



Summary Notes: Digital Inclusion in Temporary Accommodation (TA) Workshop - 14 July 2021

On Wednesday 14 July 2021, LOTI held a workshop with Digital Inclusion and Housing leads from boroughs as well as representatives from the GLA and '[Setting the Standard](#)' programme. The session was the first step in exploring the complex and multifaceted nature of digital exclusion in London's temporary accommodation. The insights gathered will help the LOTI team to design a project that meets the needs of those residents living in TA and who are digitally excluded.

Defining the outcome

LOTI uses an [outcomes-based approach](#) to scope and design projects, to ensure that outputs achieve a common desired outcome and solve a real problem experienced by a user of a service, in this case TA. The workshop started by reviewing the outcome statement: *'No Londoner should be digitally excluded as a result of living in temporary accommodation.'*

The discussion then moved on to exploring the specific personas (digitally excluded groups) residing in different forms of TA and their needs for getting online. Here's a summary of that discussion:

Personas and their journey in TA

In this exercise, participants were first invited to explore the different personas that access TA and then to map their typical journey in TA.

Personas

Participants gave feedback that grouping residents based on their eligibility for TA (dependent on a number of criteria set out in legislation) may lead to duplication, since many groups will have similar needs. Several participants were also concerned about prioritising the needs of some specific personas over others given that all individuals living in TA are in need. So, for the purposes of the workshop we focused on the following two broader groups of personas:

- Households with children and
- Solo individuals with a range of needs (for instance, suffering from mental health related issues, substance abuse, etc.)

These are not the only groups we'll consider as part of this project but are a good starting point. The discovery we'll be commissioning soon will unravel in detail the nature of needs experienced by Londoners in TA.

Typical Journey in TA

Participants' feedback was that the journeys are largely similar with some exceptions, highlighted below:

Type of TA	Length of time spent in that form of TA
For solo individuals: 1. Commissioned hostels (adult hostel pathway). If no availability B&B / hotel or other type.	Guideline length - up to 2 years
For Households with children: 1. Bed and Breakfast (B&B)	Max six weeks
2. Self contained studios - one room for whole household	No limit as deemed to be self contained
3. Self contained flat/house - leased from Private Rental Sector (PRS) or council owned stock / Private Sector Leasing	Any length - 6 weeks - 20 years!

Other useful points noted on the journey:

- Many boroughs struggle to provide suitable TA / AST within their borough due to housing pressure and prices.
- Over half of TA residents may be placed out of borough - making it challenging for their borough of origin to offer support.
- Councils have much more control over connectivity to hostels and other forms of TA when they are the freeholder (compared with leasing or using a commissioned hostel).
- Some council owned hostels can be exclusive use - not sharing facilities.

Problems and barriers to getting online

Participants were invited to first discuss the problems and barriers faced by the identified personas in getting online. Here's a summary of the main points.

Households with children:

- Can't guarantee all council owned properties have good wifi. Some building structures make it challenging / cost prohibitive to install wifi.
- Not every B&B location has access to fibre.
- Not (enough) devices: parent(s) and children all need to get online.
- Hard for families to arrange to have wifi if they don't know they will stay in one



location for long.

- Lack of skills made harder by separation from their support networks.
- Lockdowns made it even harder to access public wifi.
- Lack of funds to pay for mobiles + data / broadband + software.
- Need for specific devices / software to access home schooling.
- Privately leased accommodation doesn't currently have a requirement for wifi.

(Note: DfE funding for devices and support is coming to an end - and not everyone is covered).

Solo individuals with a range of needs

- Lack of skills and confidence in using tech / internet
- Lack of understanding or awareness of the benefits of being online.
- Lack of support to use devices / software - who can they call when they need assistance?
- Particularly acute issues for nightly-paid accommodation.
- Issues may be exacerbated by mental health issues.
- Devices don't last forever - challenge when devices break / need replacing.
- Same issues on lack of wifi.
- Inappropriate devices - hard to perform all functions effectively just on a smartphone.

Next, we explored what each of the personas would need to do online. Here's a summary of the main points.

Households with children:

- Accessing school / homework.
- Applying for jobs / benefits e.g. UC.
- Accessing entertainment - e.g. Netflix and gaming (particularly during lockdowns).
- Staying in touch with social / family networks.
- Staying in touch with lawyers.
- Accessing mental health support / GP services.
- (Note: across all the above, there is a general need to be able to stay safe online - consider filters).

Solo individuals with a range of needs

- Addressing loneliness and isolation - using digital tools to be more connected.
- Need to see where they can find things for best value / lowest price.
- Wishing to work in online roles / accessing gig economy job opportunities?



Barriers and opportunities for boroughs to support

In this exercise, participants were invited to explore the barriers they face that make it harder to support digitally excluded residents in TA and where they have the most influence and ability to act. The full list of barriers and opportunities participants identified can be found [here](#), and below is a short summary of that discussion.

Barriers

- Connectivity, including procurement
- Lack of funding and high costs of accommodation
- Lack of devices and supporting software
- Lack of confidence, skills (and language barriers) to be online even when the connectivity and devices are in place
- Variations in TA provision make it difficult to identify digital needs of residents

Opportunities

- Social value - leveraging relationships with suppliers, and corporate partners
- Improving access to devices in TA buildings (for example setting up IT suites in TA, or repurpose retired devices)
- Better working with the VCS
- Using libraries and other council buildings to promote and provide training sessions relevant to residents' needs

Next steps

Based on these and other discussions with colleagues from London Councils and GLA, the LOTI team will commission a discovery project which will seek to further explore the needs of residents living in TA and the types of interventions that best meet those needs.

If you'd like to get involved in this project or receive updates on next steps, please join [this project on Basecamp](#).