

Homes and Neighbourhoods
Islington Council
222 Upper Street N1 1XR

Report of: Ian Swift, Director of Housing Needs and Strategy

Meeting of: Housing Scrutiny Committee

Date: 13th March 2023

Overcrowding and Housing Allocations

RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. Note the content of the briefing and the actions taken to understand and respond to levels of overcrowding in the borough.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. Islington has significant levels of housing need in the borough. This may include where households have no stable home or where the accommodation, they occupy is unsuitable for their needs. There are two keyways in which these levels of need are seen by the Housing Service, through applications to the authority as homeless or at risk of homelessness and through applications to join the housing register.
3. Overcrowding is one of the areas of housing need that is observed in both the homelessness and housing register pathways.
4. This report describes current levels of known housing need as captured through the housing register and homelessness and illustrates the place of overcrowding within that need. It also updates on activity to respond to overcrowding.

Housing need and overcrowding in Islington

5. The number of households in housing need in Islington can be described by considering the number of households who are being assisted because

they are homeless or at risk of homelessness and by reflecting on the broader numbers on the housing register.

- There are currently 976 homeless households living in temporary accommodation provided by Islington Council. The data below shows the level of households living in temporary accommodation at the end of each financial year.

March 2022	848
March 2021	922
March 2020	749
March 2019	791
March 2018	745
March 2017	806
March 2016	941
March 2015	920
March 2014	1004
March 2013	1008

- In 2022/23 current trends suggest approximately **4,056** homeless approaches by year end with an average monthly approach of **338** new households.
- Those approaching as homeless largely do so because they have lost available accommodation either as a result of being excluded by family or friends or being evicted from the private rented sector or due to Domestic Abuse. There are however a portion of households who approach because their current accommodation is unreasonable to continue to occupy. Legally this is a high threshold and so it is a smaller group than those who have lost their home. Amongst this group are a small number who are extremely overcrowded and as result can no longer remain in their current home.
- A better picture of levels of overcrowding however is seen when viewing the profile of households on the council's housing register. There are two categories of overcrowding recognised on the register – overcrowding and severely overcrowded households with higher priority.
- Table 2 below shows the number of overcrowded households on the register broken down by overcrowding and bedroom need. This illustrates the high overall numbers on the register and the range of bedroom sizes required.

Table 2:

Severely Overcrowded households' numbers	Size of home required
0	1 bedroom
62	2 bedrooms
124	3 bedrooms
201	4 bedrooms
105	5 bedrooms
35	6 bedrooms

21	7+ bedrooms
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Overcrowded households' numbers	Size of home required
494	1 bedroom
830	2 bedrooms
841	3 bedrooms
172	4 bedrooms
17	5 bedrooms
4	6 bedrooms
0	7 bedrooms

11. The number of households on the housing register who are currently overcrowded is **2,909**. Of these **4** meet the criteria for statutory overcrowding, **551** are severely overcrowded and the remainder are in moderate overcrowding.

12. Over time the number on the register have fluctuated and the levels of overcrowding can also be seen to fluctuate. Table 3 and 4 below show the changes in those on the housing register over time and the changes over time in terms of overcrowding. Both are a snapshot position at the start of each financial year.

Table 3: number of households on the housing register

April 2022	15,402
April 2021	14,530
April 2020	14,164
April 2019	14,567
April 2018	14,469
April 2017	18,033
April 2016	20,733

Table 4:

Number of overcrowded households on the housing register over the last 7 years

2022	2909
2021	2772
2020	2216
2019	1378
2018	2978
2017	3432
2016	5175

13 This shows levels of overcrowding have appeared to rise markedly since the beginning of the covid 19 pandemic, or perhaps more accurately, the numbers of overcrowded households who have decided to register for a social housing move have risen.

- 14 There are of course higher levels of overcrowding in the wider community which are not seen in these statistics because some overcrowded households do not or cannot join the housing register (for example those subject to immigration controls). The scale of this overcrowding may come out in the census statistics once these are released.
- 15 Cost of living issues and the broader housing crisis are likely to also impact on this issue. The availability of homes at the more affordable end of the private sector is reducing significantly in the last 2 years and reports show that the homes available are up to 17% more expensive. In this context it is likely some households on benefits or low incomes will rent smaller homes that they can afford within local housing allowance levels and this will contribute to rising overcrowding levels.

Responding to overcrowding

- 16 The Housing Scrutiny Committee received a series of presentations during 2022/2023 which illustrated the work taking place within the council to address the issues of overcrowding in Islington.
- 17 The efforts to reduce void Islington Council properties will make some contribution to meeting overall housing need and this will make a small contribution to reducing the numbers experiencing overcrowding.
- 18 Within the council housing stock there is focused work underway through the Rightsizing and Under-Occupation work. This aims to address levels of under occupation in the council stock and by association support the response to overcrowding. The action focusses on a number of areas illustrated below:
- Moves through the housing register – currently under-occupying and applicants on the Housing Register are awarded the highest priority for a transfer as an incentive for them to give up large properties and they have to bid for properties of their preferred choice. Successful bids are based on the date they have registered. Significant individual support is required to assist under occupiers to bid. There are currently over **676** under occupying tenants registered for a move.
 - Identifying under occupiers - There are more under-occupiers in the stock who are not registered for housing and who may be reluctant to consider a move. They may however also be struggling with bills and the layout of larger homes as they get older. Work is underway to identify these residents and through the Housing Management Services area teams and through a variety of publicity and campaigns.
 - Mobility options available include the Pan London mobility scheme for those fleeing violence which support tenants of London boroughs to move to another home in a different borough, Seaside and Country Homes and mutual

exchange options such as Homeswapper, Homefinder to assist people over the age of 55, and House Exchange.

19. The number of social housings lets has declined year on year Table 5. In 2021/2022 only **1022** council and housing association homes were let through the register. Table 6 below shows the breakdown by bedroom size.

Table 5: Lettings per year

Lettings per year	Year
1022	2022
1089	2021
1186	2020
1105	2019

Table 6: Lettings 2021/22 broken down by bed size

Studio	36
1 bedroom	462
2 bedrooms	357
3 bedrooms	134
4 bedrooms	24
5 bedrooms and larger	9

- 19 Covid 19 undoubtedly impacted on the number of social homes that were relet and delayed some new build schemes, however it is unlikely any significant increase in social lettings will be seen in 2023.

- 20 Alternative responses, beyond the provision of a social home will be necessary to address this challenge. This might include measures to alleviate the impacts of overcrowding as well as looking alternative housing solutions, though this is challenging in the current market

to wait for any of that to start taking steps to establish compliance systems and processes. It is also a good opportunity to consider Islington Council's current performance management model to see whether it could be further enhanced to respond to the new, more muscular, approach of the Regulator.

Financial Implications

There are no known financial implications associated with this report.

Legal Implications

There are no known legal implications associated with this report.