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## Oxford Council Fined £4,135 for Housing Mother and Child in an Unsuitable B&B

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A mother and her young child endured six months in cramped, inadequate bed-and-breakfast (B&B) accommodation, leading to Oxford City Council being ordered to pay £4,135 in compensation. The payment followed a ruling by the Local Government Ombudsman, which exposed serious failings in the council's handling of the family's homelessness case.

Government guidelines clearly state that councils should avoid placing families in B&Bs, especially those with dependent children, for longer than six weeks. Yet, this mother, who applied for homelessness support in February 2024 after being evicted from her previous residence, was left in a B&B for far longer. The accommodation lacked basic amenities like adequate space and cooking facilities, making daily life challenging for her and her child.

Compounding the issue, the council mistakenly placed the mother on the wrong housing waiting list for two months, potentially delaying her access to suitable accommodation. The Ombudsman described this error as causing “uncertainty” about whether the family could have been rehoused sooner.

In June 2024, the council offered a flat, but the mother returned to the B&B after just two weeks, citing safety concerns due to criminal activity in the area. It wasn’t until September 2024 that the council finally provided a long-term property.

The Ombudsman’s investigation concluded that the prolonged B&B stay was unacceptable, stating that the council “caused the family to live for a prolonged period in unsuitable accommodation.” The £4,135 compensation reflects the distress and inconvenience suffered.

A spokesperson for Oxford City Council said: “We accept the Ombudsman’s decision and have issued an apology to the household. Demand for temporary accommodation has surged by 136% in two years, and we place nine to 10 households weekly.

Limited housing stock makes it difficult to avoid B&B placements entirely.” They added that the council is working to secure 200 additional temporary accommodation units over two years and plans to deliver 1,500 new affordable homes by 2029.

However, the council’s response fails to fully address the systemic issues at play. Their latest annual report revealed staffing shortages and recruitment delays, which have led to a backlog of housing complaints. In March 2024, 20 families were housed in B&Bs, with six exceeding the six-week limit, though none reportedly stayed longer than three months.

The Labour-led council’s struggles highlight a broader failure to manage Oxford’s housing crisis effectively. While they point to nationwide pressures, the Ombudsman’s findings suggest a lack of urgency in addressing individual cases. The mother’s ordeal underscores

the human cost of bureaucratic errors and insufficient housing stock, leaving vulnerable families in limbo.