

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: 9th May 2023

Overcrowding

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 updates the Housing Scrutiny Committee of the progress made relating to the strategic review of overcrowding.
5. The Housing Scrutiny Committee received a series of presentations during 2022/2023 which illustrated the work taking place within the council and with partner agencies to address the issues of overcrowding in Islington. These presentations have been conducted by:
 - Housing Needs and Strategy Services

- Housing Management Services
 - Planning services
 - Environmental Health
 - Islington Law Centre
 - Citizens Advice Bureau
 - Peabody Housing Association the largest Housing Association landlord in Islington
 - Property services
 - The New Build service
6. The council has also worked in partnership with the University College London to produce a detailed questionnaire for all households overcrowded and seeking larger accommodation through the Housing Register. This questionnaire has been distributed to the 2,909 overcrowded households on the housing register and the results of this questionnaire will be considered at a future Housing Scrutiny Committee meeting.
 7. Islington Council also distributed a questionnaire to all partners seeking views and comments on how Islington Council could improve its services for households living in overcrowded accommodation. The results of this survey will also be considered at a future Housing Scrutiny Committee meeting.
 8. The Housing Scrutiny Committee also received a comprehensive report outlining the latest data available on overcrowding and the work currently undertaken to address this series issues. This data highlighted that only 6% of people on the Housing register will be rehoused into permanent council and housing association accommodation in the future.
 9. One of the strongest indicators that all is not well in England's housing system is the level of overcrowding experienced by people in all tenures. Overcrowding in the social housing sector is indicative of a shortage of available housing of the right size, and in the private sector it is indicative of the affordability issues faced by households in trying to find a home large enough for their needs.
 10. The Housing Scrutiny Committee received verbal and written evidence, that as well as looking at the scale of overcrowding as measured in the English Housing Survey, and through the Islington Council Housing Register the Housing Scrutiny Committee also looked at the impacts on families who deem themselves to be living in overcrowded conditions. The Housing Scrutiny Committee received evidence which explored the impact overcrowding has on family's physical and mental health, wellbeing, daily lives and relationships.
 11. Nationally more than 310,000 children (313,244) in England are forced to share beds with other family members. One in every six children is being forced to live in cramped conditions because their family cannot access a suitable and affordable home. This equates to two million children from 746,000 families.

12. Households from minority ethnic backgrounds are three times as likely to be affected by overcrowding than white households. Over two thirds (70%) of overcrowded families say they have experienced both poor mental and poor physical health as a direct result of overcrowding. A quarter of parents in overcrowded homes are regularly forced to sleep in a living room, bathroom, hallway or kitchen because of the lack of space.
13. Through the work of the Housing Scrutiny Committee Islington Council is calling for a long-term, national plan for meeting housing need, with the aim of driving a drastic increase in the number of affordable homes over the next decade.
14. The most commonly used measure of overcrowding is the bedroom standard. This was developed by the Government Social Survey for use in the 1960 housing survey. While it is not legally enforceable, it is commonly held to be a realistic and useful measure. Under the standard, the number of bedrooms needed by a household is calculated according to the composition of the household in terms of age, gender and relationships. The household is deemed to be overcrowded (“below standard”) if they have fewer bedrooms available to them than this calculated figure.
15. The English Housing Survey is an annual sample survey looking at housing issues. For the following analysis we used the published dataset relating to the year 2020/21, the latest available at the time of writing. These figures only include families, i.e., households including dependent children.
16. The council counted all families deemed to be “below standard” as measured against the bedroom standard as noted above.
- Overcrowded families 745,820
 - Children in overcrowded families 1,894,454
 - Total number of people in overcrowded families 3,409,216
 - Adults (total people minus children) 1,514,762
17. This means that one in six of all children in England are living in overcrowded conditions.
18. Looking at the incidence of overcrowding (amongst all households, not just families) by ethnicity, the council can see that households from minority ethnic groups are more than three times as likely as white households to experience overcrowding.

	White	Minority ethnic
Below standard (overcrowded)	2.7%	9.8%
At standard	25.3%	41.6%
Above standard	72.0%	48.6%
Total	100.0%	100%

19. By breaking down the figures by tenure, we can see that nearly half of overcrowding is located in social rented housing.

	Overcrowded families	% of all overcrowded families
Social renters	355,852	47.7%
Private renters	242,751	32.5%
Owner-occupiers	147,215	19.7%
Total	745,818	100%

20. Key findings from a recent National Housing Federation research programme identified the following:

- In four in ten (41%) overcrowded homes, children are sharing a bedroom with an adult.
- In one in four overcrowded homes (26%), children are having to share a bed with someone else.
- Over half of all respondents (52%) have had to sleep somewhere other than their bedroom, such as a living room, bathroom, corridor or kitchen due to overcrowding.
- Parents in more than half (53%) of overcrowded homes worry that their children are too embarrassed to bring friends home because of how overcrowded it is.
- In almost half (48%) of overcrowded homes, children struggle to do their homework because of the lack of space.
- 76% of overcrowded families have experienced an adverse impact on their health due to overcrowding.
- 77% of overcrowded families have had their mental health negatively affected by overcrowding.

Financial Implications

There are no known financial implications associated with this report.

Legal Implications

There are no known legal implications associated with this report.