

# CARTREF YW POPETH HOME IS EVERYTHING



John Griffiths MS

Chair, Local Government and Housing Committee

Senedd, Caerdydd CF99 1SN

15<sup>th</sup> December 2022

Dear John,

**RE: Inquiry on Homelessness and Temporary Accommodation: additional information**

I am writing as requested to supply additional information about our casework experience of service charges in temporary accommodation. I hope the below is useful to the Committee in your inquiry.

- Service charge arrears are a relatively common issue among people using our services. Although service charges are covered by Housing Benefit for supported accommodation, they are not covered for temporary accommodation. Affordability problems can be further exacerbated by the fact that in some temporary accommodation there is also a shortfall between rent and housing benefit. It is good practice to avoid charging these shortfalls.
- We find a large variation in the levels of service charge across different local authorities and across different types of accommodation. There does not appear to be any consistency in what is charged for, and there is little transparency. There is no detailed guidance in the statutory Code of Guidance to assist local authorities to ensure that service charges are set at fair, affordable and transparent levels.
- People's ability to challenge unaffordable service charges is in practice limited. Service charges are among the costs that local authorities should take into account when determining whether temporary accommodation is suitable from an affordability perspective (Code of Guidance 19.26). However in practice suitability challenges can be complex and intimidating, particularly if people are not receiving independent specialist

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housing advice to support them with the review, and local authorities have 56 days to complete a review by which time significant arrears may have accrued.

- Arrears in service charges can be a barrier to accessing move-on accommodation. We are aware that some local authorities are paying off service charge arrears from their own funds in order that people can continue to access the social housing register.

I hope the above is useful to you. Please let me know if I can be of further assistance.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jennie Bibbings", enclosed in a light grey rectangular box.

**Jennie Bibbings**

**Head of Campaigns, Shelter Cymru**