed in every neighbourhood.

2.2 Homes created through Permitted Development Rights

There is a pressing need for more homes that are decent, safe, accessible and affordable. Given both the level of the housing crisis and the length of time to deliver new homes, consideration must be given to other ways to deliver more homes in a shorter time frame. It may be possible that conversions to residential properties could play a part in this, and we know that this is an avenue government is actively pursuing through expansion to Permitted Development Rights (PDRs). However, the homes which have been created through the PDR system to date have too often been a far cry from homes we should be creating. Instead, without the necessary safeguards to support sustainable development and ensure the health and well-being of residents (including children and young people) the reality has been poor ([as captured in the TCPA photobook](#) and highlighted by the [government's own commissioned research](#)). **'Homes' have often been created in entirely unsuitable locations, completely inappropriate for people without access to cars, and isolated from local shops, services, and transport links, and with no place for children's play and no ability for children (and their parents) to walk to local amenities, including schools.**

The existing standards for conversions via the permitted development route are not sufficient (even with the inclusions of natural light and minimum space standards in 2020) to deliver the quality homes needed. The location of such schemes should be a critical consideration in conversions and there are some basic requirements that *all* homes should meet; TCPA's [Healthy Homes](#) (discussed in more detail later in our submission) principles provide a starting point for this. CIH also agree with the recommendations of the [joint inquiry into rethinking commercial to residential conversions](#) around areas which must be addressed if PDR conversions are to play a role in addressing the housing emergency.

2.3 Unequal access to suitable housing

Structural inequalities and systemic disadvantage are endemic in housing in England. [Research in 2023 by the Health Foundation](#) has shown that younger adults, people from minority ethnic backgrounds, and people on low incomes are significantly more likely to experience multiple housing problems, which is associated with worse health than having just one housing problem.

[Shelter's Still Living in Limbo report](#) highlights that lone mother-led families are overrepresented in TA - 1 in 43 lone mothers in England are living in TA. It also highlights that people from racially minoritised groups are overrepresented - fifty per cent of heads of households in TA identify as Black, Asian, Mixed or another ethnicity, where ethnicity is recorded. In England as a whole, just 15 per cent of people identify as being from a racially minoritised group. **Black households are 11 times more likely to be living in TA than white households.**

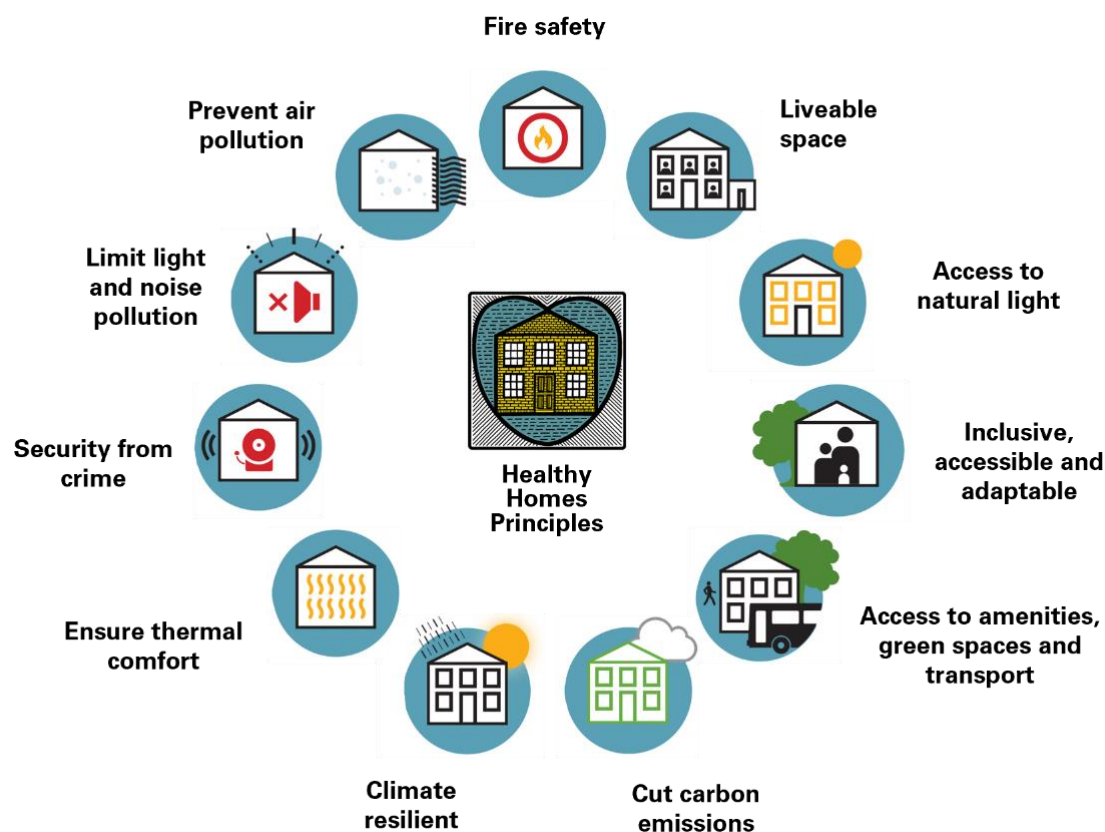
3. Building blocks for life - healthy homes and healthy neighbourhoods

Good quality, affordable, well-located housing has the power to enhance children and young people's immediate health and wellbeing, and their future lives.

[CIH's building blocks for life: housing and healthy neighbourhoods](#) examines the role of housing in tackling health inequalities, exploring the value of partnerships across housing, health and care, and how to develop strong shared working approaches that benefit residents and communities. In CIH's [housing manifesto](#) published in September this year, we are clear that decent and affordable homes make our lives better - providing the safe and secure foundation we all need. **We urge all political parties to commit to recognising housing as a foundation for creating healthy and sustainable communities.**

3.1 The Healthy Homes Principles

Standards for new homes and places are fragmented, complex and do not guarantee that all new homes provide for residents' basic human needs, such as access to green space and local services, and clean air. CIH have long supported the Healthy Homes campaign [developed by the TCPA, which](#) establishes a set of principles for all new homes (including conversions) - setting housing as a cornerstone for promoting people's health.



Source: <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/healthy-homes-principles-why-do-we-need-them/>

The principles are intended to be a scaffolding framework for the quality of all new homes. Embedding Healthy Homes principles would have huge benefits for children’s and young people’s lives.

3.2 Walkability and 20-minute neighbourhoods

The location of housing and the ability to access everyday services, including school, play and sports areas and local shops via active travel methods, are vital in creating healthy, sustainable places. **Building housing in sustainable locations provides health and wellbeing benefits to children and young people and promotes gradual independence as they learn to complete local trips alone and with friends.** The [Children's Commissioners Mean Streets report in 2020](#) noted that whilst “teenagers are consistently presented in the media as ‘trouble’, as perpetrators of crime and anti-social behaviour, alarming knife-wielding creatures lurking in groups in hoodies, mobile phones clamped to their ears”, children and young people are actually often fearful about their safety in public spaces. Over time children have become less likely to go out independently, and often do not feel safe to do so. One of the themes to emerge from the report was that children want to live in communities designed with them in mind. This means more activities in youth clubs or extended schools, **but also better lit, better designed and better maintained public spaces to make them feel safer.**

The concept of a [20-minute neighbourhood](#) provides many of the tenets of children and young people supportive communities. The 20-minute neighbourhood concept is essentially about ‘nearness’ and compact communities. It is about ‘living locally’ and

giving people the ability to meet most of their daily needs within a short walk from home, with access to safe cycling and local transport options. [TCPA's 20 minute neighbourhood introduction for planners in England](#) gives general characteristics or 'ingredients' including:

- Diverse and affordable homes;
- Well-connected paths, streets and spaces;
- Schools at the heart of communities;
- Good green spaces in the right places;
- Community health and wellbeing facilities;
- A place for all ages.

[The RTPI's 'creating places to grow work' in 2021](#) notes that when considering the needs of children, town planning has traditionally focused on the provision of schools and sports and recreation facilities. Whilst in recent years there has been more recognition of the role of play, **for the planning profession to properly address the impact of the built environment on children a holistic approach needs to be taken, covering all aspects of children and young people's lives.**

The principles which the RTPI believe should be considered when creating child-friendly places can be summarised as:

- Welcoming - designed to help children develop a sense of belonging including visual cues that they are welcome.
- Local - everyday services are located safe, walkable, distances from homes.
- Engaging - children and young people are involved in design.
- Sustainable - built to last and adapt.
- Play - places are designed with a variety of opportunities for play.
- Green - children and young people have free access to greenspace and nature near their homes.
- Inclusive - places are designed to cater for diverse communities.
- Confidence - places are designed to give children and young people (and their parents and guardians) the confidence to use them (i.e. natural surveillance and safe walking routes)

About CIH

The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) is the independent voice for housing and the home of professional standards. Our goal is simple - to provide housing professionals and their organisations with the advice, support and knowledge they need. CIH is a registered charity and not-for-profit organisation so the money we make is put back into the organisation and funds the activities we carry out to support the housing sector. We have a diverse membership of people who work in the public and private sectors, in 20 countries on five continents across the world. We are a member of the [End Child Poverty Coalition](#). Further information is available at: www.cih.org.

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December 2023