

# **IRISH HOMELESS FAMILIES — IN LONDON —**



**A REPORT BY BRENT IRISH ADVISORY SERVICE**

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## **Irish Homeless Families in London**

**“In Ireland you can have a home but no job, in England you can have a job but no home, nobody helps anyone else, nobody is making it clear to people about the realities of living in London”.**

This report on Irish homeless families in London is produced by Brent Irish Advisory Service (BIAS). The report provides an overview of the difficulties of housing for Irish families in London and a resume of a research project on the issue, carried out by BIAS in 1988.

Recommendations based on the agency's regular assistance to homeless Irish families are being made in the light of the impending changes in the legislation on homelessness in Britain and the likelihood that British Local Authorities will exercise more stringent rules on acceptance of homeless families.

The report is written for the public, Irish agencies and community organisations, Local Authorities in Britain and Ireland, the Irish Government and all agencies dealing with Irish homeless families.

### **Summary**

The majority of Irish immigrants to London are young single people but there is a growing number of families with children moving to London primarily for employment. The families experience great difficulty in securing adequate housing and many are forced to rely on Local Authority homelessness provision. If accepted as homeless and not having any accommodation in Ireland these families are often placed in bed and breakfast accommodation for periods of up to two years. The consequences of living in this type of accommodation has serious effects on the families and especially the children.

The survey carried out by BIAS in interviewing 26 such families showed that most felt isolated

and distressed with little hope of being housed for a long time. Living conditions were very poor and families felt that their children suffered.

Contrary to popular myths only one in ten had become homeless directly on arriving in Britain. It was later, when the initial accommodation arrangements had broken down that families became homeless. Steps need to be taken to provide accurate information to Irish families preparing to move to London.

The Irish Community in Britain, the Irish Government, London Local Authorities and Irish Local Authorities should provide a co-ordinated approach to this increasing movement of Irish families to Britain and London in particular.

## The Irish Homeless Families in London

Homelessness represents the continuing exclusion of households from all available housing provision whether through the housing market or public housing.

All immigrant communities in Britain are faced with great difficulty in securing adequate housing. Initially the private rented sector has provided housing for the newly arrived without children who then "graduated" to Local Authority, Housing Association or owner-occupation. Many however remain in private rented accommodation and it is in this area of housing that the least security is available as well as the worst housing conditions.

For the Irish in London (i.e. those from the Republic of Ireland), the breakdown of housing tenure in 1986/7 was as follows:-

Owner-Occupation — 40%  
Housing Association — 5%  
Local Authority — 44%  
Private rented — 11%  
(Source: LRC)

There has been a significant reduction in the number of Local Authority dwellings for rent since 1979, resulting from the sale of almost 1 million Council properties to tenants and the restrictions placed on Local Authority house building. This has limited the ability of Local Councils to house the 30,000 homeless families each year accepted by London boroughs. Many councils now house only those who have lived in temporary accommodation for the homeless for a length of time, and practically no-one from the waiting lists are housed. These homeless households accepted by Councils with a right to housing under the Housing Act 1985 Part III are placed in temporary accommodation until a suitable property is available. The temporary accommodation is usually bed and breakfast type with families sharing one room, often for periods of up to two years.

In May 1988 the figures for families in this type of accommodation throughout London boroughs were as follows:-

Barking	Nil
Barnet	24
Brent	878
Bromley	4
Camden	285
Croydon	9
Ealing	1070
Enfield	124
Greenwich	Nil
Hackney	304
Hammersmith & Fulham	692
Haringey	746
Harrow	100
Havering	0
Hillingdon	212
Hounslow	150
Islington	89
Kensington	74
Kingston	67
Lambeth	374
Lewisham	83
Merton	11
Newham	617
Redbridge	Nil
Richmond	63
Southwark	166
Sutton	125
Tower Hamlets	380
Waltham Forest	Nil
Wandsworth	335
Westminster	307
TOTAL:	7289
(Source: London Research Centre)	

These figures do not represent all homeless families in each borough as some may be placed in short-life accommodation or required to stay with friends pending eventual rehousing.

The boroughs with the highest concentration of Irish people also have the highest rate of families in such temporary accommodation such as Brent (16%). Since many boroughs do not keep ethnic records of homeless families it is not possible to give the figures for all Irish homeless families in London. Suffice to say that many of those placed in hotel or bed & breakfast type accommodation are Irish, and the comments of such residents can only mean that it is not suitable for any family to live in these circumstances.



## Comments

These comments are taken from the Survey outlined in this report by Irish homeless families in bed & breakfast accommodation and also in the report on living in bed & breakfast by the School for Advanced Urban Studies (University of Bristol).

**"I feel like a prisoner sentenced to a term".**

**"We are a floating population that nobody wants to help".**

**"We feel forgotten about, it's not fair on the children".**

**"In Ireland you can have a home but no job, in England you can have a job but no home, nobody helps anyone else, nobody is making it clear to people about the realities of living in London".**

**"People just look down on you automatically if you say you are homeless — most people anyway"**

And a detailed response from one Irish household exemplifies the situation.

B. and H. are a childless couple, both aged 17 years, living in the S\_\_\_\_\_. They had come to London from Ireland 11 months earlier and had been living in a succession of hotels. They had been in the present hotel for almost eight months and prior to that they had been in another hotel. Both were unemployed and had been advised about housing and benefits at the Irish Advice Centre. They had stayed at their first hotel for three months and had been told their benefit entitlement would end in another five weeks. At that stage H. was pregnant and they were advised to seek assistance from the local authority. The local authority sent them to their present address the next day. Even though she was pregnant they were told they would have to wait for about a year

for housing and certainly wouldn't get it in Camden or Islington. When H. lost the baby (after eight months pregnancy) they were helped by hospital and other social workers and:

They said they'd keep us on anyway because we were so young.

In their previous hotel:

We had one room; there was no bathroom. The walls were all dirty, the paint ran, so it was really bad. And I mean, you had to put up clothes just to cover the holes in the walls.

You could hear through the walls, they were like cardboard. You could hear every word, like, the fellow was saying next door to us.

Noel, the maid, used to be living downstairs — he used to live in the same hotel. He used to — if he turned on the radio, you couldn't sleep all night, he used to — like, he had the radio on.

It used to be freezing — we were in there during the winter, like, but it was freezing.

We shared a bathroom, there was loads of people going there and there wasn't even a lock on the door. You were lucky if you'd get into a bathroom with a lock on the door, and even still, people would be coming up pushing the door, like.

The cooking facilities here are good but it's hard to get in there. The kitchen's so small, and two people might be using the same gas-ring. And it's really hard to get around, like, when someone's trying to get into the sink or the dustbin. Yeah, it's really bad.

## Homelessness — The Definitions

Since 1979 homelessness has risen dramatically: over 30,000 households a year are now accepted as homeless by London boroughs, double the level of 1979. However this is only a partial representation, as the full extent of homelessness is not known, because what actually constitutes homelessness is a matter of interpretation.

The **legal and statutory** definitions of homelessness can be found in the 1977 Homeless Persons Act which has subsequently been incorporated into the 1985 Housing Act Part III. It states:

1. That a person is considered homeless, if he/she has no accommodation which he/she is entitled to occupy or cannot secure entry to such accommodation. Further the Act extended the concept of homelessness from **actual** to **threatened** and as a result a person is considered to be homeless if he/she is threatened with homelessness and is likely to be homeless within 28 days.
2. The Act also states that certain categories would be in **'priority need'**. Households which contain dependent children, pregnancy or any form of vulnerability on the grounds of old age, illness or disability are regarded as being in priority need and thus have a statutory right to rehousing. This provision is also available to those made homeless as a result of an emergency such as flood or fire.
3. The Act also defines Local Authorities' duties and obligations to prevent homelessness and secure rehousing: only after having established whether the household is **'intentionally homeless'** (i.e., did the household deliberately do something or fail to do something which

led to losing the home, such as being seriously in breach of a tenancy agreement or refusing to pay the rent). This definition prevents many Irish homeless families from being accepted for housing by British Local Authorities and is dealt with further in this report.

Secondly, the household must have a **'local connection'** with the Local Authority whom they approach (i.e. are there family connections in the area or the household is normally resident in the area).

Thus the definitions provided by law may not necessarily encompass the extent of homelessness in London. Homelessness may range from the visible homelessness of those sleeping rough or being evicted to the concealed homelessness of people unable to leave unsatisfactory physical or social situations.

Recent research undertaken by the London Research Centre, suggests that 'hidden' forms of homelessness are a far greater phenomenon than had hitherto been recognised. Interviewing over 7,000 households, the researchers established that there were over 447,000 households in potential housing need in the form of **Split** households (households which would be formed, if housing were available) and **concealed** homelessness (where an individual is currently part of a household of which they are neither the head or the partner of the head).

Thus homelessness can be viewed as an entirely **relative concept**: relative to the norms and culture of a particular society. If the norms and culture of a society dictate that a home is a place where privacy, security, peace and shelter can be found, then those who are deprived of this, must be perceived as homeless.



## Intentional Homelessness

The Housing Act 1985 Part III does not place any duty on Local Authorities to house those homeless families whether Irish, British or from any part of the world where the family is deemed to have become 'intentionally homeless'.

There are six stages of events which must have occurred for the legal definition of intentional homelessness to be established. Many Local Authorities place a narrow interpretation on this qualification and as a result many Irish homeless families are refused housing. Indeed this is the aspect of qualification for assistance which most Irish homeless families fail to meet.

For intentional homelessness to be found the conditions are:-

1. The applicants must have done or failed to do something deliberately. They may have left their accommodation to move to London and not secured permanent accommodation in London beforehand.
2. The applicants must have been aware of all the relevant facts at the time.
3. The deliberate act or omission (above) must have caused the present homelessness.
4. The applicant must cease or be likely to cease to occupy their accommodation.
5. It would have been reasonable for the applicant to continue to occupy that accommodation.

If any of these elements is not found then the applicant household is not intentionally homeless. Councils in London have found that homeless families who leave accommodation in Ireland even if they apply for assistance six months later are deemed to be intentionally homeless. Some Councils have also found 'intentional homelessness' where women and children leave through violence or threat of violence.

The most common reason given by Irish families for leaving their accommodation in Ireland is to seek work in London. This reason has not been accepted as valid by any Council in London except one, and therefore the most usual type of emigration of Irish families will amount to 'intentional homeless', should the family become homeless later in London. Some families are offered travel vouchers to return to Ireland but this is at the discretion of the Council.

In the investigation of homeless applicants London Authorities will contact Irish Local Authorities and Department of Social Welfare Offices to verify the facts given by applicants. There is no standard procedure here and most enquiries are made by telephone. This procedure needs to be standardised because virtually all Irish authorities would be unaware of the significance of information given. **Should a homeless family be found 'intentionally homeless' they cannot rely on Local Authority housing and must seek alternatives or return to Ireland.**

## The Survey

The work of Brent Irish Advisory Service involves giving advice, information and assistance to Irish people in need in the borough of Brent and beyond. Since its beginnings in 1978 BIAS also has worked with groups and set up groups to deal with specific areas of need. Through research the organisation has highlighted many of the unmet needs of the Irish community especially in the areas of housing, Irish culture, mental health, mental handicap and many other areas.

The difficulties experienced by Irish people who have had to leave Ireland to seek employment or a more satisfactory way of life are constantly being presented to our agency. A more recent happening in this emigration pattern has been the emigration of whole families to London from Ireland.

Traditionally, Irish emigration has been predominantly that of single men and women who were able to support themselves through their positions in the labour market. They were of course many instances of exploitation by employers, landlords, etc., but generally single people are more mobile and adaptable in the housing market.

The survey was carried out in May 1988 by Patricia Cyhan who is a Social Policy student at Middlesex Polytechnic London. The study was confined to households placed in bed & breakfast accommodation by L B Brent which has the highest proportion of Irish residents (16%) of any London borough. Brent has traditionally been an area of Irish settlement encompassing the well-known Irish districts of Kilburn, Cricklewood, Willesden and Harlesden. The study therefore provides a microcosmic view of the members of the Irish community in London faced with homelessness.

At the time there were 1683 homeless people

in temporary accommodation placed there by the borough Council. 878 were in bed & breakfast type accommodation, 490 were in short-life accommodation, 24 were in mother and baby residences and 291 were staying with friends usually in overcrowded conditions. Irish households made up 14% of the total and 15.5% of the bed & breakfast accommodation.

The impetus for the research was the desire by the Brent Irish Advisory Service to establish the needs of the homeless in Bed and Breakfast accommodation, where over half the homeless families are placed, and where BIAS as a voluntary organisation could supplant or fill gaps in existing provision.

The first objective of the project was to establish who became homeless within the Irish community and the possible socio-economic characteristics such as age, sex, education, employment and occupation.

The second aim was to establish the possible reasons for homelessness, such as the type of accommodation the households were living in prior to Bed and Breakfast accommodation and secondly what circumstances directly precipitated their homelessness, such as eviction, the incidence of disputes with relatives or landlords. Under this category it was also decided to establish the length of residence in Bed and Breakfast accommodation at the time of the research and also to establish if households had actually slept 'rough', this was in order to determine how common such an occurrence was.

The final aim of the research was to highlight people's experience of Bed and Breakfast accommodation. We wanted to establish people's daily experiences such as their access to facilities i.e. cooking, bathroom and laundry facilities. Secondly we wanted to establish provision for children in hotels and the condition of their health.



## Methodology

It was decided that the form of research would be to interview Irish households in Bed and Breakfast accommodation with a semi-structured questionnaire. Gaining access to such households however proved to be a laborious process. Firstly Brent Council's Housing Needs Unit (who are responsible for housing the homeless) were contacted and a list of Irish households in Bed and Breakfast accommodation was requested. This was refused because of the Data Protection Act and confidentiality, but the Council was prepared to provide:

- A. a list of hotels currently used by Brent Council,
- B. the number of households actually housed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation but no ethnic breakdown.

Secondly, to alert households to the research an explanatory letter was composed and Brent Housing Needs Unit agreed to distribute this letter (and information on welfare, social and cultural activities pertaining to the Irish which was provided by BIAS) to all Irish households in Bed and Breakfast.

Research began in mid April and ended five weeks later with 26 interviews. There were 78 hotels on the list provided by Brent Council, 46 were approached directly and a further 4 were contacted by phone, making the total approached 50. The method of research was to group hotels

under geographical headings i.e. Kilburn or Paddington and visit at random individual hotels.

### Important Points to Note

- a. One category of hotels was completely excluded from the research. Under the title 'miscellaneous' various disparate hotels were grouped whose geographical location because of the constraints of time would have made it difficult for me to approach them collectively. This group totalled 15.
- b. Although the decision to visit individual hotels was random, distance from the first hotel visited would seem to have been a deciding factor and it is possible that starting from a different hotel in the various geographic groups may have produced slightly different data.

The sample is relatively small but lack of time and resources prevent anything more extensive being undertaken. What emerged confirmed many of the assumptions and echoed the opinions expressed by BIAS staff in informal discussions based on that Agency's contact with Irish people.

The full data and materials involved in the research is available at BIAS offices, 296 Willesden Lane, London NW2.

## Research Results

### WHO ARE THE HOMELESS WITHIN THE IRISH COMMUNITY?

#### 1. Age and Gender

The first thing was to establish who the homeless were in terms of age and gender. There were 5 male respondents and 21 female respondents (19% and 81% respectively). The age group breakdown reveals that the highest overall number is in the 25-45 age group, 69%.

**Therefore 54% of the survey were females over 25.**

**In the youngest group 16-25, out of a total of 8 (31%) the gender split was 1 man and 7 women.**

**Therefore it is apparent that women are over-represented amongst the homeless in Bed and Breakfast accommodation.**

#### 2. Type of Household

The sample revealed that 77% of those interviewed were of two-parent family type formation i.e. households consisting of parents and children, either as married couple or as unmarried partners.

6 of those interviewed (23%) were single people with men predominating, (5 out of the 6 single people were men). None of the single person households had any dependents.

A further breakdown of the figures regarding children reveals that:

The households containing children (77%) were all of pre-school age. Secondly that the average number of children per family was two. So it appears that households containing children are the largest group amongst the homeless, and in fact these are a priority group. Pascall states that Local Authorities are very reluctant to accept women as in 'priority need' without children and catalogues the obstacles that women without dependants face in trying to gain provision.

#### 3. Origin

Respondants were asked to indicate their ethnic origin and all responded. As a result it was established that the majority (92%) originated from the Republic of Ireland and 8% (2 people) originated from Northern Ireland.

The Irish have traditionally settled in certain areas of Brent such as Kilburn and Cricklewood and as a result, relatives and friends continue to be drawn to the area.

#### 4. Education

If we look at the education achievements of the homeless interviewed, it can be seen that a total of 70% had some form of academic qualification or further training. This figure can be broken down to reveal that:

- 28% of those interviewed had passed the Inter-Certificate or its equivalent 'O' levels,
- 5% had completed their education at eighteen leaving college with the Leaving Certificate (equivalent to 'A' Levels),
- A further 18% had also acquired the Leaving Certificate but had also gone on to some form of further training such as Nursing although the Leaving Certificate was not a necessary condition for entry to such further training,
- Finally a further 19% had acquired training or had completed an apprenticeship to become a mechanic for example.
- 30% of the sample had no academic qualifications whatsoever and had left school at 16.

#### 5. Occupation

The majority of respondents were unemployed (81%). Those who were presently engaged in paid employment totalled 19% (5 people).

Out of those presently working, (19%), classification of their work reveals that two individuals had manual and skilled occupations such as being an electrician.

Secondly that three individuals worked in non-manual skilled occupations such as Nursing.

An analysis of those unemployed (81%) via classification of their previous employment reveals that previous employment undertaken was in sectors of the economy that Irish immigrants have traditionally entered.

Out of the unemployed 61% were women who had all previously worked in Hairdressing, Catering and Secretarial (manual skilled, manual unskilled and manual skilled) work all characterised, unsocial hours and weak status. It must be said that women's participation in economic production cannot be divorced from the constraints they experience in familial responsibilities and all but



one of the 61 % had dependants they were caring for.

A further 8 % (2 women) had previously never worked at all and were known as 'housewives'. Both women had children they were caring for and although viewed as 'economically inactive' by State policy, there is considerable evidence that such housewives work extremely hard for little remittance. (See Piachaud, D 'Round about Fif-

ty Hours a Week' for further discussion.) An analysis of the unemployed men interviewed reveals that they had also worked in traditional sectors of the economy such as in the construction industry. This has proved to be quite an erratic form of employment for the men concerned all of whom had originally come to England with promises and contracts of work and accommodation which subsequently fell through.

## Why are the Homeless, Homeless?

### 1. Length of time spent in Bed and Breakfast accommodation

At the time of interview, the shortest time an individual or household had spent in Bed and Breakfast accommodation was five weeks.

The longest time an individual or household had spent in such accommodation was **three and a half years**.

The overall average time spent by respondents in Bed and Breakfast accommodation was nine and a half months. It must be stressed that this figure does not represent the average time spent in Bed and Breakfast accommodation prior to being rehoused, it indicates the length of time spent in Bed and Breakfast at the time of the research.

### 2. Residence prior to Bed and Breakfast accommodation

Interviewers were asked to indicate their housing circumstances, prior to Bed and Breakfast accommodation and these were the results:

Private rented accommodation	31%
Accommodation shared with friends/relatives	30%
Squatting	15%
Council Accommodation	8%
Bed and Breakfast Accommodation	8%
Hostels for the homeless	4%
Caravan	8%

### 3. Reasons for leaving previous accommodation

1. Disputes with friends or relatives — 29%  
Disputes with friends or relatives understood literally proved to be rare; in fact families, far from wanting to eject household, often proved to be the greatest support and provided temporary accommodation. It was usually in the circumstances of selling a house or pressure from landlords unwilling to accommodate further 'guests' that families/friends were unable to accommodate homeless households.

### 2. Eviction — 25%

The most common evictions took place when individuals were ejected from Council property in which they were Squatting. Contrary to the popular perception of squatters as 'drop-outs' consciously choosing to live an alternative lifestyle, all those interviewed who indicated squatting as their residence prior to Bed and Breakfast accommodation were in fact of family type formation with young children.

### 3. Dispute with a landlord — 13%

Reasons for disputes with landlords are specific to each individual case. However evidence presented indicates that private landlords do in fact evict households with young children. Equally those suffering from accident or illness who became dependent on State Benefits, found landlords were unwilling to accept this situation.

### 4. Unemployment (job hunting) — 13%

Unemployment in Ireland is a major cause of homelessness in Brent and the relatively large Irish population naturally draws friends or relatives from Ireland.

### 5. Unable to afford the Rent — 9%

Two respondents both of family type formation, found the costs of privately rented accommodation simply too prohibitive and felt forced to leave such accommodation.

### 6. Left an Institution i.e. Prison/Hospital — 5%

One individual, an elderly single man suffering from Schizophrenia had spent time in both Prison and Psychiatric hospital prior to being placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation.

### 7. Harassment — 5%

One individual suffered anti-Irish racism which he found intolerable to the extent he had to leave the accommodation.

### 4. Sleeping Rough — Incidence of

- 6.5% of the sample had slept on the streets at some point, all were single men with no dependants.

The longest time spent sleeping rough by one



individual was six months.

The shortest time spent sleeping rough by one individual was one night.

Having established the socio-economic characteristics of the sample and reasons for

homelessness we now look at the Human costs of Bed and Breakfast accommodation; people's access to facilities and control of their environment. We also examine the financial costs of such accommodation.

# The Human Costs of Bed and Breakfast Accommodation

The experience of people living on a long term basis in Bed and Breakfast is not identical, there are variations in the nature of accommodation, variations in people's willingness to tolerate such accommodation, and variations in encounters with officialdom. However the common experience is of low standards of accommodation, characterised by overcrowding, lack of facilities for cooking, washing and drying and wholly inadequate provision for children.

## FACILITIES

The facilities provided by many Bed and Breakfast establishments are simply not designed for long stay residents.

## COOKING FACILITIES

Cooking facilities were available to the majority of people visited. However such facilities often meant a communal kitchen massively overcrowded with as many as 50 households expected to share one kitchen. The lack of food storage facilities and constraints on the use of the kitchen means that households are dependent on 'take away' food with limited nutritional value.

11% of those interviewed had no cooking facilities whatsoever and as a result were entirely dependent on eating out.

## BATHROOM FACILITIES

Again available to the majority, but some were denied use of the Bathroom because of illness. Two Psoriasis sufferers (a skin condition) were denied use of any communal bath because part of their treatment, a coal tar solution, would stain the bath.

## LAUNDRY FACILITIES

38% of those interviewed had no laundry facilities in the hotel, and drying facilities for clothes proved to be non-existent. The expense of Launderettes means there is immense pressure on family budgets, especially where children are concerned.

## CATEGORY 'ANY OTHER'?

Most people had access to either a Television lounge or reception area. However since 19% of

those interviewed, mostly in Bayswater and Paddington, were not allowed to have any visitors up to their rooms, such an 'extra' facility proved to be a necessity not a luxury. The possibility of any private conversation with a friend or relative in a public reception area, where an employee of the hotel would be sitting, with children running around and other residents present, would be non-existent and thus such residents are completely denied any privacy.

## CHILDREN — THE LACK OF PLAY SPACE

The lack of play space for children was a difficult problem facing families in Bed and Breakfast. The cramped conditions of individual rooms and hotel management dictate that children should not be allowed to play in corridors or on stairs, meant that the children were being brought up with 'restricted lives'. Many households talked on their children's 'stunted growth' both physically and mentally and were concerned that Bed and Breakfast was wholly 'unfair on children'.

## HEALTH

A wide range of health issues are directly linked to conditions in the hotel, with problems affecting children seeming insurmountable. The majority of those interviewed stated that their children had suffered from one or more of the following whilst in Bed and Breakfast:

Flu's, Colds, Diarrhoea, Chickenpox, Ear infections, Tummy bugs, Measles, Meningitis, Coughs, Mumps, Chest infections, Runny noses, Loss of appetite, Vomiting, Eczema, Lack of sleep and Behaviour problems.

The inadequacy of cooking and toilet facilities, problems of sharing, over-use and inadequate cleaning are directly linked to the bouts of illness which the children suffer and are able to spread so easily.

Adults are equally not immune from suffering. Many households talked of 'becoming demoralised' and many others talked of being 'depressed'. People in relationships talked of being 'irritable' or 'moody' all the time with their partner and thus the stresses and strains of living in Bed and Breakfast can have an extremely detrimental effect upon the relationship between couples. This situation is compounded if people are 'shipped out' to areas such as Bayswater, Earls Court or



Paddington away from friends, relatives and communities they identify with.

Local doctors and health visitors in Bayswater confirm a picture of deteriorating health as well as severe stress on services. For example doctors have found many serious cases of malnutrition and many children are not immunised. They have also found an unusually high incidence of behavioural disorders in homeless children, such as aggression, retarded emotional development and severe depression.

Yet access to doctors has proved problematic for those interviewed who found immense difficulties in getting accepted on a GP's List, and in a survey undertaken in one Bayswater hotel two years ago, less than 60% of the families had a GP.

### ACCESS TO SCHOOLING

Some respondents expressed difficulty in trying to get children into certain schools in areas such as Bayswater and Paddington. Most schools were already overcrowded, and some schools had the perception of children from Bed and Breakfast as being 'unstable' and were unwilling to admit the children.

The mobility of homeless families means that once a place in school is allocated, the family have often moved on and some respondents did express their worries about the lack of effective records (also medical records) which would impede the difficult task of making speedy assessments of children's knowledge and potential achievement.

This problem requires genuine recognition and it is estimated that 800 school age children are believed to be without a permanent school place in London at present.

### SAFETY

Safety issues only seemed to be an issue amongst a minority of those interviewed. At no point was any household asked about general safety or

specific concerns, and thus the information here was volunteered freely and actively brought to attention.

Some households reported burglaries, thefts from the shared kitchen and that their mail had been opened. The biggest concern for safety was those housed in Bayswater and Paddington.

Bayswater is a notorious red-light area and it was asked repeatedly why households containing women and children had been placed in that area. The sense of concern was heightened at the time of the research because of the recent murder of a prostitute.

Women experienced tremendous harassment walking along the streets and subsequently felt afraid to leave the Bed and Breakfast during the day. Respondents volunteered information on attempted abduction's and persistent harassment from men looking for prostitutes and thus there is a genuine anxiety about safety.

### OVERCROWDING

The standards as to the minimum space and provision of amenities can be found in the Housing Act 1985 Section 352 and 358. A room will be overcrowded if two persons of ten years old or more and of opposite sexes, and not being persons living together as husband and wife must sleep in that room (dependent on floor area space). However from what has been seen it would appear that the vast majority of those with children **77%, were overcrowded** although no measurements of space were undertaken to confirm this.

Thus as has become evident, the facilities in these hotels are simply not suitable for long stay residents, yet the costs of hotels are high. However because they are hotels they escape the public health standards of private housing and many households were aware and resentful of this: that 'paying guests' seemed to receive priority treatment.

## The Financial Costs of Bed and Breakfast Accommodation

As has been shown, the 'human' costs of Bed and Breakfast accommodation are grave, but equally the use of such accommodation for the homeless also represents a significant level of Public expenditure. The Government calculated that the gross costs of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for a household a day to be £31, which is £20,615 a year. As a result it cost Local Authorities over £100 million to keep homeless households in Bed and Breakfast accommodation alone in 1987.

The costs do not end there. The majority of households accepted as officially homeless and placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation are usually in receipt of Benefits and the above figures do not reflect this. What the figures also exclude is the administrative and welfare expenditure by

Local Authority which Murie and Jeffries estimate at about £6 per day at £2,190 per annum.

The projected costs to LB Brent and similar boroughs both in hotel payments, loss of rent and provision of services for each homeless family accepted are as follows:

1988/9	£20,075
1989/90	£31,075
1990/91	£42,075
1991/92	£53,075

(Source: LB Brent Report November 1987)



## Opinions on Council Service

While recognising the many financial difficulties that the Council is facing and that housing staff recognise the housing need of those living in hotels and are responding sympathetically, the overwhelming majority of those interviewed expressed dissatisfaction with the level of contact and information provided by the Council.

### A. CASEWORKER VISITS

Those living in bed & breakfast were concerned at the infrequency of visits from caseworkers. "Caseworkers never visit" was a common complaint and those that had received visits were irregular. One household had received only one visit in 9 months and another household had received only 2 visits in two and a half years.

The infrequency of caseworker visits would be better tolerated if people had an alternative channel through which they could voice their dissatisfactions, express concern or more importantly glean information as to how their rehousing prospects were progressing. The most common way of trying to contact the caseworker was via the phone, however, this proved problematic. Time and time again it was reported that people 'spent a fortune' trying to contact their caseworker with no success. This proved to be a very frustrating drain on people's resources both financially and mentally as people were left hanging on the phone indefinitely or were cut off. People were very angry about the lack of contact and felt 'neglected' and 'forgotten about'.

### B. CASEWORKERS' ATTITUDES

Those who had received visits from caseworkers or had managed to contact their caseworkers made a number of criticisms.

Some felt that the caseworker was simply 'not responsive' and in fact had reached a stage of apathy where they felt it was pointless to complain, because 'the caseworker would say that they were aware of the problem, but did nothing'.

Such comments must be placed against the financial background. We have the phenomenon of powerless workers talking to the powerless homeless. As a result workers do not themselves have access to housing, nor can they tell families exactly how long they will have to wait, often there may be understandable reluctance to admit it will be years.

Almost 19% felt reasonably satisfied with contact from the Council.

Households felt pressured with offers of Chalkhill or Stonebridge (both large estates) for rehousing and felt this was very unfair. Nearly all households interviewed had a very clear idea of the scale of attacks, burglaries and muggings which apparently characterise these estates — yet very few had actually visited these estates. Women were particularly hostile to the possibility of being rehoused in these estates, because they are primary carers of children and thus least mobile. Women would thus spend the majority of their time in a flat, while men could go out and were subsequently not so intimidated.



## How Irish Community Organisations should address the Needs of Irish Homeless Families

Those interviewed provided six clear demands on Irish community organisations such as BIAS. It is important to note that many Irish organisations and individuals provide accommodation for newly arrived single immigrants through renting rooms or allowing relatives and friends to stay in their homes. Three large Irish Housing Associations — CARA, Innisfree H A and Irish Centre Hostels provide accommodation for single Irish emigrants. The Irish community in Britain itself does not have the resources to provide accommodation for families from Ireland except initially through relatives sharing their homes.

Advice agencies such as Brent Irish Advisory Service often assist five families each week with housing but the main provision comes through Local Authority housing. The type of assistance required by homeless families is therefore largely information on legal rights to housing, advocacy and support.

The most important finding is that the homeless families feel that the 'settled' Irish are not concerned with their needs.

### 1. Challenge People's Perception of the Homeless — Advocacy

Those interviewed wanted community organisations to challenge people's perception of the homeless as somehow personally irresponsible or inadequate, which the present government philosophy has encouraged. Homelessness is primarily a housing problem and a genuine recognition of the inequities and shortage of low-cost accommodation that exist, must be made clear to the general public.

Because of their 'statelessness' homeless households receive poorer services than the general public. **They are perceived as a group apart, they cannot vote, they are pushed into hotels, visibly labelled and rendered powerless.** While the rest of the population is concerned about the safety of their children, the reputation of the street and the value of property, the general public fiercely oppose the development of any service that may alleviate some problems in Bed & Breakfast accommodation.

The homelessness of households must be seen as a transitory phase not a fixed condition of a person's life, and it is within this context that many households felt there was a division between established immigrants and the influx of new immigrants. One household remarked that 'they were a floating population that nobody wants to

help' and was dismayed at the way the established community was responding. There may be hostility amongst sections of the settled community towards new immigrants possibly because of their attitudes to the Church or the educational advantages which earlier emigrants did not have — a factor which did not escape the attention of one household who stated, "the educated immigrants would not work as slaves" and felt this might be one reason for suspicion from the established community.

Established Centres for the Irish need to allow homeless families access to their facilities especially during the day.

### 2. "Get Irish together so that our voices can be heard"

Many homeless households felt that it was only through collective action that something could be done and BIAS and other welfare agencies must respond to this. There seems to be two strands to this, political and social.

Some households felt that the homeless needed to be politicised to focus the discontent which exists. The majority of those interviewed were angry about their situation and this was more acute because the channels open to them i.e. caseworkers' visits or surgeries were either infrequent or being cancelled. The homeless are thus politically marginalised and have no effective vehicle in which to air their grievances. Organisations such as BIAS could hold informal meetings aimed at the homeless with the specific aim of providing a legitimate vehicle where people could air their grievances and could also provide a useful social gathering. Hopefully this would provide a support system which would facilitate the exchange of information about hotel conditions, how people have coped with problems and generally provide the opportunity to campaign or highlight the plight of households in Bed and Breakfast. The aim would be social, but practical information could be distributed. At all times the impetus must come from the homeless attending the meeting, this must not be an opportunity to reinforce people's powerlessness.

### 3. Provide information on housing and accommodation

This facility already exists in the BIAS offices. However people seemed to want more specific information regarding the rehousing procedure and the reassurance that everything was being



done with regard to their case. Leaflets could be issued with information in easily condensed form i.e. how rehousing procedure works, what to do if people are unhappy with the choices offered to them, any extenuating circumstances which may fortify people's cases, etc.

#### 4. Irish social worker

The homeless include some of the most vulnerable members of the community. The risk of anxiety/isolation caused by prolonged placement in artificial surroundings of cramped hotel rooms can result in many social problems necessitating social work support. Thus as some families are spending up to 3 years in Bed and Breakfast it is clear that further services need to be provided to prevent other problems developing. However equally some households may have no need for and might positively reject professional social work support, but would benefit from more general support of a welfare nature.

#### 5. Pressurise the Council

Some households felt very much marginalised and felt it was important that 'Homelessness' was highlighted and people should become aware of the reality of Bed and Breakfast. Although the council have made the needs of the homeless a

priority, those interviewed did not seem to feel this.

They felt that Irish organisations should be documenting cases in a collective effort with other voluntary organisations, such as Citizen's Advice Bureaux and Women's groups, etc. to encourage awareness of what is happening to homeless households and then work through the policy channel to try to influence MP's and try to change the situation. One specific cause of concern was 'The Bayswater effect'. It was continually asked why were homeless families placed in areas such as Bayswater, an area notorious for prostitution.

#### 6. Information Packs

A very useful project would be for BIAS to create in co-operation with other voluntary agencies, an information pack. This would include:

- detailed breakdown of facilities in the locality of B/B's e.g. Doctors' addresses and problems people may have experienced;
- schools, play centres and hospitals.

This must be done via a breakdown of individual boroughs' provision, it must be localised.

## The Decline of Public Sector Housing Expenditure

The public expenditure controls of Monetarist economic policy have increasingly fallen on Local government and the determination that local government must conform collectively to national economic objectives has resulted in massive cuts in housing finance. Housing expenditure is centrally controlled and can be distributed either as **Capital** expenditure (investment in the housing stock to create or improve dwellings) or **Current** expenditure (subsidies in order to bring down the cost of housing to the consumer): Capital expenditure on housing proved to be the most immediate way of achieving rapid and substantial spending cuts in public expenditure. As a result, Gross local government capital spending fell by 43% in real terms from 1979 to 1982. Thus investment in public sector housing has declined dramatically and this is reflected in the number of new build homes for rent which have fallen from 89,300 in

1979 to 23,200 in 1987. The result of this policy is that local authorities are carrying out their lowest house building in peace time since 1925.

- Total Government expenditure on housing fell from £6.7 billion in 1978/9 to £2.7 billion in 1986/7 in real terms (estimated at 1985/6 prices).
- As a proportion of Total Government expenditure, housing amounted to 5.4% in 1978/9 and only 2% in the year 1986/7 although total Government expenditure increased by 10% in that period in real terms.
- The proportion of receipts from Council house sales which can be used by local authorities for housing investment has fallen from 50% to 20% since 1982.

(Source: Institute of Housing)



## Recommendations

The following recommendations are divided into sections dealing with the relevant authority or organisation to which they apply. The recommendations follow from the results and work of the survey as well as the regular work of BIAS in assisting Irish homeless families.

The families in the survey had been accepted as homeless and deemed not to be intentionally homeless. Many families would have been found to be 'intentionally homeless' and not eligible for even Bed & Breakfast temporary accommodation. The recommendations however cover the needs of these families who have been adjudged as 'intentionally homeless' and refused any accommodation from Local Authorities.

There are at least two studies being undertaken by the Department of the Environment and

Association of District Councils in Britain on the homelessness legislation. It is to be expected that a review of the Housing Act Part III will soon be undertaken by the British Government. This may result in a lengthening of residential qualifications for acceptance by Local Authorities and would severely restrict the rights of Irish homeless families to housing. As yet no White Paper on the issue has been produced but the recommendations in this report will cover this possibility.

**It is hoped that the Authorities to which these recommendations are addressed will seriously consider and implement what are but basic guarantees of human dignity for those in the most vulnerable position in society — those without a home.**

## The Irish Community

1. To ensure that Irish homeless families are provided for in the activities of Irish Centres and Advice Centres.
2. Provide facilities during the day for women with children who are in temporary accommodation.
3. Campaign in their local Authorities for adequate provision of housing and work towards ending the marginalisation of homeless Irish and other households.
4. Information leaflets need to be made available in each borough for Irish homeless families outlining activities, schools, churches, doctors and other areas of interest.
5. Irish organisations should urge Councils to provide adequate services to homeless families.
6. Support for homeless families by the established Irish community could be provided at a greater level.
7. Work with other groups in the boroughs to ensure that Irish homeless people receive equal treatment in housing and other services.



## The Irish Government

1. The Irish Government must initiate an information campaign in Ireland directed at individuals and families who are considering coming to London without securing permanent housing. This could be arranged through leaflets and advertisements in Local and National newspapers and Radio and TV on the problems of homelessness for Irish families in London and especially on the 'intentional homeless' provisions. The situation is developing in London where any family who have left accommodation, however undesirable, in Ireland, will not receive any assistance with housing beyond advice.
2. The Irish Government should ensure that families are not forced to leave because of the prospects of long-term unemployment in Ireland. Most families seen by BIAS have come primarily to seek employment in London.
3. A co-ordinated system be set up between Irish and London Local Authorities to facilitate exchange of rented housing along the lines of the British National Mobility Scheme. People in two bedroom properties wish to return to areas where many young families are leaving for London. Support should also be given to the Returning to Ireland Scheme being developed by Innisfree Housing Association.
4. The reciprocal exchanges of rented accommodation between some London boroughs and Irish Authorities need to be extended to all Authorities and the system formalised and efficiently implemented.
5. The Irish Government must press for EEC Social Fund resources to be made available for housing Irish emigrant families in London.
6. Services must be provided in Ireland for the many women with children who are forced to leave because of violence or difficult family circumstances.
7. The Irish Government should make finance available for Innisfree Housing Association and other agencies in Britain to purchase and develop property for emigrant Irish people and families moving to Britain.
8. Irish Local Authorities need to adopt a consistent and uniform approach to the issues of enquiries by British Local Authorities and on speedily rehousing Irish families who have been refused housing in Britain and have returned to Ireland. The issue of women with children being forced to return to violent situations is especially important.
9. The Irish Government should monitor any changes in housing and homelessness legislation in Britain which affects Irish people and make representations to the British Government on any changes which adversely affects Irish citizens.

## London Local Authorities

1. That no London Local Authority repatriates Irish families who are homeless but that in 'intentional homeless' cases the families be housed through London Area Mobility Scheme or other means.
2. Each Local Authority must ensure that homeless families are provided with support services to enable them to cope with homelessness pending rehousing.
3. That all Irish and other families be given information on health, welfare, benefits and social educational and cultural activities in the area they are placed.
4. Although London Local Authorities are under severe financial strain in housing provision, no measures should be taken which discriminate against Irish or other immigrant groups.
5. Local Authorities should support financially the Returning to Ireland Scheme of Innisfree Housing Association to allow older Irish people to return to Ireland.
6. That London Local Authorities seek financial assistance through the European Social Fund for Irish immigrant workers for housing provision.
7. All London boroughs must make adequate provision for Travellers to reduce the homelessness among the Travelling Community.
8. That London Local Authorities resist impending legislative changes to define homelessness as 'rooflessness' and to alter the provisions on local connection as these changes would seriously affect the housing of Irish homeless families.
9. Maintain ethnic records of all applications for housing and homelessness.
10. Ensure that Irish people are included under the provisions of Equal Opportunity Policies in housing.
11. That Irish homeless applicants from Northern Ireland who have left because of violence or harassment be rehoused in London and that such reasons for giving up accommodation not be regarded as 'intentional homeless'.
12. Considering that Local Authorities have been forced by Government to reduce building homes from 89,000 in 1979 to 23,000 in 1987, and the consequent burdens placed on them through increasing homelessness that every effort be made to again increase housing provision and no attempts be made to restrict housing access to homeless families, especially Irish and other immigrant families.
13. That London Local Authorities support Innisfree Housing Association and Irish agencies to provide housing for Irish people.
14. Employ Irish staff in Housing Departments and especially in areas such as Homeless Persons Units where many Irish people use the services. Training and opportunities for responsibility at higher levels be made more accessible for Irish staff.

## Commission for Racial Equality

1. The Commission for Racial Equality must investigate the procedures of London boroughs in assessing homeless Irish applicants for housing.  
The Race Relations Act may be breached by the different standards employed in investigating Irish people's circumstances compared with other applicants for housing under the House Act Part III.



## Appendix I

### Numbers of Households on Waiting Lists in London boroughs April 1988

Barking	4853	Islington	9750
Barnet	7827	Kensington & Chelsea	11770
Bexley	3868	Kingston	1447
Brent	18010	Lambeth	16209
Bromley	3354	Lewisham	22629
Camden	16949	Merton	4413
Croydon	4166	Newham	9611
Ealing	9913	Redbridge	1869
Enfield	7963	Richmond	3953
Greenwich	7054	Southwark	11309
Hackney	9327	Sutton	1469
Hammersmith & Fulham	8852	Tower Hamlets	11974
Haringey	14221	Waltham Forest	10362
Harrow	2356	Wandsworth	8555
Havering	3561	Westminster	9044
Hillingdon	4079	City of London	610
Hounslow	6490	Total:	267,717

(Source: LRC/The London Irish)

As can be seen from the above table the boroughs with the highest concentration of Irish heads of household are also the boroughs with the longest waiting lists and vice versa.

This does not mean that the Irish are the main applicants for housing, but only that the Irish live predominantly in the areas where there is greatest housing need.

Equally the homeless households in the following table are in boroughs where most Irish live even though the Irish do not form a very significant proportion of the total number of homeless households.

## Appendix II

### Homeless households by London boroughs April 1987—March 1988.

Barking	260	Kensington & Chelsea	323
Barnet	462	Kingston	271
Bexley	341	Lambeth	1429
Brent	1482	Lewisham	1589
Bromley	552	Merton	324
Camden	1450	Newham	1566
Croydon	809	Redbridge	247
Ealing	1560	Richmond	290
Enfield	882	Southwark	2497
Greenwich	1341	Sutton	502
Hackney	1285	Tower Hamlets	1362
Hammersmith & Fulham	1061	Waltham Forest	801
Haringey	1950	Wandsworth	964
Harrow	212	Westminster	1297
Havering	204	City of London	42
Hillingdon	429	Total:	30,837
Islington	2402	(Source: LRC)	

### Appendix III

Residents in Private Households by Irish Republic born Heads of Households and Percentage of Total Private Households.  
London Boroughs (1981 Census).

Barking	4390	(3%)	Islington	15648	(5.6%)
Barnet	12774	(4.5%)	Kensington & Chelsea	6526	(5.6%)
Bexley	3500	(1.6%)	Kingston	3627	(2.8%)
Brent	28141	(11.3%)	Lambeth	14771	(6.2%)
Bromley	5261	(1.8%)	Lewisham	9232	(4%)
Camden	12781	(8.4%)	Merton	5954	(3.6%)
Croydon	9117	(2.9%)	Newham	5611	(2.7%)
Ealing	19385	(7.1%)	Redbridge	6950	(3.1%)
Enfield	7660	(3%)	Richmond	4123	(2.7%)
Greenwich	7232	(3.5%)	Southwark	11989	(5.8%)
Hackney	9332	(5.3%)	Sutton	3752	(2.3%)
Hammersmith & Fulham	14219	(10.1%)	Tower Hamlets	5040	(3.7%)
Haringey	12616	(6.3%)	Waltham Forest	5649	(2.7%)
Harrow	9900	(5.1%)	Wandsworth	13606	(5.5%)
Havering	5009	(2.1%)	Westminster	11878	(7.8%)
Hillingdon	7390	(3.3%)	City of London	90	(2.3%)
Hounslow	7558	(3.8%)	Total:	300,621	

(Source: The London Irish)

### Appendix IV

London Housing Survey 1986-87 Council Tenants in London

#### Race by Tenure

Tenure	White UK (%)	Afro Carib (%)	Asian (%)	Irish (%)	Other (%)	TOTAL (%)
owner occupiers	53	33	59	40	58	52
council tenants	31	48	25	44	21	32
private tenants	10	8	14	11	16	10
hsg assoc tenants	5	10	2	5	5	5
TOTAL	100 (2,044,000) N=4582	100 (181,000) N=389	100 (140,000) N=328	100 (117,000) N=257	100 (158,000) N=347	100 (2,640,000) N=5903



### Council Tenants: Household Type by Ethnic Origin

household type	White UK (%)	Afro Carib (%)	Asian (%)	Irish (%)	Other (%)	TOTAL (%)
pensioner households	43	8	15	31	21	37
single people	10	18	3	12	17	11
2 or more adults	21	22	15	27	20	21
1 parent families	7	23	5	8	10	9
small families	14	23	37	16	26	16
large families	5	6	25	6	5	6
TOTAL	100 (643,000) N=1383	100 (86,000) N=182	100 (35,000) N=79	100 (52,000) N=108	100 (34,000) N=68	100 859,000 N=1820

(Source: LRC)

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**“In Ireland you can have a home but no job, in England you can have a job but no home, nobody helps anyone else, nobody is making it clear to people about the realities of living in London”.**