Communities
and Local Government

Tackling Overcrowding in England:
Self-Assessment for Local Authorities

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Contents

Introduction

Good housing has a key role to play in influencing the overall living standards of a family. Children's development and well being is dependent on tackling all relevant dimensions of poor housing. If a home is overcrowded it can affect health and educational attainment and can impact negatively on life chances.

Living in overcrowded accommodation can, both directly and indirectly, have a devastating effect on families. Under-achievement at school can be caused by lack of space for children to do their homework. Absence rates may be higher because of illness associated, at least in part, with poor living conditions. Older children may spend more time outside the home, on the streets, simply to find privacy and space.

Poor housing conditions can cause a range of physical and mental illnesses and children growing up in difficult housing conditions are 25 per cent more likely to suffer severe ill-health and disability during childhood/early adulthood. Overcrowding is a key component of poor housing.

Under the existing statutory standards we estimate that some 20,000 households are overcrowded. Under the Survey of English Housing's Bedroom Standard it is estimated that 554,000 households are overcrowded, of which 228,000 are in the social sector. There are particular concentrations of overcrowding in London where some 37 per cent of all overcrowded households live.

The Government wants to see a substantial reduction in the number of households who are living in overcrowded accommodation. This will provide better circumstances for individual households to achieve their ambitions and improve their life chances. Reducing overcrowding is closely tied to the Government's ambition to eradicate child poverty by 2020.

The Government has allocated an additional £15m towards tackling overcrowding over the next three years (2008-11) and in December 2007 we awarded Pathfinder status to 38 local authorities, building on the good practice work of five overcrowding pilots in London. We estimate that 60 per cent of all overcrowded households in the social rented sector live in these areas (all London authorities and Birmingham, Bradford, Leicester, Liverpool and Manchester).

The London Mayor in his *Draft Housing Strategy* (September 2007) outlined his expectation that all local authorities will develop housing strategies with clear policies to tackle overcrowding, aiming to stem its growth in social housing by 2012. Government wants to encourage all local authorities to formulate action plans to tackle overcrowding and to ensure that those households who are experiencing the worst incidences of overcrowding are given the necessary support to enable them to alleviate their circumstances.

To support the work of the Pathfinders and to encourage wider development of overcrowding strategies the Homelessness, Overcrowding and Worklessness Division in Communities and Local Government have produced this *Tackling Overcrowding in England: Self-Assessment for Local Authorities.* It is full of practical tips and we hope will help local housing authorities establish an effective approach to tackling overcrowding.

There is no requirement to complete the self-assessment or submit it to Communities and Local Government or your Government Office. We hope however, that local authorities and their partners will find this a useful exercise to undertake when considering options for reducing overcrowding in your locality. The self-assessment could be used in the following ways:

- To develop a localised *Tackling Overcrowding* strategy and action plan

- By Members who may wish to use the self assessment as the basis of undertaking a scrutiny review of the authority's work in tackling overcrowding.

The self-assessment is not exhaustive nor do we seek to be overly prescriptive, but we do however hope it will provide you with pointers as to the potential steps and/or schemes you might undertake when addressing overcrowding issues.

There is no requirement to produce a strategy for tackling overcrowding but we would suggest that developing a short strategy and more importantly the associated action plan highlighting short, medium and long term actions that will have a practical and positive effect, might be a sensible approach to adopt.

This document is not statutory guidance and is not linked to any funding decisions by Communities and Local Government. Local authorities are reminded that when discharging any housing function they need to have regard to relevant legislation and any statutory guidance.

A.   Corporate and member commitment

This section helps a local authority to assess whether it has in place all the key strategic aspects required to tackle overcrowding effectively. It assesses whether there is Member and Chief Officer 'buy in' backed by adequate resources, a strategy and action plan and the inclusion of tackling overcrowding as a priority for the local authority.

Q1.   Has the authority politically committed itself to prioritising tackling overcrowding?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Q2.   If so, has this priority been expressed as a specific commitment with a measurable target?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Q3.   Have both revenue and capital resources been committed to work to tackle overcrowding?

Yes   ☐
No   ☐

> **Comment:**

Q4.   Has the local authority assessed the contribution that tackling overcrowding will make in assisting the authority to meet a number of indicators contained in the Local Government Performance Framework?

Yes   ☐
No   ☐

> **Comment:**

Q5.   Has the authority sought to adopt tackling overcrowding as an LAA priority or as a locally set performance target?

Yes   ☐
No   ☐

> **Comment:**

Possible actions and next steps:

- **obtain Member and Chief Officer commitment; this is best expressed in the form of a local authority statement, target, or policy**

- **political and corporate commitment needs to be backed by resources. Both capital and revenue resources need to be identified early on, as part of work to develop a strategy and action plan**

- **Communities and Local Government homelessness grant can be used for tackling both homelessness and overcrowding. This was indicated in the homelessness grant notification letter sent to authorities in December 2007**

- **for those Pathfinder authorities allocated specific resources for overcrowding - how will these be deployed?**

- **consider building actions to tackle overcrowding into the authority's Community Plan**

- **consider how tackling overcrowding can be promoted within the authority's Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) group**

- **ideally an authority should set an overcrowding target**

- **link tackling overcrowding back to the new local government performance framework by identifying all indicators where tackling overcrowding can have a positive effect on the authority's performance in meeting those indicators. (Possibly link to indicators on child poverty, health, education attainment, etc)**

- **consider prioritising tackling overcrowding as an LAA indicator or adopting it as a local indicator and target.**

B. Adopting an overcrowding strategy and action plan

Sections B and C help a local authority to develop practical actions to effectively tackle overcrowding. This includes developing a short tackling overcrowding strategy. Of greater importance is the development of the action plan with the aim of bringing together all the actions, initiatives and partnerships that will make a difference in the local authority area.

Q6. Has the authority adopted a tackling overcrowding strategy and action plan?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Q7. If no, are there plans in place to develop a strategy and action plan within 6 months?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Possible actions and next steps:

- **local authorities should approach work to address overcrowding in similar terms to that taken to prevent homelessness. Success is likely through a housing options approach and a 'can do' culture amongst staff and members with all actions grounded in practical measures**

- **important to explain to members that tackling overcrowding doesn't mean an authority cannot continue to tackle homelessness. authorities might want to undertake an impact assessment on homelessness of tackling overcrowding**

- **the approach is really an extension of tackling the most extreme forms of housing need, with work to tackle homelessness and overcrowding two clear priorities for an authority looking to address housing need effectively**

- **the action plan is more important than a 'wordy' or 'worthy' strategy**

- **what is likely to work is a strategy based on an inclusive and corporate approach to tackling overcrowding; setting up specialist roles or a team; setting targets and monitoring performance against them; practical actions underpinning a strategic approach**

- **suggested issues that a strategy and action plan may seek to address include:**

  - **establishing a baseline for the levels of overcrowding in the social sector as a starting point and considering how baselines could be set for the private rented sector**

  - **establishing a tackling overcrowding project team and membership, including main partner RSLs**

  - **developing joint working and partnerships including those at sub regional level**

  - **setting targets and monitoring performance against these targets**

  - **obtaining and allocating resources**

  - **establishing an overcrowding team in larger local authorities where Pathfinder funding has been given. In smaller authorities a post or part of the role on overcrowding could be integrated into that of existing options officers. Alternatively, an authority could consider sharing resources**

with neighbouring authorities or commission work sub-regionally

o **considering reviewing allocations criteria for social housing including what criteria is applied locally for an overcrowded household to qualify for reasonable preference and what priority is given to these households. Think also about under occupation cases in the social sector and how an authority's allocation policy can be used to assist these households to move**

o **making best use of existing social stock to ensure that, wherever possible, properties of the correct size are allocated, especially where properties are flagged as two bedrooms/three people or three bedrooms/four people**

o **making best use of all stock including targeting private rented sector incentive schemes to secure larger properties. This may require adapting incentive schemes for landlords and tenants**

o **developing a casework approach to tackling overcrowding including options interviews; options toolkit; options home visits**

o **developing a communication and publications strategy to include professionally produced material; use of road shows to get messages and information across; targeting publicity; take up campaigns; working with community groups; using Choice Based Lettings (CBL) publications to highlight opportunities**

o **consider the authority's approach to new supply including use of Section 106 planning gain and requiring larger units for some sites rather than more smaller units.**

C.   Setting up a team

Q8.   Has a team been set up to tackle overcrowding?

Yes ☐
No ☐

> **Comment:**

Q9.   Has an officer been appointed within the local authority with overall responsibility for driving forward actions to tackle overcrowding?

Yes ☐
No ☐

> **Comment:**

Q10. Has the contribution that other authority administered services could make to tackling overcrowding been assessed and actions agreed with these services?

Yes ☐
No ☐

> **Comment:**

Q11. Is it clear within the local authority who is responsible for all the key elements of any strategy ie who is responsible for strategic actions; developing new initiatives or carrying out practical tasks?

Yes ☐
No ☐

> **Comment:**

Q12. Has a work plan been produced for team members, with individual targets and responsibilities?

Yes ☐
No ☐

> **Comment:**

Q13. Has specific training, based on a training plan, been provided for all staff and agencies who will be involved in work to tackle overcrowding?

Yes ☐
No ☐

> **Comment:**

Possible actions and next steps:

- **establish roles within the team and other sections of the authority**

- **need for someone to take the policy and strategic lead to 'get things moving'. There will also be the need for someone (or a team) to carry out the practical actions resulting from the strategy and to develop initiatives**

- **consider incorporating into mainstream options team work or in larger authorities, especially those with overcrowding Pathfinder funding, a dedicated team or post**

- **tap into mainstream staff as 'foot soldiers', the doorknockers explaining options and providing information. These could be for example, existing housing management staff from the authority, Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) or Registered Social Landlord; existing options officers or visiting officers**

- **training for the team or those who will come together to form part of the team for certain roles. Training could include:**

  - **conducting overcrowding options interviews**

  - **helping people understand the reality of their housing prospects ie 1000 overcrowded tenants on the authority's housing list with supply of only 10 x 3 bed plus lets a year**

  - **specific training on the options available locally including: remaining in existing property with adaptations; helping older children to move out into the private rented sector or to join the housing waiting list; mobility, accessing the private rented sector; HomeBuy options; mutual exchange**

  - **strategy to determine who to target and how to obtain information**

  - **providing training to allow non technical staff to undertake basic assessments when visiting properties to determine the possibility of minor or major adaptations**

  - **allocation policies, Choice Based Lettings (CBL) and how they can be used to help tackle overcrowding**

  - **any possible incentives for under occupation moves**

  - **how to help tenants make better use of space in their existing home.**

D. Establishing baseline position on levels and severity of overcrowding and under occupation

This section helps a local authority understand the levels and severity of overcrowding within its area by tenure, in order to establish an accurate baseline to measure the effectiveness of actions taken. This will also help a local authority to develop a targeted approach to reducing under occupation in social sector stock.

Q14. Has baseline information been gathered to establish levels of overcrowding in all sectors, but especially the social sector?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Q14a. Are you able to establish:

- How many households in authority owned stock are overcrowded?

  Yes ☐   No ☐

- How many households in Registered Social Landlord (RSL) owned stock are overcrowded?   Yes ☐   No ☐

- How many households in the private rented and owner occupier sectors are overcrowded?

  Yes ☐   No ☐

- How many households in social sector (both authority and RSL) are under occupiers?   Yes ☐   No ☐

Comment:

Q15. Can the local authority break down levels of overcrowding still further in the social sector ie number of households short by one bedroom, two bedrooms, etc?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Q16.   Have software programmes been developed to help establish baselines and monitor progress?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Possible actions and next steps:

- **agree the minimum standard the local authority will adopt to establish baseline figures for overcrowding within the social sector as a starting point and look to encourage all Registered Social Landlord (RSL) partners to adopt the same standard. A local authority should establish by how many bedrooms households in the social sector are overcrowded**

- **if possible look to establish the severity of overcrowded cases in other tenures though this may be more difficult to establish in the first instance**

- **develop an overcrowding demand and supply model to include:**

  o **baseline figures and the severity of these cases**
  o **build in the estimated impact of each targeted action and plot the likely impact of targeted actions over a given period on the overall figures**
  o **estimate any newly arising demand**
  o **provide projections against targets**
  o **establish who is overcrowded using:**

    ▪ **housing register including any transfer lists for existing tenants of all social housing partners**
    ▪ **direct questionnaires to tenants to update household size and identify both cases of overcrowding and under occupation. Identify age of adult children to establish if help can be given for family members to move into their own accommodation**
    ▪ **Social services; General Practitioners (GPs); Age Concern etc.**

E. Accessing and using financial resources

Actions to tackle overcrowding are unlikely to be fully effective without sufficient capital and revenue resources. This section sets out a number of options for funding work in this area including drawing in resources from other partners especially local RSLs.

Q17. Have capital and revenue resources been identified to help tackle overcrowding?

Yes   ☐
No   ☐

Comment:

Q18. Has a budget been agreed to cover staffing costs, other revenue costs, and any capital costs?

Yes   ☐
No   ☐

Comment:

Q19. Can some under occupation incentive costs be met from capital? (eg capital costs to improve a property for occupation)

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Q20. Has an assessment been carried out of all potential financial sources of funding across all partners, including non financial contributions such as staff time from other Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), or voluntary sector agencies?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Q21. Have bids been prepared to the Regional Housing Pot and for any internal capital bidding process within the local authority?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Possible actions and next steps:

- **Review all possible sources of funding including:**

    o **Housing Revenue Account (HRA) management and maintenance allowance**

    o **Decent Homes funding**

    o **Single capital pot for the local authority**

    o **Local authority contingency reserves for capital and revenue**

    o **under spend capital slippage across the local authority**

    o **small grants from Private Sector Renewal Strategy funding possibly targeted at smaller Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) without reserves**

    o **existing RSL resources to fund all work targeted at overcrowded tenants for the specific RSL?**

- **use of homelessness grants to fund or part fund an officer for overcrowding. This may be the likely source of revenue funding in smaller authorities**

- **use of overcrowding grant to set up a team in all Pathfinder areas**

- **consider tackling overcrowding as a priority for any 'Prudential Borrowing' schemes operated by an Authority**

- **seek agreement with RSLs to use their own resources including RSL reserves; possible use of RSL recycled social housing grant to extend properties**

- **resources 'in kind' through Section 106 planning gain to require larger units in appropriate new developments**

- **work up achievable bids for a local authority's Single Capital Pot and first call for any capital slippage resources throughout the financial year**

- **prepare specific capital bids for the Regional Housing Pot covering extensions, dormers and minor adaptations. Reducing overcrowding is a priority for most Regional Housing Strategies and is a priority for the Greater London Authority (GLA) and the Housing Corporation.**

F.   Joint working and partnerships

This section helps a local authority to assess how effective and inclusive its partnerships are in tackling overcrowding. No local authority can hope to achieve its long term aims without developing open and transparent relationships between all partners, including Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and the voluntary sector. Given the important role partners need to play in tackling overcrowding, professional relationships need to be established with sufficient funding, and jointly agreed outcomes.

Q22. Have you set up a tackling overcrowding project group involving key internal and external partners?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Q23. Do these key partners include, as a minimum, representatives from, housing management services, Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs), key RSLs, health and education?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Q24. Have you met with all key Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) in your area, as an individual local authority or as a sub regional group of authorities to discuss a common approach to tackling overcrowding?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Possible actions and next steps:

- **common approach to priority given to overcrowded tenants under both an authority's and RSL's allocation scheme**

- **discuss with RSLs any child density restrictions where a larger property would meet a severe overcrowding need**

- **how shared ownership schemes can be targeted at households who are overcrowded in the social sector. The authority should meet with its local HomeBuy RSL agent and agree referral processes; level of mortgage to rent for social HomeBuy schemes with a mortgage loan of between 25-75%; agree criteria for Open Market HomeBuy targeted at overcrowded tenants. This may help with a low cost equity loan of up to 50% available of total costs. Agree how overall household income for overcrowded tenants will be considered in any eligibility criteria**

- **agree with Planning Services how the affordable housing policy governed by the Planning Framework can be adapted to encourage the provision of larger units. This could be a priority with any pre application discussions with potential developers so they are clear from the outset what the authority requires in terms of affordable housing. Joint work with Planning Services could be expressed through an internal Service Level Agreement or protocol covering for example: early identification of suitable sites; looking for Section 106 agreements based on people/hectares rather than units**

- **agree how RSLs can contribute to tackling overcrowding through new supply. Local authority may look to support bids for social housing funding which will prioritise larger units**

- **partnerships with education, health and Supporting People services to develop effective ways to support overcrowded households and plan services to tackle the ongoing health and social effects**

- **joint under occupation policies or action plans with RSLs agreeing for example, common levels of funding for under occupation incentives and cash incentives.**

G.   Reviewing allocations policies to aid tackling overcrowding

Sections G and H look at the contribution that a local authority allocation scheme can make to effectively tackle overcrowding and under occupation.

Q25.   Has the authority reviewed its allocation scheme to consider the following?

- **Current priority given to overcrowded households within the reasonable preference category for overcrowding?**
  Yes ☐   **No** ☐

- **How successful is the current allocation scheme in re-housing overcrowded households (which needs groups are getting what; percentage and numbers)?**
  Yes ☐   **No** ☐

- **Could changes be made to the authority's allocation scheme to provide greater priority for overcrowded households? What would the effect of any change have on other needs groups?**
  Yes ☐   **No** ☐

- **Has the authority considered giving the most severely overcrowded households additional preference under the authority's allocation scheme, where they fall into the reasonable preference category for overcrowding?**
  Yes ☐   **No** ☐

- **Has the authority reviewed all overcrowded applicants on its Housing Register to consider whether overcrowded cases have had their housing needs fully assessed when considering if they may qualify for greater priority through having 'cumulative need' (for example, look at medical issues that may be exacerbated by the severe overcrowding)?**
  Yes ☐   **No** ☐

- **Is there in place, or plans to put in place, a common allocation policy covering how overcrowded households will be dealt with by both the authority and Registered Social Landlord (RSL) partners? This could be agreed sub regionally for maximum impact.**
  Yes ☐   **No** ☐

- **Has the authority set targets for the number and percentage of overcrowded cases it plans to house and does it monitor progress against any targets set?**

  Yes ☐　　**No** ☐

- **Does the authority operate a Social Welfare panel which has the power to grant greater priority for an allocation to counter the social and welfare effects of severe overcrowding?**

  Yes ☐　　**No** ☐

Q26.　Has the local authority considered advertising specific properties under their Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme for certain types of household (eg some large properties advertised for overcrowded households)? This must not greatly disadvantage other large households in need (eg the homeless) who also require larger family properties.

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Q26a. Where no CBL scheme is in place has the authority considered making lettings of appropriate properties to those households that are most severely overcrowded?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Possible actions and next steps:

- **aim for a common lettings policy for overcrowding across Registered Social Landlord (RSL) partners and all authorities within sub region where CBL is in use or planned**

- **set targets for the number and percentage of overcrowded cases the authority wishes to house and monitor against these targets. Ideally every local authority should develop a lettings plan covering anticipated lettings to each high need group. Monitoring continuously against this plan will allow an authority to make amendments to its allocation scheme where lettings to high need groups such as the most severely overcrowded is below the anticipated level**

- **consider and review current priority given to overcrowded cases. What is the current priority for overcrowded households who are owed reasonable preference? How many overcrowded households are currently housed broken down between existing tenants of the authority; existing tenants of Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and new applicants?**

- **where authorities have specific allocation policies relating to 'hard to let' accommodation how can this be applied to help tackle overcrowding?**

H.   Allocations schemes and under occupation

Q27. Has the local authority considered how to give priority under its allocation scheme for under occupying tenants who are willing to move to smaller social housing properties?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Possible actions and next steps:

- **consider current priority given for under occupied tenants under the authority's allocation scheme. Are they in a high enough priority group or band to be housed? What are the alternative ways in which their chances of being rehoused could be improved? Can they be housed on management grounds?**

- **consider how under occupiers might have their property aspirations met to free up a larger unit of accommodation. This might involve granting a priority card for a time period. Where an under occupying tenant has expressed a desire for a specific property an authority may need to consider a direct letting if they have sufficient priority to be rehoused.**

- **consider giving under occupying households high local priority outside of the reasonable preference group. Where an authority takes such action it must ensure that its allocations scheme gives priority overall to those households that fall into a reasonable preference category.**

The options themselves

The following sections look at how the housing options approach which has been so successful in helping to tackle homelessness can be extended to help tackle overcrowding. Face to face bespoke overcrowding options interviews and advice are key components underpinning any overcrowding strategy and this is covered in section J. The following sections look at the options themselves including making best use of existing stock; accessing the private rented sector; dealing effectively with under occupation and developing a 'chain lettings' approach.

I.   Developing options interviews

Q28.   Have specific options interviews been developed to tackle overcrowding?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Q29.   Are options interviews for overcrowding scripted to ensure all relevant issues are covered during the interview?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Q30.   Are options interviews, followed up and promoted?

Yes ☐
No   ☐

> **Comment:**

Q31.   Are home visits used to promote options for tackling overcrowding with severely overcrowded tenants?

Yes ☐
No   ☐

> **Comment:**

Q32.   Where overcrowding is a relevant issue, are tackling overcrowding initiatives promoted in 'routine' housing management interviews?

Yes ☐
No   ☐

> **Comment:**

Possible actions and next steps:

- **look to develop a specific options package to cover options interviews for overcrowded households**

- **script the areas that must be addressed in the interview to ensure nothing is missed and information on options available is provided**

- **a typical overcrowding options interview could cover[1]:**

  o **'Moving out' options including accessing the private rented sector and mobility moves out of the area into private rented sector[2]**

  o **financial assessment of what the household may qualify for under the new Local Housing Allowance (LHA) size criteria. LHA rates are more transparent than local reference rents – households are aware of their entitlement before they find a property. This gives them more control over finding an appropriately sized property which minimises or eliminates any shortfall between their rent and Housing Benefit payable**

  o **alleviating any severe overcrowding by helping adult family members to move out into private rented sector or where possible an allocation (in accordance with the allocation scheme) of an alternative social sector tenancy**

  o **support to households to register on other local authority or RSL allocation schemes in areas where someone may wish to move to**

  o **a financial assessment to initially determine if a household's circumstances may allow access to local or sub regional HomeBuy schemes**

  o **establish housing priority under the Authority and RSL partner allocation schemes and assess whether all needs have been correctly assessed or if circumstance have changed since they were last reviewed**

  o **discuss options to help them remain in their current property including:**

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[1] Under homelessness legislation it is a Local Authority's duty to carry out enquiries if they have reason to believe a person is homeless or threatened with homelessness; and
[2] any option involving surrendering of a secure tenancy must be carefully explained and a household must be advised to seek independent legal advice.

- **assistance and financial support for space saving actions**

- **assessment of property for possible extension, dormer, partitioning.**

J.   Making best use of existing occupied property

Q33.   Are tenants advised as part of the options approach on how to make best use of existing space?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Q34.   Are financial support grants available for small space saving work including – purchasing bunk beds or sofa beds; installing fold down beds; installing built in storage; removing unwanted bulky furniture, etc?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Q35.   Are capital grants available to cover small adaptations including partitioning, or alleviating the practical impacts of overcrowding eg by installing an additional washbasin.

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Q36.   Are schemes in place or planned to undertake capital works for extensions, dormers or knocking through two adjoining properties into one?

Yes   ☐
No   ☐

> **Comment:**

Q37.   Will the authority and partner Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) consider allocating larger families to smaller properties where a technical assessment has been made that the property could be extended and capital funds are available?

Yes   ☐
No   ☐

> **Comment:**

Possible actions and next steps:

- **lifestyle issues (these can be sensitive and need careful handling) de-cluttering and making best use of existing space**

- **opportunity for space saving: bunks, fold down beds, built-in storage space; removing unwanted furniture; creating home working area under stairs where there may be wasted space; anti hoarding approach. Consider funding opportunities for this work**

- **small property adaptations using Capital Grant funding, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) management and maintenance money, or General Fund. Adaptations could include an extra washbasin; partitioning rooms for extra space (need to deal with building regulations issues here and may need exemptions to create two bedrooms from one with stud partitioning as long as any fire regulation requirements are met)**

- **set rates for grants available for small works and adaptations**

- **larger capital works including:**

  o **assessing property potential for extension and dormers**

  o **ability to knock through adjoining properties to produce a larger unit**

  o **extending using any external staircase or roof terrace space**

  o **consider undertaking a procurement exercise for small and large capital works and consider procuring larger works through a partnering approach to reduce costs to achieve a greater number of completions for the money available.**

K. Private rented sector options

Q38. Does the local authority operate a private rented sector (PRS) landlord incentive scheme?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Q39. Has access to the scheme been extended to overcrowded tenants and those who are overcrowded and on the housing register where there is a risk that these households may become homeless?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Q40. Has an enhanced private rented sector (PRS) landlord incentive package been developed? This may be more generous than the local authority's standard scheme but as a result may improve the prospects of an overcrowded household being able to move and at the same time will yield an additional social housing unit?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Q41.   Are payments made to tenants who are prepared to move into the PRS and release their secure tenancy?

Yes   ☐
No   ☐

Comment:

Q42.   How are larger PRS properties being identified? Is there specific marketing information available to landlords and overcrowded tenants covering PRS opportunities and explaining any financial incentives and potentially higher Housing Benefit entitlement for larger households?

Yes   ☐
No   ☐

Comment:

Q43.   For tenants wishing to move into the private rented sector (PRS), can longer term Assured Shorthold Tenancies (ASTs) be negotiated with landlords in return for higher landlord incentive payments?

Yes   ☐
No   ☐

Comment:

Q44.   Is there support for new housing benefit claims to enable landlords to be more confident to let properties to overcrowded tenants prepared to accept a property in the PRS? Support packages could include options officers verifying HB documentation to ensure HB claims are processed quickly or guidance where tenants may qualify for rent payments to be made direct to their landlord.

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Q45.   Does the local authority produce a regularly updated LHA 'Guide to current benefit levels, according to family size and by Broad Market Rental Area' so that overcrowded households can determine levels of HB available under the LHA size criteria?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Possible actions and next steps:

- **moving into the private rented sector (PRS) with a landlord incentive. This could be for both the household as whole or adult family members to resolve or alleviate the overcrowding**

- **the local authority could consider developing a Private Sector Leasing scheme (PSL) to lease larger size properties. Under Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) rules an authority is able to lease accommodation outside of homelessness duties and claim the higher rate 'non Housing Revenue Account (HRA) housing benefit cap rate' applicable for that authority. This is likely to be sufficient to cover the cost of the lease rent and management costs**

- **issues here to consider for any existing tenant looking to move into the PRS include:**

    o **assessing whether they can pay for accommodation at a higher rent**

    o **the Local Housing Allowance provides more generous rates for larger households especially in London. The LHA size rules do not reduce the bedroom requirement for households headed by a single parent**

  Additionally authorities may wish to consider:

    o **where financial incentives have been paid a move into the PRS could end any responsibility for the former tenant. In such cases this would need to be fully explained to the tenant so they can exercise their choice to move in full knowledge of the facts**

    o **ensuring that any incentives to move are not used where a household has accumulated debt and therefore may choose to surrender their secure tenancy to pay off debt rather than improve their housing conditions.**

L.   Dealing with under occupation

Q46. Do you currently operate an under occupation scheme?

Yes ☐
No ☐

> **Comment:**

Q47.   Are similar schemes in operation with all large Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) in the area?

Yes ☐
No ☐

> **Comment:**

Q48.   If so, are there plans in place to operate one common scheme with standard incentives and marketing across all social housing providers in the area or sub region?

Yes ☐
No ☐

> **Comment:**

Q49.   Have targets been set for under occupation moves in local authority and Registered Social Landlord stock?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Q50.   Does the authority have an up to date and accurate record of all under occupiers in their own social housing stock (if retained)?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Q51.   Is an information sharing protocol in place with all major RSLs in the area in order to obtain information for actual households who are under occupying in order to assess the overall level of need and target households for options information?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Possible actions and next steps:

- **establish who to target and how:**

  o **mail shots**

  o **council tax records**

  o **voluntary agencies; General Practitioners (GPs); libraries**

  o **parking shops; estate offices; older people's social work teams**

  o **support from a Handy Person scheme or Home Improvement Agency**

  o **close working with Housing Advisers/Homeless Caseworkers who are dealing with parental evictions/hostel placements which may result in under occupation; adverts in local press**

- **review effectiveness of local authority's mutual exchange list and look to match overcrowded tenants to suitable under occupying tenants looking to trade down**

- **develop an incentive package and consider which incentives to adopt. Could include:**

  o **cash incentives (£x per room given up, with possibly additional cash for larger properties and ground floor units)**

  o **extra support given to elderly tenants including packing and removals service; consider also an extra bedroom for visitors**

  o **consider offering priority under the authority's allocation scheme for new one and two bedroom units as an incentive for under occupying households to move**

  o **offer bespoke choices, developing a package to encourage moves. This could include decorating to specific taste and requirements; new fitted kitchen, etc**

  o **Split tenancies (ie separate studio accommodation for under occupier's adult child).**

M. Mobility options, including moving out of the area and help to find PRS property elsewhere in the region or beyond

Q52. Are overcrowded and under occupying tenants routinely asked where else they may wish to live?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Q53. Is the local authority able to provide an accommodation finding service for tenants including:

- **helping tenants to register on authority and Registered Social Landlord (RSL) registers elsewhere in the country and assessing if any local connection criteria apply to these schemes**
- **finding private rented sector (PRS) accommodation in selected areas through contacts with lettings agents and offering financial incentives (receiving authorities should be contacted where moves are planned in this way)**
- **offering to pay for removals and the opportunity for families to visit areas where they may wish to live**
- **establishing links to local Job Centre Plus services so that families can assess employment opportunities**
- **in London linking elderly tenants into the Seaside and Country Homes scheme**
- **for elderly tenants that may wish to move away from an area, making links with local authorities and RSLs who may have under utilised sheltered housing.**

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

N.   Cash incentive schemes to assist home purchase through low cost market housing

Q54.   How is the authority targeting under occupying and overcrowded families for HomeBuy opportunities within their area and sub region?

Yes ☐
No ☐

<div style="border:1px solid black">

Comment:

</div>

Q55.   Are severely overcrowded cases prioritised under any sub regional or local HomeBuy scheme?

Yes ☐
No ☐

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Comment:

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Q56.   Has a working protocol been established with HomeBuy agents covering:

- **referral**
- **how priority will be awarded**
- **how HomeBuy agents can assist with marketing to tenants and overcrowded families on the housing register**
- **how household income as a whole will be assessed for overcrowded case referred**
- **any flexibility for overcrowded households regarding levels of rent or equity loan required compared to the level of funding that needs to be financed through a direct mortgage?**

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Possible actions and next steps:

- **an authority could target both under occupied and overcrowded households for HomeBuy opportunities. This could be through:**

  - **cash payment for a deposit to buy (only if the property to be purchased would not replicate the level of overcrowding)**

  - **no cash, but priority for adult family members in overcrowded households for HomeBuy schemes where there are smaller units.**

- **need to establish links and develop a protocol with the appointed home ownership agent for HomeBuy. It is also important to agree how the overcrowding team can undertake any initial financial assessment as part of an options interview. Agree how overcrowded cases may be fast tracked for referral and prioritised if appropriate.**

O.   Overcrowding and chain lettings

Q57.   Has the local authority analysed the potential to develop a chain lettings approach to help tackle overcrowding?

Yes ☐
No   ☐

Comment:

Q58. Has the authority modelled how this might work?

Yes ☐
No   ☐

Comment:

Q59. If the local authority wishes to pursue chain lettings has it reached agreement with local Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to increase the potential pool of properties available under a scheme?

Yes ☐
No ☐

Comment:

Possible actions and next steps:

- **planning chain lettings. Allocating a property that could be used for overcrowded household to another needs group such as homeless may not necessarily make best use of that stock**

- **setting up chain lettings can be time consuming. Making a chain work needs commitment from both authorities and RSLs to put in appropriate properties to maximise the number of moves from this initiative**

- **chains have to be managed and household advised of the opportunities presented through the chain. This is quite specialised and needs excellent communication skills and a proactive approach**

- **occasionally, where relevant, direct lettings may need to be made to complete the chain. This needs to be reflected in the authority's Choice Based Lettings (CBL) policy. Alternatively, properties can be flagged and bids made on behalf of tenants who have expressed an interest in certain types of property in a specific area, if this will complete the chain**

- **often it will be an attractive off estate smaller unit that can be used to complete the chain and persuade an under occupying household to move by trading down.**

Related Overcrowding Publications

Work in tackling overcrowding is relatively new however the following publications may be useful to refer to when developing an action plan following completion of the self assessment

Tackling overcrowding in England: A discussion paper (2006)

Tackling overcrowding in England: An action plan (2007)

Tackling overcrowding in England: Lessons from the London pilot schemes and sub-regional coordination (2008)

The Homelessness, Overcrowding and Worklessness Division in Communities and Local Government will be happy to discuss proposals once the self assessment has been completed. Support and advice is also available from your regional specialist adviser.

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