



Department for Levelling Up,  
Housing & Communities

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Dame Meg Hillier MP  
Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

6 December 2022

Dear Dame Meg,

Further to the Public Accounts Committee hearing on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2022 on Supporting Vulnerable Adolescents, I am writing to you today to clarify some points raised at the committee relevant to the Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities.

I welcome the Committee's interest in this issue. As you are aware supporting vulnerable families is a high priority for my department. The Supporting Families programme encourages services to work together to provide co-ordinated support to families facing multiple challenges including unemployment, poor school attendance, health, crime and anti-social behaviour and domestic violence, with funding allocated to authorities based on deprivation and population levels. The programme has had a vital impact on the vulnerable adolescent cohort. We estimate that over 137,000 young people between 10-17 years old received support between 2015-2021.

You asked me to clarify what my department is doing to ensure vulnerable families who need to relocate for the safety of a child are able to do so easily and feel supported to do so. I have spoken to my colleagues who lead on access to social housing and homelessness support. There are a number of existing provisions to support this aim.

By law, local authorities must give certain people 'reasonable preference' (priority) under an allocation scheme, including people who need to move for medical or welfare reasons such as those who need to relocate for the safety of a child. Last year we updated statutory allocations guidance to reflect the latest advice and obligations on landlords for protecting victims of domestic abuse. This includes guidance for local authorities and housing associations to improve access to social housing for victims who are in a refuge or other form of safe temporary accommodation.

It is important to also note that where households need to move away from an area to escape violence, statutory allocations guidance encourages local authorities not to apply residency tests for access to social housing. Statutory guidance additionally sets out how they can give appropriate priority, including additional preference (high priority) to those who are homeless and require urgent re-housing as a result of violence or threats of violence.

Section 170 of the Housing Act 1996 also provides that, where a local housing authority so requests, a private registered provider of social housing (PRP) shall co-operate to such extent as is reasonable in the circumstances in offering accommodation to people with priority under the authority's allocation scheme. This includes those requiring urgent re-housing as a result of violence or threats of violence.

Similarly, PRPs have a duty under the 1996 Act to co-operate with local authorities in exercising their homelessness functions. S.213 of the same Act provides that, where requested by a housing authority, a PRP must assist the authority in carrying out their duties under the homelessness legislation by co-operating with them as far as is reasonable in the circumstances. These provisions are reinforced by the fact PRPs are subject to the Regulator of Social Housing's Tenancy Standard, which sets out an expectation that they will co-operate with local authorities' strategic housing function.

You also asked me for an update on whether my department is taking any further actions to prevent vulnerable households from being rehoused in a new borough, or in hostels. Homelessness legislation and guidance are clear that local authorities should, as far as possible, avoid placing households out of their borough. In some areas where there is a limited supply of suitable accommodation, we are aware that, on occasion, it is necessary to place households in accommodation outside of the local area. This, however, should be as a last resort. If a local authority places a household into accommodation in another local area, they are required by law to notify the local authority of any placement and it is the responsibility of the placing authority to minimise disruption to schooling, employment, etc. Further details can be found in the Chapter 17 of the Homelessness Code of Guidance at paragraphs 17.48-17.66.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities/chapter-17-suitability-of-accommodation>.

At the committee I also committed to finding numbers relating to drop off in contact with the criminal justice system amongst the Supporting Families cohort. The Troubled Families Evaluation (now known as the Supporting Families programme) that was undertaken in 2019, highlighted that the programme makes positive changes in reported crime and anti-social behaviours measures. There were fewer reports of contact with the police (14% of families had contact, compared with 23% two years before) and use of force or violence within family's homes also fell (was reported by 5% of families compared to 8% two years before). In addition, there were fewer reports of action needed to stop anti-social behaviour (2% of families reported action compared to two years before, which was 6%).

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Siobhan Jones', with a stylized, cursive script.

**SIOBHAN JONES**

