



**Housing and
Communities**

Mitigating the Impacts of Overcrowding in the London Borough of Newham

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Research at LSE ■

CASE Report 156

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Summary

Between 2022 and 2024, LSE Housing and Communities conducted research into overcrowding in the London Borough of Newham, and how the harms of overcrowding can be mitigated. This final report brings together data analysis into the scope and scale of overcrowding in Newham; a literature review relating to the harms of overcrowding; evidence reviews of existing Newham policies and strategies to tackle overcrowding, and evidence from actions by other, comparator local authorities; interviews with 15 overcrowded households in the borough, and findings from a qualitative survey into overcrowding; and the summary of a cross-departmental workshop to explore potential mitigation actions and their possible routes to implementation in Newham.

I. Overcrowded Newham

Newham is the most overcrowded borough in London, with 21.5% of its households living in overcrowded conditions. Using data from the 2021 Census, we were able to build a detailed picture of overcrowding in Newham.

- 24,860 *households* are overcrowded in Newham (21.5% of households), with 123,395 *people* living in these overcrowded households (35% of the people in the borough).
- 42% of all families with dependent children in Newham live in overcrowded homes.
- 26% of households in private rented homes are overcrowded; 25% in social rented housing. Whilst overcrowding is less common in owner-occupied homes, 15% of homes which are owned with a mortgage are overcrowded, and 11% of households in homes which are owned outright are overcrowded.
- 41% (24,966 people) of Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African people living in Newham live in overcrowded homes. 40% (59,245 people) of Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh groups live in overcrowded homes. 35% (19,090) of Gypsy or Irish Traveler, Roma or Other White people are overcrowded. 16% (8,311) of White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British people are overcrowded, which represents only 7% of all people who are overcrowded which is significantly fewer than the proportion of this group in the Newham population (15%). In addition, 37% (6,326) of people from other ethnic groups, 33% (5,302) of people from Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups, and 8% (155) of White Irish people live in overcrowded homes.
- Green Street East ward has the highest proportion of overcrowded households in Newham, followed by Plashet, Green Street West, Little Ilford, and East Ham.
- The highest level of overcrowding occurs in the social housing sector in Green Street East, where 36% of all social housing properties are overcrowded. Even in the ward with the lowest level of social housing overcrowding, Royal Victoria, 17% of properties of this tenure are overcrowded. This reflects the serious pressures on social housing stock in the borough, and the lack of available larger properties.

Data from the Census gives us a good picture of overcrowding in the borough, but it only reflects those who filled in the Census. Some households, particularly those with unclear migration status, may be less likely to complete and return the Census and so it is likely that overcrowding figures are underreported.

II. Harms of Overcrowding

Overcrowding is understood to contribute to significant social, educational and health harms. This research explored literature relating to the harms of overcrowding, with a particular focus on the harms to families with children:

- In terms of physical health, there is evidence of a strong link between overcrowding and infectious diseases, including TB and other respiratory diseases, such as severe flu. Further evidence has shown medium to low links between overcrowding and rheumatic fever, throat, skin and eye infections, and heart disease, as well as to increased accidents and physical injuries in the home. Studies have also identified worsening existing health conditions, such as asthma, for example from damp and condensation.
- Studies have shown evidence of overcrowding increasing the risk for a range of mental health problems, including stress, increased substance misuse, and low self-esteem. During the Covid-19 lockdown, there was evidence of increased mental health risks due to lockdown for overcrowded households.
- Harms to children's education outcomes have been evidenced from general studies showing how poor housing can be linked to underachievement at school.
- A cost-benefit analysis by the Building Research Establishment indicated that the cost to the public purse of poor housing (not specific to, but including overcrowding) could be estimated at £1.4bn a year to the NHS; and wider social costs including a loss of earnings potential and the need for further care and support services led to an estimated overall cost of poor housing of around £18.5bn a year.
- People living in overcrowded homes report significant harms to their social, educational, and mental health outcomes, including:
 - Difficulty falling asleep and the impact of lack of sleep on education, work, and health
 - Low mood, anxiety, and exhaustion
 - Arguments and stress on family relationships
 - Lack of play, learning and leisure space
 - Children unable to do homework due to lack of space
 - Fewer opportunities for social interaction with family and friends

III. Interviews With Overcrowded Families in Newham

As part of the research, we conducted 15 in-depth interviews with individuals that were experiencing overcrowding in Newham. All interviewees were living with dependent children in overcrowded housing, and the overcrowding led to significant challenges for themselves and their children. For many of the families we spoke to, overcrowding was one of many housing-related challenges they

were facing, including facing eviction from properties owned by private landlords; living in multifamily shared accommodation with limited privacy and access to facilities; experiencing long waits (decades in some cases) on social housing waiting lists; and experiences of precarity in insecure temporary housing including hotels, and bed and breakfast accommodation.

In terms of the challenge of overcrowding, a lack of space for children to play and study within the home was a key challenge, as was meeting the needs of children of different ages, for example older children and teenagers needing privacy and younger children needing space to play. Green spaces and external areas were incredibly important to overcrowded families, although many of those interviewed expressed concern around the safety of outside green spaces, particularly for older children and young people. Interview participants often spoke about the stress caused by overcrowding, and the difficulties that this brought to family relationships. Physical health was another key concern, including the impact of damp and mould, common in overcrowded households, on children's respiratory health.

Interviewees stressed the importance of local resources and activities, such as leisure centres and libraries, that are community based and hyper local. These do however need to be affordable for families to access. For those families struggling for adequate space within the home, having spaces (inside and outside) in the local area that were available for children to use to study, play and let off steam were seen as something that would benefit families, easing tensions and providing respite.

Being able to access face-to-face advice was also seen as crucial to finding the right help and support to deal with overcrowding. The Family Navigators service was highlighted as a key support for overcrowded families, as they were a trusted service, able to provide advice in a range of language and with appropriate cultural contexts. The role of support, either through more accessible and transparent Council services, or through charities, community-based or other services e.g. schools, was important. There is a strong case for increased partnership working with community-based organisations and trusted agencies to ensure that people can find sources of support and advice more effectively. Where statutory services do currently exist, there may be additional work needed to enable residents to access them

IV. Existing London Borough of Newham Strategies and Programmes to Tackle Overcrowding

London Borough of Newham has a number of relevant strategies and programmes that aim to tackle some of the harms of overcrowding, although these are more explicitly linked to reducing poor housing outcomes than overcrowding specifically. This research reviewed existing LB Newham work to establish how current strategies could be expanded to have more of an explicit focus on overcrowding to increase the effectiveness and impact of these strategies.

Key strategies for focus include:

- 50 Steps to a Healthier Borough: Health and Wellbeing Strategy, particularly around ensuring that housing is safe, free from damp and mould, and promotes good health, and the changes to the allocation policy (implemented in 2022) to introduce a new priority category of

Severely Overcrowded Plus (SOVP) for families in properties that are overcrowded by two or more bedrooms and have another reasonable preference

- The Children and Young People Strategy, which highlights overcrowding as a major issue affecting children and young people's quality of life
- The Community Wealth Building Strategy, which sets out to build new council homes at genuinely affordable rents as a key element of addressing the borough's housing needs. This strategy also promotes the use of social prescribing, which could be appropriate for some overcrowding mitigation options
- The Early Help Strategy, which sets out a plan to develop localised hubs as one-stop shops for families' needs, with multidisciplinary teams (which lends itself to the findings from the qualitative research that families prefer face-to-face support to deal with overcrowding and its mitigation)

V. Mitigation Action by Other Local Authorities

Overcrowding is not just a challenge for Newham. Many other local authorities are attempting to tackle overcrowding and mitigate its harms. By reviewing a range of local authority actions taken to tackle overcrowding in different ways, we were able to develop some ideas for Newham to build on or implement. These included:

- Action to **identify larger, available homes** through partnerships with the private rented sector; creating a database of registered provider or private sector landlords' properties and actively matching overcrowded families to them; identifying voids or abandoned larger properties and bringing them back into use; fast-tracking the voids process for larger properties; and implementing a buyback programme for large Right to Buy properties
- Action to **incentivise downsizing**, in order to free up larger, under-occupied homes. This could involve financial incentives; a hand-holding service for underoccupiers; support with removals and other moving costs; community-based events to engage local people in identifying and stimulating movement between underoccupying and overcrowded households
- Actions to **make changes in overcrowded homes**, including architect-led space saving services, such as room dividers, bunk beds, and other measures; a programme to identify and action home and attic extensions, as well as knock-throughs; decluttering strategies and support
- Actions relating to the **process of managing overcrowding within the Council**, such as having dedicated officers/outreach advisers to manage overcrowding and underoccupation work; setting up a cross-departmental task force to monitor progress relating to overcrowding and reducing its harms; specific communication and engagement work, in particular to communities that may have not been able to access mitigation options previously due to language or cultural barriers.

VI. Routes to Mitigation Implementation in Newham: Workshop

The scope of this report was to suggest mitigation options to tackle the harms of overcrowding, within the context of limited housing options and lack of resource to develop new homes within the borough. As part of this work, the LSE Housing team organised a workshop with Newham Council partners, to bring together all relevant areas and teams within the council, as well as appropriate external partners.

The workshop was specifically focussed on what more could be done to help families in Newham, particularly those with children, to cope with the problems which overcrowding causes. The main aim was to critically examine the options that the LSE Housing team had identified as possible mitigation actions to reduce the harm caused by overcrowding, as a co-production group. The mitigation actions were grouped into four main themes:

- Housing
- Children
- Community
- Health

The actions were assessed one by one, with potential routes to implementation discussed, the Council's capacity for delivery, and the potential impact of the action. A table setting out this detail is provided within this report. The workshop allowed us to sense check the feasibility of mitigation actions that we had developed from the research with the council departments and stakeholder organisations that would be responsible for their implementation, bringing together previously siloed parts of Newham Council and fostering links and motivation to move ideas forward.

VII. Conclusions and Recommendations

The main conclusions and specific recommendations of this report are set out in Sections Six and Seven on pages 62-66 below.

Overcrowding is clearly a problem in the London Borough of Newham, affecting many households and people, and causing particular harms to families with children. The Council has extremely limited capacity to provide additional, appropriately sized, affordable housing for those overcrowded households. This research has drawn together data analysis, evidence and literature pertaining to overcrowding and its harms, the lived experience of overcrowded families in the borough, and ideas for mitigation actions conducted by other local authorities. It also assessed existing Newham work and strategies to mitigate overcrowding. The workshop held in December 2023, developed and tested mitigation ideas in a cross-departmental forum, to enable LB Newham to start thinking through potential options and implementation plans.

Some of the mitigation actions relate to specific programmes or initiatives that can reduce harms, such as setting up a Safe Saving Service, decluttering advice, or the development of community spaces for overcrowded families to play, do their homework, and use laundry facilities. Others focus on identifying additional housing stock, for example through incentivising and supporting under-occupying households to move to smaller properties, thereby freeing up

larger properties for overcrowded families. Finally, other actions relate to the Council's service, communication, and targeting of specific support for those that are overcrowded.

Overcrowding presents a complex challenge for Newham Council, layering on additional potential harms for households and children, and requiring action beyond those that will address general problems of poor housing and deprivation. While an ideal solution would be to provide more affordable, good quality, adequately sized housing, this is not feasible within the context of existing LB Newham capital and capacity. However, working in partnership with community organisations, providing culturally appropriate, well-communicated, and targeted services, and embedding overcrowding mitigation into all Council activities can help reduce some of the harms that overcrowded families face, until an appropriately sized home is identified.

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to present practical and measurable steps that can be taken across the London Borough of Newham to mitigate the health and social harms for families living in overcrowded housing. It sets out to address three main questions:

- How does overcrowding in Newham present different problems, and need different mitigation actions, compared to the needs and actions taken to address the more general problems of poor housing and deprivation?
- To what extent do the current extensive health and social programmes in Newham address overcrowding? How could these programmes be more effective in mitigating harms?
- What additional or new actions could be put in place to reduce harms of overcrowding, building on existing Newham actions and programmes, the additional actions seen in other comparator local authorities, the suggestions of the workshop held as part of this research, and the wider evidence in this report?

These questions have emerged as a result of discussions with the London Borough of Newham (LB Newham) commissioners of this report, and the Project Steering Group. One of the important and difficult issues about addressing and mitigating the harms of overcrowding and their mitigation is that they must be seen as part of a wider set of issues affecting housing in Newham, and many other comparator boroughs. These are a result of lack of sufficient, appropriate, affordable housing of good repair, and the problems of low income and deprivation which affect many of the households who are in need of this housing. These problems are also made more serious by the way the welfare benefit system operates, including the level of Housing Benefit payments, which are based on Local Housing Allowance levels and which limits the range of affordable private-rented sector properties available to both households and the borough, when placing families in temporary accommodation.

There is extensive parallel literature and research on the impact of poor housing conditions generally on families, which sits alongside other literature and research on the impact of deprivation and low income on both health and wellbeing, which restricts households in being able to find appropriate accommodation to meet their needs. This overlap extends to the options for mitigation, where LB Newham, like other authorities, has to address the wider need to provide affordable and high quality housing to all their residents who need their assistance to do so, and also to address the interim requirement to allocate the limited available affordable and well maintained housing to those in most need, where those needs cover a wide range of problems and harms of different kinds. Overcrowding is only one of the several pressing housing and health needs of Newham residents.

This report focuses specifically on overcrowding and so we look at the ways in which harms or mitigation can actually be linked to overcrowding, and where steps can be taken to reduce harms in current housing contexts, prior to any eventual move to more appropriately sized homes. Some overcrowding harms are a result of the disproportionate impact of overcrowding in triggering harm (for example, overcrowding exacerbating damp or mould); other harms relate to more general problems (for example the impact of poor housing on family relations) which can be mitigated by targeted actions to provide additional support or new spaces where these tensions can be addressed or reduced. Sometimes these distinctions are not entirely clear or possible to make as it is likely a household experiences different types of harms at the same time. In terms of mitigations, there are actions which could reduce the harm impacts of overcrowding specifically, for example, in relation to changing the approach of the allocation system in Newham to awarding increased

priority to certain types of repair for overcrowded families. Other mitigations tackle more general problems which are exacerbated by overcrowding, for example by providing new types, or more targeted forms, of social and community support which can help to address issues from overcrowding. Some of the suggested mitigation actions are already embedded in part of Newham's extensive set of programmes to address housing, health, and social needs in the borough, but the approach to overcrowding in those programmes could be made more relevant and the links to the harms being mitigated could be drawn out more. They could also be more explicitly promoted to residents that are overcrowded and highlighted in council communications and training.

Structure of this report

The report starts by setting out the nature of the overcrowding problem in Newham, which is based mainly on analysis of the 2021 Census. The Census only counts people who return their census form, and so may underestimate the extent of overcrowding, but nevertheless provides the best overview of the different dimensions of overcrowding in Newham. It gives an overview of the extent of overcrowding (and underoccupation); where it is most severe (at ward level); how families with dependent children are specifically affected; the patterns of overcrowding by tenure; and which ethnic groups experience higher levels of overcrowding.

The next section complements this demographic data by examining the evidence around the harms caused by this overcrowding. This evidence of harms is pulled from three main sources. First, academic evidence of links found between overcrowding and health or social harms; secondly, evidence of the incidence of problems and issues reported by samples of people who live in overcrowded condition, based on large and medium scale national studies of the experiences of people living in overcrowded homes; third, the lived experience of overcrowding based on a series of in-depth interviews carried out as part of this research, with 15 people living in overcrowded households in Newham. We also provide insights from interviews with supporting organisations, including the voluntary community and faith sector, housing teams, housing associations, education and health partners.

Having set out the demographics and harms as above, the next sections of the report move to considering mitigation measures which might be taken, or which are already in place but might be enhanced. We start by reviewing the steps already being taken by LB Newham and other local authorities tackling similar problems. We identify current Newham programmes which are most relevant to overcrowding and some options for further mitigation within those programmes. We also include a review of some actions taken by other local authorities to address overcrowding in their boroughs, including evidence from a series of pilot programmes tackling overcrowding.

The report then presents the outcome of a consultation workshop undertaken with Newham Council officers and partner agencies on possible overcrowding mitigations. This workshop, in December 2023, presented research into overcrowding in Newham and other local authorities, and suggested areas of mitigation action¹. Breakout groups then explored areas of mitigation from the

¹ Dr Penny Bernstock, Andrew Holt, Debbie Humphry, Frankie Webb-Huseyin (2024) *The Impact of inadequate housing on educational experience: A Pilot study in Newham* Citizens UK (East London Citizens), London.
<https://www.schoolhomesupport.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/CITIZENS-UK-The-Impact-of-inadequate-housing-on-educational-experience.pdf>; Nixon L, Eveleigh E, O'Donoghue M, et al. OP132 'Household overcrowding and family health and wellbeing: exploring the lived experiences of overcrowded families in North London to inform a holistic measure of overcrowding'. *J Epidemiol Community Health* 2024;78:A100.
https://jech.bmj.com/content/78/Suppl_1/A100.2; Ucci, M., Ortegon-Sanchez, A., Mead, N.E., et al. 'Exploring the

perspectives of housing, of children, of community action, and of health. Participants were encouraged to think widely and freely about possible mitigation actions, how they might be implemented, and their potential impact. The workshop allowed us to identify priority mitigation actions and comment on their viability and potential implementation routes for LB Newham. A full report from the workshop is available in Annex 3.

The final, concluding section six brings together all the evidence in an attempt to answer the three research questions, as set out above, including recommendations of further work and actions.

1. Overcrowded Newham

Summary

Key Newham Statistics as recorded in the Census 2021²

- 24,860 households are overcrowded in Newham (21.5% of households)
- 123,395 people live in overcrowded households (35% of the people in the borough)
- 42% of all families with dependent children in Newham live in overcrowded homes
- 26% of households in private rented homes are overcrowded, as well as 25% in social rented housing, 15% in homes which are owned with a mortgage, and 11% in homes which are owned outright
- 41% (24,966 people) of Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African people living in Newham live in overcrowded homes. 40% (59,245 people) of Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh groups live in overcrowded homes. 35% (19,090) of Gypsy or Irish Traveler, Roma or Other White people are overcrowded. 16% (8,311) of White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British people are overcrowded, which represents only 7% of all people who are overcrowded, which is significantly fewer than the proportion of this group in the Newham population (15%). 37% (6,326) of people from other ethnic groups, 33% (5,302) of people from Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups, and 8% (155) of White Irish people live in overcrowded homes
- Green Street East ward has the highest proportion of overcrowded households in Newham, followed by Plashet, Green Street West, Little Ilford, and East Ham

Overcrowding in Newham

In 2021, Newham had the highest rate of overcrowding in London, with 21.5% of its households living in overcrowded conditions, according to the 2021 Census from the Office of National Statistics (ONS).

In total an estimated 115,510 **households** were living in Newham. Of these, an estimated 24,860 were living in overcrowded conditions.

Newham had an estimated 348,421 **people** living in the borough at the time of the 2021 Census count. Of these, 123,395 (35.4%) lived in households which were overcrowded to some extent. The percentage of **people** living in an overcrowded home was higher than the percentage of **households**

² Note that this Census will not record all the people living in the borough, as some households will have not completed the survey; and that it is based on self-reporting by those households who did complete the form. The situation will now (in 2025) be different but no other data with a similar comprehensive range of comparable and cross-referenced data is available, and the patterns of overcrowding are likely to be similar, although there are some recent changes including increased homelessness and people sleeping on the streets, and increased numbers of people seeking asylum whose housing options are subject to a different regulatory regime, i.e. the Home Office rather than the borough in which they were based.

that were overcrowded (21.5%) since it will often be the case that a larger number of people live in those overcrowded households.

Newham also had the third lowest level of “under occupied” homes (35%) in 2021, which is where people live in a home where there are more rooms than they “need”. This assessment of under-occupation is based on the ONS “Bedroom Standard”, which is a measure which compares the number, gender, and age of all the household members with the number of bedrooms available in the home³.

Looking at the wider picture across England, in 2021 London was the region with the highest prevalence of overcrowding, which at 11.1% was almost three times that of England (4.4%), as set out in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Overcrowded and under occupying households by region, 2021

Percentage of overcrowded and underoccupying households by occupancy rating (bedrooms) England, Wales and English regions, March 2021 (Census)			
Area name	Overcrowded	Occupied-to-standard	Under-occupied
England	4.4	26.8	68.8
London	11.1	40.0	48.9
West Midlands	4.3	25.4	70.3
South East	3.5	26.1	70.4
East of England	3.4	25.2	71.4
North West	3.3	24.7	72.0
East Midlands	3.1	21.8	75.1
Yorkshire and The Humber	3.0	24.0	73.0
South West	2.4	24.0	73.6
Wales	2.2	21.5	76.3
North East	2.0	22.6	75.4

Source : Census 2021

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/articles/overcrowdingandunderoccupancybyhouseholdcharacteristicsenglandandwales/census2021#main-points>

This high rate of overcrowding reflects the lack of affordable available housing of the right size across London as a whole, which constrains Newham’s options in finding solutions to its own overcrowding problems. Estimated overcrowding rates in the London boroughs are set out in Figure 2 below. This figure also looks at underoccupation; in 2021, only the City of London and Tower Hamlets had lower percentages of underoccupation than Newham – which is to say there are many fewer “spare” rooms in Newham than elsewhere in London. Figure 2 also shows households in the middle with the “right” number of bedrooms (although of course some of these households may require more rooms due to health, disability, or other issues experienced by the members of the household, or to use for work or other similar activities).

³ See

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/census2021dictionary/variablesbytopic/housingvariablescensus2021/occupancyratingforbedrooms#:~:text=An%20occupancy%20rating%20of%3A,an%20ideal%20number%20of%20bedrooms> for a full definition of this Bedroom standard of overcrowding).

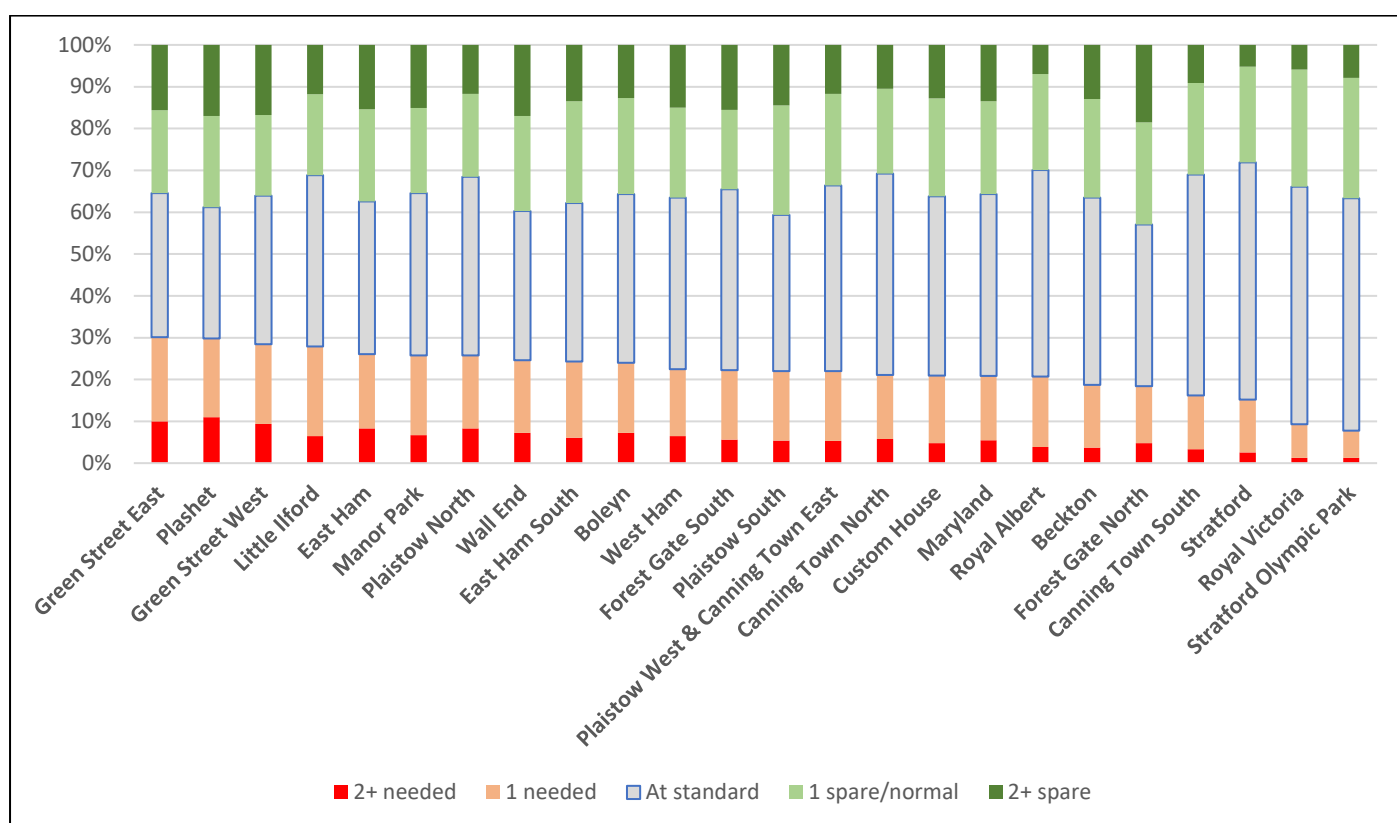
Figure 2: Overcrowding and underoccupation rates in London boroughs, 2021

Borough	Overcrowded	Occupied-to-standard	Under-occupied
Newham	22%	43%	35%
Barking and Dagenham	18%	42%	41%
Brent	17%	41%	42%
Tower Hamlets	16%	52%	32%
Hounslow	15%	40%	46%
Haringey	13%	43%	43%
Waltham Forest	13%	38%	49%
Ealing	13%	39%	47%
Redbridge	13%	32%	55%
Enfield	13%	35%	52%
Hackney	13%	51%	36%
Southwark	12%	48%	40%
Harrow	12%	31%	57%
Lewisham	11%	43%	46%
Hillingdon	11%	35%	54%
Greenwich	11%	41%	49%
Lambeth	11%	47%	42%
Croydon	10%	36%	54%
Westminster	10%	51%	39%
Camden	10%	50%	41%
Merton	9%	33%	57%
Islington	9%	53%	37%
Barnet	9%	35%	56%
Hammersmith and Fulham	9%	48%	43%
Kensington and Chelsea	8%	47%	45%
Wandsworth	8%	43%	50%
Sutton	7%	34%	59%
Bexley	6%	29%	65%
Havering	6%	28%	66%
Kingston upon Thames	6%	32%	62%
City of London	5%	64%	32%
Bromley	5%	28%	68%
Richmond upon Thames	4%	29%	67%

Source: Census 2021. Office on National Statistics.

The patterns of overcrowding and underoccupation by ward in Newham can be seen in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3 Occupancy of homes in Newham according to the bedroom standard, 2021



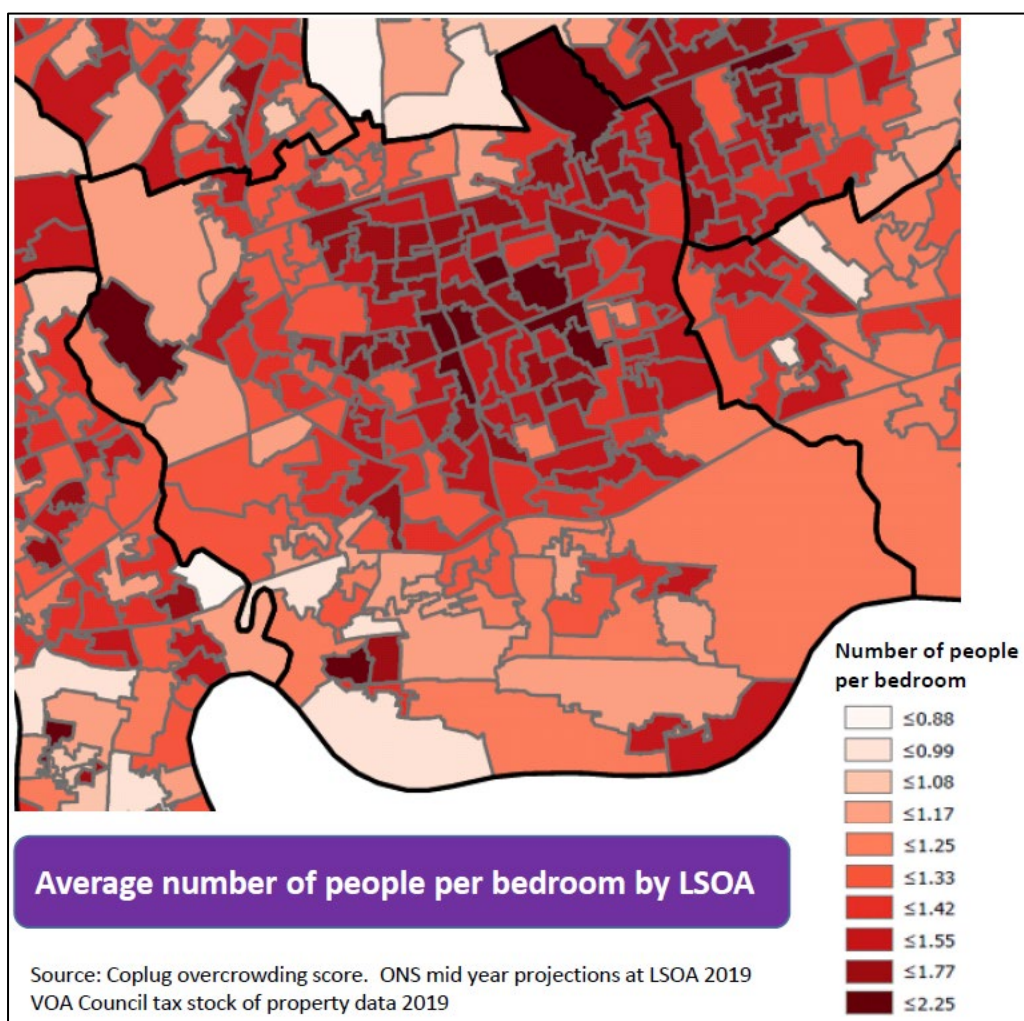
Source: Census 2021 Table T S0052

In the chart above, the orange and red sections of the bars indicate the percentage of homes in each ward that were overcrowded. Households that required **two or more** additional bedrooms to meet the needs of the family living there are shaded red; households requiring **one** additional bedroom are orange. The table has been laid out so that the ward with the highest proportion of overcrowded homes is to the left, then the next highest to the right of that and so on.

The chart shows that in 2021 overcrowding was present across all parts of the borough, with over 15% of households overcrowded in all but two wards. It shows that Green Street East had the highest proportion of overcrowded households, followed by Plashet, Green Street West, Little Ilford, and East Ham. At the top of each of the bars, the light green and darker green indicate the percentage of homes where households had more bedrooms than they needed. The middle, blue, section of the bar shows where households had the “right” number of bedrooms for their needs. This shows that some of the wards with the most overcrowding also had high levels of underoccupation. Underoccupation is likely to be partly an aspect of owner occupiers (particularly older people) living in households where adult children have left home, leaving spare rooms. It also may indicate a lack of mobility in the social rented and owner occupied sectors within the borough. Some further exploration of the reasons for this underoccupation could be useful, with a view to encouraging downsizing with incentives and encouragement. This is discussed in the mitigations section of this report.

An indication of the location of overcrowding in the borough can be seen in a map produced by LB Newham, which shows the estimated average number of people per bedroom in 2021 (Figure 4). This map was produced using council tax property data and mapped on to the ONS small area mapping locations (lower super output areas; LSOAs). The concentration of overcrowding in the central and northwestern wards in the borough are shown by the darker shades of red.

Figure 4: Density of occupation in small areas in Newham, 2021



Source: Newham Children and Young People Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2021

The focus of this research is households with dependent children⁴. If we look at all the families with dependent children in the borough, an estimated 42% of those families lived in overcrowded households in 2021. This compared to 18% of households with only non-dependent children. Looking at the figures from another point of view, three quarters (77%) of overcrowded households included dependent children, compared to 10% that included non-dependent children, and 13% that were other types of household, such as students and other groups of people without children. As these figures come from the Census, they may not fully include single workers living in overcrowded accommodation whose circumstances were not recorded, and so a greater number may be missing from the “other households” total.

Turning to tenure, the division between owning and renting is stark. In 2021, overcrowding was concentrated amongst households who were renting, either in social housing (25% of households were overcrowded) or private rented housing (26%). In contrast, households in homes that were owned outright were much less likely to be overcrowded (11%), as were people in mortgaged properties (15%). The table below summarises this information. Low overcrowding in homes owned outright could be linked to being occupied by older people whose children have left home, as noted above.

⁴ Children under 16 years old, or under 18 while in full time education and living with a parent or grandparent

Figure 5: Tenure and overcrowding

Tenure	% overcrowded
Owned outright	11%
Mortgaged	15%
Social housing	25%
Private rent	26%

Source: Census 2021

A more detailed breakdown by ward and tenure is in the table below (Figure 6). Areas of high overcrowding are highlighted in red (over 30%) and orange (20-30%), and the areas of low overcrowding are highlighted in green (under 10%).

The chart shows clearly the contrast between the properties owned outright (likely by older, “empty nest” households) and other tenures. The mortgaged column is likely to reflect younger but better off families who can afford to buy in Newham but still have children at home, although it is important to note that Green Street East, Green Street West, Plaistow North and Plashet have over 20% overcrowding in this sector, and some mitigation work may need to be targeted here. The most extreme overcrowding is clearly in the private rented sector (including a very small number of “rent free” tied properties) where ten wards had over 30% overcrowding in 2021. What is also striking is that Royal Victoria and Stratford Olympic Park had relatively low levels of overcrowding, as did Stratford (apart from in the social rented sector) and Beckton (except in the private rented sector).

In relation to Stratford Olympic Park, where 10% of the overall private rented market in Newham is located, only 5% of these homes were overcrowded, suggesting that the prevalence of newer, serviced rental units with higher rents, resulted in a higher share of more affluent renters who can afford to choose the right size of home for their needs. In contrast, overcrowding may be driven in other wards by the continuing problems of affordability for lower income families in the private rented sector. The restriction of Housing Benefit to Local Housing Allowance rates can mean that families who rely on Housing Benefit (or the housing portion of Universal Credit) to rent privately may rent homes which are too small for their needs due to being unable to afford a larger property. The demand for private rented housing is also very high in both Newham and surrounding boroughs, which has led to rent rises outstripping rises in wages and benefits, compounding the problem.

Some wards had higher levels of overcrowded social housing, with a high of 36% in Green Street East. Even in the ward with the lowest level of social housing overcrowding, Royal Victoria, 17% of properties of this tenure were overcrowded. Meeting the demand for larger social rented properties which households need is a key pressure and area of concern for LB Newham, who are severely constrained by the lack of new social-rented housing in the borough and the constraints on moving under-occupying households with secure tenancies into homes of a size more matched to their needs. Recent changes to the allocations policies, and continuing work to assist tenants to find moves and exchanges to make best use of available housing stock are the focus of existing work and initiatives. However, LB Newham’s ability to offer social renters a larger property is severely constrained by the overarching problem of lack of stock. This is due to very high and rising demand for social housing, lack of investment resources to provide additional housing stock over the last decade and more, and the historic impact of Right to Buy which has depleted existing stock.

Figures for overcrowding in the social and private rented sectors are likely to also include households who have been placed in temporary accommodation, where Newham has a legal duty to support those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness to secure accommodation. In March 2024, there were 6,350 households living in temporary accommodation (of which 4,456 were households with children), representing 5% of all households in the borough. In temporary accommodation, living room space may be used for sleeping without meeting the threshold for statutory overcrowding. This means that if the family grows while in temporary accommodation, there is even less space that can be used than in a new social tenancy, contributing to high rates of overcrowding. The soaring cost of temporary accommodation has placed substantial pressure on Council budgets, further limiting the Council's ability to invest in mitigations.

Figure 6: Overcrowding by ward and tenure, 2021

Ward	Owned outright	Mortgaged	Social rented	Private rented or rent free
Beckton	6%	12%	17%	28%
Boleyn	10%	16%	28%	33%
Canning Town North	4%	15%	27%	21%
Canning Town South	7%	9%	23%	14%
Custom House	6%	13%	23%	29%
East Ham	14%	19%	24%	36%
East Ham South	7%	19%	30%	32%
Forest Gate North	5%	11%	21%	29%
Forest Gate South	13%	14%	24%	28%
Green Street East	15%	27%	36%	37%
Green Street West	18%	28%	25%	36%
Little Ilford	13%	23%	30%	35%
Manor Park (Newham)	13%	18%	26%	34%
Maryland	7%	10%	28%	25%
Plaistow North	12%	21%	27%	33%
Plaistow South	8%	17%	27%	29%
Plaistow West & Canning Town East	9%	16%	26%	24%
Plashet	18%	27%	34%	38%
Royal Albert	10%	11%	26%	23%
Royal Victoria	5%	4%	17%	9%
Stratford	6%	7%	26%	14%
Stratford Olympic Park	2%	3%	18%	5%
Wall End	11%	19%	27%	32%

Newham's population is highly diverse in a great variety of characteristics, including ethnicity, culture, heritage and languages spoken. This diversity is highly relevant to understanding overcrowding and mitigating its impacts, as different communities may have different aspirations, experiences and needs.

We have looked at the overcrowding among different, broadly defined ethnic groups, based on the ethnicity categories in the Census (Figure 7). We are conscious that these categories are very wide and encompass a diverse range of communities and individuals, and it is therefore not possible to draw more detailed conclusions without more granular understanding of these populations.

In 2021, prevalence of overcrowding was highest among Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean and African residents, where an estimated 41% of people – amounting to around 25,000 individuals – were living in overcrowded conditions. Asian, Asian British and Asian Welsh groups had similar levels of overcrowding, with 40% of residents (almost 60,000 people) living in an overcrowded home. Overcrowding was lowest in Newham’s White Irish (8%) and White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British (16%) populations. This demonstrates inequality in overcrowding between broad ethnic groups in Newham, where Black and Asian groups are over-represented, and White British and Irish groups are under-represented.

There may be several reasons for these inequalities, including different levels of income and financial security between groups, differential levels of discrimination in gaining access to the housing market, and differences in family size or likelihood of living in a multigenerational household. This data can inform strategies to prevent or mitigate the harms of overcrowding, and reduce associated inequalities, by ensuring actions are tailored and targeted based on risk and need.

Figure 7: Number and proportion (%) of people living in overcrowded homes by broad ethnic group, 2021

Group	Number of people living in overcrowded homes	Proportion (%) living in overcrowded homes
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh	59,245	40%
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	24,966	41%
White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller, Roma or Other White	19,090	35%
White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British	8,311	16%
Other ethnic group	6,326	37%
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	5,302	33%
White: Irish	155	8%

Of all Newham residents who were living in overcrowded homes in 2021, almost half were from an Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh group, which was a function of high prevalence of overcrowding in Asian groups coupled with Newham’s large overall Asian population. One in five residents living in an overcrowded home were from a Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African group, and around one in six were from a White Gypsy, Irish Traveller, Roma or Other White group (Figure 8). This further highlights the diversity in Newham’s overcrowded population and the importance of ensuring that programmes and policies to prevent or mitigate the harms of overcrowding recognise and address the diverse aspirations, needs and experiences across this varied group.

Figure 8: Overcrowded population in Newham by broad ethnic group

Group	Proportion (%) of all people who were overcrowded	Proportion (%) of all households who were overcrowded
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh	48%	42%
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	20%	17%
White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller, Roma or Other White	15%	15%
White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British	7%	15%
Other ethnic group	5%	5%
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	4%	5%
White: Irish	0%	1%

Figure 9 below details the prevalence of overcrowding in different broad ethnic groups by ward, which highlights the variation in overcrowding across the borough within each group.

Figure 9: Overcrowding by ethnic group and wards

Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh - by number overcrowded			Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African - by number overcrowded			White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British - by number overcrowded		
Ward	% O/C	Number	Ward	% O/C	Number	Ward	% O/C	Number
Green Street East	47%	5,510	Custom House	42%	2,055	Custom House	23%	886
Green Street West	46%	5,312	Plaistow North	49%	1,775	Beckton	19%	600
Little Ilford	43%	4,299	West Ham	47%	1,768	Plaistow West & Canning Town East	18%	590
Plaistow North	47%	4,106	Plaistow West & Canning Town East	42%	1,523	East Ham South	19%	540
Plashet	47%	4,043	Canning Town North	49%	1,493	West Ham	19%	506
East Ham	42%	3,984	East Ham South	42%	1,422	Plaistow South	19%	441
Manor Park (Newham)	42%	3,848	Little Ilford	42%	1,327	Maryland	18%	424
Wall End	36%	3,586	Forest Gate South	40%	1,225	Canning Town North	19%	392
Boleyn	42%	3,301	Royal Albert	44%	1,130	Forest Gate South	16%	374
Forest Gate South	41%	3,238	Stratford	39%	1,055	Wall End	24%	359
East Ham South	41%	3,155	Plaistow South	41%	1,046	Plaistow North	17%	350
Plaistow West & Canning Town East	43%	2,030	Maryland	39%	1,027	Stratford	11%	341
West Ham	42%	1,804	Boleyn	44%	974	Forest Gate North	12%	315
Plaistow South	38%	1,772	Beckton	32%	927	Royal Albert	16%	283
Maryland	44%	1,434	Green Street East	52%	925	Canning Town South	19%	261
Stratford	32%	1,336	Manor Park (Newham)	40%	797	Little Ilford	19%	250
Forest Gate North	40%	1,266	Forest Gate North	33%	729	Manor Park (Newham)	17%	249
Beckton	29%	1,172	Royal Victoria	29%	682	East Ham	19%	236
Custom House	33%	1,091	Canning Town South	40%	676	Royal Victoria	8%	233
Canning Town North	38%	910	Wall End	38%	552	Boleyn	12%	189
Royal Albert	32%	635	Plashet	47%	490	Green Street East	20%	159
Royal Victoria	14%	564	Stratford Olympic Park	29%	482	Green Street West	18%	136
Stratford Olympic Park	15%	432	Green Street West	37%	458	Stratford Olympic Park	4%	114
Canning Town South	24%	417	East Ham	33%	428	Plashet	19%	83
Total	40%	59,245	Total	41%	24,966	Total	16%	8,311

Figure 10: Overcrowding by ethnic group and ward

White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller, Roma or Other White		
Ward	% O/C	Number
Beckton	37%	1,459
Custom House	37%	1,271
Wall End	51%	1,109
East Ham South	43%	1,105
Plaistow West & Canning Town East	37%	1,075
East Ham	52%	1,010
Plaistow North	43%	973
West Ham	33%	963
Forest Gate South	36%	935
Maryland	33%	913
Plaistow South	41%	899
Forest Gate North	41%	733
Stratford	22%	730
Manor Park (Newham)	40%	695
Little Ilford	42%	692
Boleyn	37%	639
Royal Albert	36%	636
Canning Town North	34%	623
Green Street East	42%	590
Green Street West	44%	565
Royal Victoria	15%	496
Plashet	46%	383
Canning Town South	25%	346
Stratford Olympic Park	13%	250
Total	35%	19,090

2. Identifying the harms linked to overcrowding

Summary

There is a considerable amount of evidence in the published research literature linking overcrowding to adverse physical and mental health, educational and social outcomes.

- A main link to harm is in relation to a range of infectious diseases. Amongst these are TB and flu, and related hospitalisations.
- There is some evidence associating overcrowding with other diseases including rheumatic fever, throat, skin and eye infections, and heart disease, as well as accidents in the home.
- In terms of mental health impacts, there is evidence that overcrowding is linked to increased risk of a range of mental health problems including stress, substance misuse and low self-esteem. Overcrowding was also associated with increased mental health risks during COVID-19 lockdowns.
- In relation to educational outcomes in children, more general studies on the impacts of poor housing suggest poor housing is linked to underachievement at school, made worse the longer the child is in poor housing. However, a comprehensive study of overcrowding concluded that a similar relationship was seen, after having adjusted for family size and socioeconomic status.
- A cost benefit analysis published in 2021 by the Building Research Establishment indicated that the cost to the public purse of poor housing (not specifically but including overcrowding) could be estimated at £1.4bn a year to the NHS; and wider social costs including a loss of earnings potential and the need for further caring and support services led to an estimated overall cost of poor housing of around £18.5bn a year.

Turning to large scale lived experience surveys of people in overcrowded homes, the main problems reported by households in the studies consistently indicate the main issues as being:

- children sharing a bedroom with an adult or having to share a bed with someone else
- having to sleep somewhere other than their bedroom, such as a living room, bathroom, corridor or kitchen
- difficulties falling asleep either because they shared a bedroom or because their house was too noisy
- fewer opportunities for social interaction with family and friends
- physical injuries and worsening health conditions (e.g. asthma) associated with unsuitable environments (e.g. damp)
- negative effects on their physical and mental ill health, including low mood, anxiety, and exhaustion
- arguments among the family group
- lack of access to outdoor and indoor facilities for play, leisure and learning
- children struggling to do their homework because of the lack of space
- parents worrying that their children are too embarrassed to bring friends home

There is also evidence about the differential impact on different ethnic groups. This includes:

- a qualitative study of South Asian overcrowded households demonstrating the importance of housing choices including people's wish to live with, or close to, extended family members and attachment to an area. There was also evidence of lack

of trust in how, and by whom, information and support is provided which led to barriers to the take-up of mitigating options.

From our in-depth interviews with Newham residents living in overcrowded homes and officers providing support to these families, the main issues raised included many of those listed above, but also included:

- a significant challenge in meeting the needs of children of different ages. Older children and teenagers need privacy, and younger children need space to play
- local resources such as leisure centres and libraries - and community-based facilities – being vital, but they need to be affordable and hyper local
- access to face to face advice such as the Family Navigators and to trusted individuals and organisations such as schools enabling people to find help and support
- schools being a vital source of stability and continuity for children
- local social networks being crucial to supporting families through difficult times
- green space and external play areas being important, although concerns were also raised over safety of children and young people

Introduction

This section reviews the main evidence and literature around the harms associated with living in overcrowded conditions. Some care is needed to understand how to separate harms which result from poor housing conditions generally from those specifically due to overcrowding. In addition, overcrowding can exacerbate some pre-existing issues, such as poverty and deprivation, poor health and mental health, domestic abuse and child neglect and abuse, and other similar issues. Some people may have moved into overcrowded housing as a consequence of these pre-existing issues, and may also have had the problems made worse by overcrowding.

In this short review we try to specifically identify the harms of overcrowding, although many of the mitigations suggested in the report will have positive benefits in relation to overlapping impacts from poor housing generally. There are three main types of evidence set out:

- Literature reviews reviewing the links between overcrowding and adverse outcomes, such as physical and mental health and educational outcomes.
- Documenting the lived experience of overcrowding, which is captured from structured surveys and interviews with selected samples of people living in overcrowded conditions.
- Primary research conducted as part of this study, consisting of individual, in-depth and open-ended or semi-structured interviews with a small number of Newham residents, LB Newham staff and other stakeholders, exploring their perceptions and experiences of overcrowding.

We explore all three approaches below.

Literature reviews

A 2004 literature review⁵ published by the then Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (now the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government - MHCLG) considered the impact of overcrowding on health and education. This was over 20 years ago and at that point it appeared that there was

⁵ Office of Deputy Prime Minister (2004). *The Impact of Overcrowding on Health and Education: A review of the Evidence and Literature*. ODPM <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/5073/>

limited evidence on the links between health and overcrowding, and specific gaps were identified as needing further research. In summary, the report found that:

- There was a good evidence base (40 studies) on overcrowding and physical health. The evidence pointed to a relationship between overcrowding and aspects of ill health of both children and adults. In addition, there was evidence to suggest that overcrowding in childhood affects aspects of adult health.
- A smaller evidence base (25 studies) was found on mental health, and evidence was mixed about a relationship between overcrowding and mental health.
- No studies were found which specifically drew out the differential effects of overcrowding on the health or education of people from different ethnic backgrounds.

This report identified many gaps in the evidence, and that there was a specific need for longitudinal research to explore the effects of overcrowding over time.

A more recent review of evidence around overcrowding and health, Kearns (2022)⁶, was partly triggered by the observed impacts of COVID-19 on households forced to spend longer continuous periods in overcrowded homes. The review cites a range of studies, particularly in relation to infectious diseases, mental health, and educational attainment. One of the main reports cited is a World Health Organisation review of international evidence around overcrowding⁷. That report is based on a range of European and wider international evidence, rather than being UK specific, but the findings are in our view still relevant to Newham.

This report notes that the effects of overcrowding can be broadly defined as the hazards associated with inadequate space within the dwelling for living, sleeping, and household activities. Several studies have reported a direct association between crowding and adverse health outcomes, such as infectious disease and mental health problems. Studies included exacting methodologies such as case-control studies, cross-sectional studies, ecological studies and retrospective cohort studies. Twenty-one studies identified evidence that overcrowding is associated with increased risks of tuberculosis (TB). Thirty studies reported that overcrowding was linked to respiratory infectious diseases other than TB, including flu related hospitalizations and illnesses, pneumonia, acute respiratory illness, and respiratory syncytial virus. Twenty-five studies identified links between overcrowding and other infectious diseases such as rheumatic fever and heart disease, typhoid fever, meningococcal disease, and throat, eye, and skin infections (although overcrowding appears to carry higher risks for some of these diseases than others).

Mental health problems, including stress, are also associated with overcrowding although the evidence for these is more limited.

Of the 13 separate studies reviewed by the World Health Organisation report on overcrowding harms, eight publications reported at least one significant association between household overcrowding and mental health; and seven further studies reported that participants living in a crowded household were more likely to report a mental health problem than those not living in crowded conditions. These mental health concerns included psychological distress, alcohol abuse, feeling depressed, and feeling unhappy about one's health. On the other hand, four of the studies

⁶ Kearns, A. 2022. Housing space and occupancy standards: developing evidence for policy from a health and wellbeing perspective in the UK context

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/09613218.2021.2024756?needAccess=true>

⁷ WHO. (2018). *WHO housing and health guidelines. Chapter 3: Household crowding*. World Health Organisation. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241550376>

could not detect any relationship between crowding and mental health outcomes. The certainty of the evidence relating crowding to adverse mental health effects, including stress, was assessed as moderate to low. A 2024 study of the relationship between overcrowding and mental health from the Health Foundation⁸ noted that, in 2022, 23% of people living in overcrowded housing indicated that they had experienced psychological distress, compared to 21% living in non-overcrowded housing, suggesting prevalence of distress was similar between the groups. The difference was more pronounced in 2019 and 2020 and may be linked to the impact of COVID-19 restrictions.

In relation to children's educational development and outcomes, several researchers have connected overcrowding to lower educational attainment, including one French study which showed a significant correlation between children's underperformance at school and overcrowded housing conditions, even after controlling for family size and family socioeconomic status. A more general study from the UK⁹ looked at the impact on children's wellbeing of spending long periods in poor housing conditions, examining five waves of data from the Families and Children Study, a representative longitudinal study of families with children in Britain, to show that the longer children live in poor housing, the more vulnerable they are to a range of other adverse outcomes, including health outcomes and educational attainment, which are included in the Government's Every Child Matters framework¹⁰. This study was wider than specifically overcrowded housing, but the evidence is nevertheless relevant, as overcrowding is recognised to be one aspect of poor housing condition.

Many households spend long periods in overcrowded conditions. The 2018 Homeless Monitor for England. Produced by Crisis¹¹ reported that analysis of longitudinal housing surveys shows that a majority of overcrowded households in a particular year had been overcrowded the previous year, with many crowded for at least two years. Econometric modelling of overcrowding showed that this was clearly related to housing market conditions, employment, and poverty, as well as demographic factors.

Wider harms are also evidenced in the literature. Ormandy (2009)¹² cites evidence of the links between overcrowding and increased risk factors associated with home injury, social tensions, and exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke.

Reviewing wider literature, WHO¹³ has noted that the income constraints that compel people to live in dwellings with inadequate space for their needs can also mean that such households struggle to afford housing that is in good repair or to heat homes sufficiently. This is made worse by caps to the welfare benefit support available due to Local Housing Allowance (LHA) restrictions, an effect which is supported by evidence from Shelter¹⁴ and Clair¹⁵ who find clear evidence that LHA caps faced by

⁸ The Health Foundation (2024). *Relationship between living in overcrowded homes and mental health*. <https://www.health.org.uk/evidence-hub/housing/housing-stability-and-security/relationship-between-overcrowding-and-mental-health>

⁹ Matt Barnes, Sarah Butt, and Wojtek Tomaszewski (2011) 'The Duration of Bad Housing and Children's Well-being in Britain'. *Housing Studies*, 26:1, 155-176, DOI:10.1080/02673037.2010.512749

¹⁰ See HM Treasury (2003). *Every Child Matters*. UK Govt: London
<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7c95a4e5274a0bb7cb806d/5860.pdf>

¹¹ Crisis (2018). *Homelessness Monitor for England*. Crisis: London
https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/238700/homelessness_monitor_england_2018.pdf

¹² Ormandy D. (ed.). (2009). *Housing and Health in Europe*. Routledge, London.
<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/edit/10.4324/9780203885239/housing-health-europe-david-ormandy>

¹³ Op cit

¹⁴ Shelter (2019). *From the frontline – Universal Credit and the broken housing safety net*. Shelter: London
https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_and_research/policy_library/report_from_the_frontline

¹⁵ Clair, A. (2021). 'The effect of local housing allowance reductions on overcrowding in the private rented sector in England'. *International Journal of Housing Policy*, 22(1), 119–137. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19491247.2021.1964253>

poorer households mean they are more likely to choose to live in smaller and overcrowded homes. In addition, people living in overcrowded homes are the most likely to experience other housing problems. The Health Foundation reports that almost one third (29%) of households living in overcrowded homes experience at least one other housing problem¹⁶.

While literature on the costs to the public purse of specific overcrowding harms is not available, there is recent information from the Building Research Establishment¹⁷ which provides cost estimates of the wider cost to the NHS of poor quality housing. While this is not directly a cost to LB Newham, it does create additional demand on already stressed local healthcare providers, and in many cases will affect the extent of care services provision required. The estimated cost to the NHS is £1.4bn per year to treat those people who are affected by poor housing. These are first year treatment costs alone. For many harms there may be ongoing treatment required beyond the first year. In addition, there will be a loss of economic potential (poorer educational achievement, loss of productivity, career prospects) for people affected by poor housing. When these societal costs are included, it is estimated that the full cost to society of leaving people living in poor housing is some £18.5bn per annum.

In conclusion, the literature reviews suggest that overcrowding is associated with some physical and mental health harms, harms to children's education attainment, and other adverse social outcomes, as well as significant costs to the NHS and society. Kearns¹⁸ notes that better evidence is part of the way forward to strengthening policy. In his view, further research on the specific harms and costs of overcrowding would support the development of more rigorous, enforceable standards of domestic space and occupancy for the benefit of quality of life, health and wellbeing, and the productivity of society in the future.

Lived experience studies

In 2023, the National Housing Federation produced a briefing report¹⁹ highlighting key findings regarding the living conditions being experienced by overcrowded households in England. This information complements the Census information provided in Section I, and the impacts and issues highlighted below are very likely to be mirrored in Newham.

- 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.

¹⁶ The Health Foundation (2024). *Number of households experiencing multiple housing problems*.

<https://www.health.org.uk/evidence-hub/housing/housing-stability-and-security/number-of-households-experiencing-multiple-housing-problems>

¹⁷ Garrett, H., Mackay, M., Nicol, S., Piddington, J., Roys, M., (2021) *The cost of poor housing in England 2021 Briefing paper*. British Research Establishment: London

https://files.bregroup.com/research/BRE_Report_the_cost_of_poor_housing_2021.pdf

¹⁸ Op cit

¹⁹ National Housing Federation (2023). *Briefing: Overcrowding in England*. NHF: London

<https://www.housing.org.uk/globalassets/files/resource-files/overcrowding-in-england-april-2023.pdf>

- 76% of overcrowded families report an adverse impact on their health due to overcrowding.
- 77% of overcrowded families report that their mental health has been negatively affected by overcrowding.

A report published in 2005 by the housing advice and campaigning organisation Shelter²⁰, summarised key research in the area highlighting other studies that analyse data from various censuses and health surveys to capture the lived experience of people in overcrowded housing. This report identifies how lived experience highlights similar harms to those found in the literature described above, including

- Respiratory and infectious diseases
- Common mental health conditions
- Accidents around the home
- Tuberculosis (TB)

Different ethnic groups may have different lived experiences of overcrowding according to several studies. Following findings in the English Housing Survey (EHS) that British Bangladeshi households are 12 times more likely than those from White British households to live in overcrowded households (24% of British Bangladeshi, compared to 2% of White British households in England), the responsible government department (then DLUHC) funded a qualitative study²¹ including in-depth interviews and focus groups to better understand the causes and impacts of overcrowding on South Asian households. Factors identified as important to housing choices included people's wish to live with, or close to, extended family members and attachment to an area, near appropriate places of worship, and near other members of the same community. The households in the study also reported negative consequences to overcrowded accommodation, including an inability to sleep, a lack of privacy, and more family arguments. Interestingly the study also asked about what would help deal with the overcrowding problems they experienced. Trust in how, and by whom, information and support is provided, alongside equitable provision of services, emerged as key factors helping people seek advice and be prepared to engage with services. Suggestions included the use of multiple channels to communicate information about housing and financial support, including through community networks and local charities; information on wider benefit entitlements provided at the same time as housing advice; and appropriate and tailored contact and support during housing application and bidding processes.

There is also research into the housing and homelessness issues experienced by households of Somali background. A 2003²² report studied five case study areas in England. Overcrowding was one prominent issue, and the case studies found there was little awareness and understanding on the part of private and public landlords of the specific needs and housing ambitions of Somali households within the study.

²⁰Liam Reynolds (2005). *Full house? How Overcrowded Housing Affects Families*. Shelter: London https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_and_research/policy_library/full_house_how_overcrowded_housing_affects_families

²¹ Department for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities (2022). *Overcrowding in South Asian households: a qualitative report*. UK Govt: London. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/overcrowding-in-south-asian-households-a-qualitative-report/overcrowding-in-south-asian-households-a-qualitative-report>

²² Robinson, D. and Cole, I. (2003). *Understanding Somali Housing Experiences in England*. Centre for Regional and Economic Research: Sheffield Hallam University <https://shura.shu.ac.uk/27069/1/somali-housing-experiences-england.pdf>

Additional insights into the lived experience of overcrowding are found in a recently published study²³ which reported on the views of 20 households living in overcrowded homes in LB Islington and LB Tower Hamlets, as well as 14 professionals working with these families. The aim was to identify factors in the household and wider environment affecting family health and wellbeing that could inform a more holistic measure of overcrowding. Participants reported that overcrowded housing:

- contributed to physical and mental ill health, reporting low mood, anxiety, and exhaustion.
- led to physical injuries and worsening health conditions (e.g. asthma), associated with unsuitable environments (e.g. damp).
- affected their social life, relationships and impaired work and school performance

Families reporting disabilities, and those living in single-guardian households experienced particular challenges in overcrowded homes, according to the study. Participants identified three features of the wider environment that affected their experience of overcrowding within the home: maintenance of the housing estate, suitability of the property, and communication with councils/landlords.

In another study on how overcrowding affects children's wellbeing in Tower Hamlets²⁴, 620 households responded to a survey of their lived experience of overcrowding. About half the respondents reported not having enough space, particularly the households on lower incomes. The impact of this lack of space had the consequences of:

- lack of privacy for adults and children (identified by 83% of these responses)
- no space for children to play (81%)
- general feelings of being trapped (79%)
- arguments among the family group (69%)
- nowhere for children to do homework (64%) and
- not enough space for storage (63%)

Other prominent issues families reported included:

- fewer opportunities for social interaction with family and friends
- reliance on local friends/social connections which meant that moving elsewhere was not an option for some families
- dampness or cold rooms further reducing usable space
- a lack of access to outdoor and indoor facilities for play, leisure and learning
- small inaccessible balconies with safety concerns

²³ Nixon L, Eveleigh E, O'Donoghue M, et al. OP132 'Household overcrowding and family health and wellbeing: exploring the lived experiences of overcrowded families in North London to inform a holistic measure of overcrowding'. *J Epidemiol Community Health* 2024;78:A100; Ucci, M., Ortegon-Sanchez, A., Mead, N.E., et al. . 'Exploring the Interactions between Housing and Neighbourhood Environments for Enhanced Child Wellbeing: The Lived Experience of Parents Living in Areas of High Child Poverty in England, UK'. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 2022, 19, 12563

²⁴ A video and briefing paper is available from <https://actearly.org.uk/healthy-places-overcrowding-affects-childrens-wellbeing/> which is produced by the **ActEarly Research Hub** Bradford Institute for Health Research, Bradford

Some of the issues were exacerbated by the home needing specific repairs and maintenance. This is a separate but overlapping issue which becomes important in terms of mitigating overcrowding, as the impact of disrepair can become more harmful where the home is also overcrowded.

The lived experience of the overlapping impact of disrepair and overcrowding is also documented by Ucci and colleagues in interviews with 20 families with children between the ages of 2 and 12 in Tower Hamlets and Bradford²⁵. These interviews focused on the impact of poor housing and neighbourhoods on children's wellbeing. Overcrowding emerged as a key theme, as well as some key aspects of how families viewed the impacts on children, including the role that indoor and outdoor places and spaces have in enabling children's recreation and physical activity; and the effects of multiple, poor quality housing/environmental issues on their health and wellbeing.

The focus of this report is overcrowding and actions to mitigate its harms. Ucci' et al's 2022 report²⁶ is relevant as it identified opportunities for intervention and improvement to improve home environments. Pertinent opportunities related to overcrowding included:

- Expanding access to space and amenities, for example, by providing greater affordable access to storage space and increasing the variety of play and recreation areas. These should be local, visible and green spaces.
- Tackling poor-quality environments and/or disrepair inside and outside the home.
- Better communication with residents and within the local community. For example, some participants mentioned the need to better communicate child-friendly initiatives run by local organisations or communities.
- Communication with, and involvement of residents in, activities related to the prioritisation and fixing of disrepair or hazards inside and outside the home.
- Supporting and empowering local communities to 'take ownership' of local places, spaces and initiatives. Some residents emphasised the value of the local communities in creating places and activities which support various aspects of children's wellbeing.
- Increasing feelings of social cohesion and safety in response to anti-social behaviours.

These mitigation opportunities are reflected in the findings and recommendations later in this report, where they are placed in the Newham context.

A further recent study by Bernstock et al²⁷ reported on an in-depth pilot project aimed at understanding the impact of inadequate housing on children and young people's educational experiences and wellbeing in Newham. Its aims were to assess how inadequate housing affects early child development and educational experiences of children and young people from 0-18; how overcrowding impacts the emotional and physical wellbeing of children and families; and what kinds of strategies and policies could be put in place to mitigate the negative impact of poor housing on children and young people's educational experience.

Bernstock et al's report sets out that many children living in Newham are growing up in housing that is not fit for purpose, which is having a detrimental impact on many aspects of their lives, including

²⁵ Ucci, M., Ortegon-Sanchez, A., Mead, N.E., et al.

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Dr Penny Bernstock, Andrew Holt, Debbie Humphry, Frankie Webb-Huseyin (2024) *The Impact of inadequate housing on educational experience: A Pilot study in Newham* Citizens UK (East London Citizens), London.
<https://www.schoolhomesupport.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/CITIZENS-UK-The-Impact-of-inadequate-housing-on-educational-experience.pdf>

their ability to play, learn, study, socialise with friends, and more generally thrive in their home. It identifies overcrowding as a key issue for children in the borough, negatively affecting all family members, limiting privacy and space, and impacting their emotional wellbeing. A primary focus of the report's findings was that schools, voluntary, and statutory organisations were playing a vital role in supporting infants, children and young people, and their families, living in inadequate housing. The report notes that school based social workers/support workers can play a vital role in supporting children and their families with a range of difficulties, including housing.

A major element of the research was a series of surveys undertaken in Newham schools. One involved of a survey of Year 6 pupils at one school; a second involved views and experiences from pupils, parents and teachers at a secondary, boys school, and a third involved working with a local community organisation that offers support to Albanian people in the UK, including seven interviews with families experiencing poor housing.

Some of the main results from the survey of Year 6 pupils (where there was a 100% response rate from 64 surveyed pupils) were:

- 22 (34%) reported experiencing overcrowding/lack of space
- 25 (39%) shared a kitchen with another family
- 19 (30%) do not have a quiet place to read at home
- 33 (52%) children completed homework at a desk; 23% on the kitchen table; 15% on a bed; and 9% on the floor
- 23 (36%) reported difficulties falling asleep either because they shared a bedroom or because their house was too noisy
- 22 (34%) do not have space outside their home where they can play, for example a garden or communal area

Some main findings from the survey of 66 Year 7 pupils (boys) relevant to overcrowding were:

- 30 (46%) pupils reported that they shared a bedroom, and most pupils shared a bedroom with one other person.
- 13 (20%) pupils reported that there was something about their house that made it difficult to sleep.
- 26 (39%) reported that there was something about their housing that made it difficult to bring friends home.

Among Year 8 pupils surveyed (where 125 out of 193 (65%) surveyed completed the form), the main findings relevant to overcrowding were:

- 31 (25%) shared a bedroom with someone of the opposite sex
- 10 (8%) were sharing a bedroom with 2 siblings or more.
- 14 (11%) shared a bedroom with either a parent and parents and siblings
- 19 (15%) reported that there was something about their housing situation that made it difficult to sleep
- 20 (16%) reported that there was something about their house that made it difficult to socialise with friends at home.

The report also asked the pupils in each of the surveys what they would like by way of additional support to deal with poor housing and overcrowding. This is of significance as these responses represent the direct voices of young people, which are important to hear and to reflect in any mitigation options. A brief summary of the ideas put forward included:

- Extended school opening hours
- Homework/after school clubs
- A breakfast club/morning club offering
- Space within schools for pupils to complete their homework
- Additional learning resources e.g. tutoring, online support, Chromebooks
- Advice and support, or therapy, and listening to pupils' concerns

Several of the report's recommendations are relevant to mitigating the harms of overcrowding in Newham:

- To establish a time-limited working group with statutory and voluntary sector agencies to develop a comprehensive plan to minimise the negative impact of inadequate housing on child development and educational experience.
- To scale up support to voluntary organisations who are well placed to develop innovative solutions to support children and families.
- To ensure that there are social workers based either in schools or working across schools who could play an important role in supporting pupils and their families who are living in inadequate housing.

Evidence from interviews with LB Newham staff, stakeholders and families

For this study we undertook primary research to capture the perceptions, views, and voices of Newham residents and people working to support those in overcrowded homes in LB Newham and other local organisations. This data forms an important part of both understanding local needs and supporting the co-production of local services, which is a stated aim of the Mayor of Newham.

In this section it should be noted that LB Newham is constrained in the assistance it can offer to overcrowded households by several factors including statutory duties, which oblige it to provide specific services to certain people, local policies and programmes in place as part of the democratically controlled exercise of the powers of the authority, and the overall obligation of the council to provide services within the financial rules and constraints imposed on it. This is a complex framework of opportunities and constraints which may not be fully apparent to local frontline providers or to residents themselves.

Staff and stakeholder interviews

We held in-depth interviews with a range of LB Newham staff and other local stakeholders who work to support people in overcrowded homes. We asked them about their perceptions of the harms being caused by overcrowding and about ways of mitigating these harms.

We interviewed representatives from the following LB Newham departments and organisations:

Newham Council:

- Public Health
- Housing (Housing Strategy / Private Rented Sector / Housing Need / Housing Hubs)
- Early Help
- Family Navigator Service
- Resident Engagement and Participation
- Improvement and Change (People's Services)

Other organisations:

- Shelter: national housing organization providing advice and campaigning work. Within Newham there is a specialist team working with Newham residents facing housing problems.
- Newham Community Project: a registered charity set up in 2008 and based in Newham working to empower the vulnerable and the impoverished through training, education and sporting activities.
- School-Home Support: a national charity which supports families whose children are absent from school by addressing the root causes of high absence through whole-family support.
- Healtogether CIC which is a community enterprise organisation with a vision to improve access to mental healthcare services for minority ethnic communities in the UK
- West Ham Primary School: a Newham primary school

The representatives of these organisations covered a wide range of experience and knowledge in terms of the impacts of overcrowding and precarious housing on residents living in Newham. The health, social and educational harms experienced by Newham residents were central to their work.

Main findings

The **shortage of space**, with parents sharing rooms and often also beds with their children, was highlighted as an area for which people sought help. **The lack of privacy**, particularly for older children and teenagers as they navigated other challenges in their lives was also an area of concern.

In terms of how to mitigate these challenges, there were calls to create spaces outside of the home for people to do the activities they are unable to do within their home, for example, reinvestment in accessible and appropriate youth services and activities:

*And the only thing I would say is possibly looking at the older children and the youth zones and things like that, because what we have with overcrowding, if there are older children in the family and they're going through all sorts when they're teenagers – home, changes... school, GCSEs all that, and there's overcrowding as well. **It's not just the general things of education, it's social needs, like it's privacy, you know, they're not getting any space.***
(Voluntary sector representative)

Living in Temporary Accommodation was seen as a factor which often increased anxiety and uncertainty which exacerbated the negative impact of overcrowding. As of 31 March 2024 (the last published official Departmental figures) LB Newham had 6,350 households living in temporary accommodation, of whom 4,456 were households with children. These families with children included 100 households in bed and breakfast accommodation, and 2,490 living in nightly-paid, privately-managed, self-contained accommodation, the most insecure types of temporary accommodation, which also have the highest cost to the Council. It is likely that many of these households were also overcrowded.

LB Newham provides advice and information to its residents around housing and other local services, including through local offices and hubs. These are often subject to significant demand and can feel inaccessible to some residents. Staff in the hubs also have the difficult job of managing expectations around what accommodation might become available and when, especially given uncertainty and delays can be common.

Local information is also provided by community-based organisations who can act as a bridge – providing additional, and similar, information to the LB Newham offices and hubs, and delivering further local work and support for residents.

We learned through the interviews about the wide-ranging support that the voluntary sector offers in Newham. This includes both providing advice and information, advocating on behalf of residents, and meeting needs directly through voluntary sector resources and hubs. LB Newham has an active policy, and several programmes, to support and encourage the provision of voluntary services which complement their own, drawing on local knowledge, community support and engagement, and local innovation.

It is clear to LB Newham that locally based community and voluntary sector partners provide support that is cost-effective and delivers considerable additional social value. Nevertheless, challenges remain regarding funding such services given the current extraordinary pressures on the council due to cuts in local government funding and increasing demand for support. When exploring the role that the voluntary sector can play alongside statutory services in mitigating the harms from overcrowding and poor quality housing, it will be important to actively consider how proposed activities have community support and are adequately funded and resourced.

Resident interviews

We spoke to 15 Newham residents living in (or having recently lived in) overcrowded homes. We asked questions around how residents felt about their homes and the area in which they lived, whether their home met the needs of their family, any problems with the home, how overcrowded it was, how overcrowding impacted on health and wellbeing of the family, and importantly what they thought would be helpful in mitigating the impact and harms of living in overcrowded housing. Many of the interview respondents were experiencing a number of housing related challenges such as precarity and poor quality housing, alongside their overcrowding.

Annex 2 has more detailed information on these resident interviews. All but one were carried out in person, the other being online. All but one of the interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Interviews were analysed by the LSE Housing and Communities team using thematic analysis. In this report all identifying personal data has been removed, specific details of the household changed, and pseudonyms used throughout so that the actual families involved cannot be identified.

Main findings

Generally interviewees had an awareness of the challenges faced by LB Newham in terms of increasing demand for housing that outstripped supply, and an insufficient supply in the social and housing sectors which was mainly outside the council's control. Nevertheless, and entirely naturally and appropriately, people wanted more help and support from the council and more and improved access to services. We have not invited LB Newham to comment on or respond to the points made by residents here, as this section seeks to set out the direct views and comments of people interviewed to understand the lived experience of living in overcrowded housing. It also focuses on what residents think would help them most in mitigating the harms of overcrowding,

For many of the families we spoke to in Newham, their overcrowded housing was one of many housing-related challenges they were facing. These additional challenges involved: facing eviction from properties owned by private landlords; living in multifamily shared accommodation with limited privacy and access to facilities; experiencing long waits (decades in some cases) on social housing waiting lists leading to living in overcrowded / unsuitable homes; experiences of precarity in insecure temporary housing including hotels and bed and breakfast accommodation.

Access to help

There was acknowledgement and awareness of the challenges within Newham in terms of housing and that the council faced increasing demand that outstripped supply. Nevertheless, people wanted more help and support from the council, and more and improved access to services.

For Michelle, her experience of struggling to get help from the Council had added to what was already a stressful situation with housing insecurity.

Michelle lives with her five children in a 3-bedroom property, where they have lived now for six years. The family is happy in the home and were feeling settled there after a period of housing insecurity when they were in multiple temporary accommodation placements, including out of borough. She has been on the waiting list in Newham now for a total of 16 years.

The house is rented through a private landlord who has decided to sell the property so the family is now going through the eviction process. The current insecurity and upheaval has caused a huge amount of stress. She hasn't always been able to access the help she needs from the council and believes that more face-to-face advice services would be better:

Any time in Newham when I hear them talking about housing its always the same, it's always that, there's no one to speak to...If you walk into the council office now they'll say oh no we don't deal with that, everything is onlineIt would be nice to just walk in and speak to someone face to face or be able to book an appointment.

She has received support, however, through the school some of her children attend.

So, I spoke with her, and she was like 'ok do this; have you done this?' And it felt so nice. It was like she had wrapped her arms around me and given me a massive cuddle. You know, I'm not on my own.

Michelle is keen to stay as close as possible to the area where she currently lives. She has children at both primary and secondary school in the local area and values the local facilities and resources, as well as having family members and thus a support network nearby.

Everyone says when you get older you want to leave London and go to Essex or something, but I like Newham, I always say its better the devil you know, and I know there's a lot of crime but there's also a lot of great things in Newham like especially when it comes to children and open spaces as I was saying. I would like to stay in Newham, I like it here... Those are the kind of resources [where] we live – open spaces, we are lucky where we've been situated that there are a lot of open spaces within walking distance, and I know a lot of people don't have that. We really do take advantage of the open spaces.

In Michelle's case she only found out that the Newham Housing Hub existed when she was seeking specialist help with her eviction and feels that the council should improve communication and awareness raising on the support systems currently in place.

Space in the home to study / play

Families highlighted the **problems caused by lack of space for storage, and space for children particularly to carry out their daily activities**. Many respondents were having to balance the needs of children of different ages within very limited spaces. For Maria, a Newham resident, who lives within a multigenerational household, the lack of space and privacy was a challenge.

It affects me because I don't have my space, every day is me, my mum, I need my space, my mum needs her space. No privacy...My son he can't do play. Sometimes when he plays, he put all the toys on the floor, my mum don't like because the house is not too big. (Maria)

Another interviewee, Zara, shared how the space limitations impacted on all members of the family.

Life Story: Zara

Zara lives with her four children in a 1-bedroom flat where she has been living for around 20 years, having moved in when she was a single person. She rents from Newham Council and is very keen to move.

So I've got a one bedroom flat. Obviously there's five of us in there... We're using the bedroom for sleeping, all of us in one bedroom so I've got two bunkbeds, my bed and two foldable travel cots in that same room, so there's no room to get anywhere in the room, I have to lift the travel cot to get everybody in and out of the room so it's a bit noisy and congested and that's recurring every day.

She has been on the waiting list to move and has been bidding for a new home since 2010 and feels that her needs are not being adequately considered. She does, however, remain hopeful that a move may happen soon.

In addition to the severe overcrowding she is experiencing, she also has other problems with her home including some damp and mould, and outstanding repairs. She has health needs and the property is in a block with no lift which makes life very difficult for her and her children.

Health wise its affecting me, obviously we're all like in each other's space, it makes them sad, it makes them angry, its affecting their education definitely. They don't have enough space to do anything, there's no privacy. It's not easy to study, unless I put my kids in the corridor or something.

Zara struggles for space for storage and for the space for the children to either play or to be able to study.

There's no space. Its congested, my kids are growing and they're not getting any younger. There's four seasons in this country so we need coats, jackets, boots, shoes...It's a bit depressing because obviously I want better for the children. Education-wise it's a bit hard for them to study and get space.

She sums up the unsuitability of the home by highlighting the fact that the family can't even sit down to eat meals together:

We don't have nowhere to sit to have dinner, it's not a family home.

There is a communal garden downstairs but because of other people like thieves and these sorts of people that have got drugs, I don't really send them down there or out there because people are in there.

Because of the shortage of space within their home, Zara highlighted how important it was to have other spaces available for family members to be able to use, both outside green spaces for fresh air and space for the children to study and have fun.

Just more space, more stuff to do community wise. I don't know. If I could have more space for them to have their education that would be great for them because then there will probably be more space for me to do stuff, I always have to deal with them all the time

*because they don't have space to do these things. Even a garden. **Just more space to do things, fresh air. There's nowhere like that, there's nothing like that, I'm just always stuck at home.***

Another parent who lives with four children in a one-bedroom property talked about the **challenges for the children of having no space for play or study:**

It's hard for my children because of no privacy, they can only eat and sleep, they can't play. It's hard for my older son because he needs to study but we only have one room for him, so it's noisy and it's hard to do. (Mariam)

This impact on **children's ability both to study and also to socialise** with friends was also highlighted by Julie:

Life Story: Julie

Julie lives in a 2-bedroom property with her five children. She describes it as very overcrowded and is desperate to move, having been bidding for a new property for 15 years.

I only have two bedrooms. My little one sleeps with me and then the four other children, they sleep in one room. They share one bedroom. It's very difficult because one has to go to the sitting room and close the door to dress. And another one they have to come to my room to dress for their privacy and some of them have to dress in their room and sometimes in the toilet.

Their home being overcrowded is something that Julie feels has affected the family, both in terms of the children having the necessary space to study and have privacy, and in terms of health and wellbeing for family members.

Even [my daughter] mention that to her school that "I always sit on the stairs to study and it's no good". And the teacher asked her why you sitting on the stairs, and she said "it's because there's no room. My [siblings] are studying in the hall and when they study I can't concentrate so sometimes I have to sit on the stairs or sometimes I have to sit in the toilet to study. If somebody goes first to the stairs then I have to sit on the toilet and study." All of them are affected... their education.

Julie also reflects on the wider impacts of lacking space to enable socialization with others in the home:

*Yeah, because sometimes children's birthday you want to go to the garden, or invite their friends. **We cannot, they cannot socialise, they cannot invite their friends. They themselves feel ashamed of their living.***

For Julie having other spaces in the local area that her children can use to study is absolutely crucial:

...she go to the library because she cannot...she said mum it's too much. She had to go to uni and study in the library until 12am because she's preparing for exam and when she comes home this one also is studying here, and this one is studying here, and there's no space to sit down and study, so she had to stay in uni until 12/1am before she will come home. And sometimes I will sit on the stairs waiting for her. And my son always comes to

library to study so even the librarian know him here and they stay there and study until 8 o'clock when the library is closing and you have to come out of the library.

She is happy in the area she lives in and values the local park and safety of the area:

I would say the area is good... What I like about the area, it's quiet, it's not violent. The park is five minute or three minutes walking distance. In the park there's a gym so sometimes they go and play there, even myself I use it as my gym.

Health

The physical and mental health impacts of overcrowding came out strongly in our research with Newham residents. For a majority of those we spoke to, their homes were lacking in both space and privacy, with associated stresses and challenges affecting mental wellbeing.

For Steven and his wife Helen, a lack of space and privacy when living in overcrowded conditions staying with a family member led to raised stress levels, an increase in arguments among family members and a deterioration in wellbeing. They eventually received help and were able to move into more suitable accommodation following interventions from health professionals.

Life Story: Steven and Helen

Steven and Helen have three children and live in a 3-bedroom property, having moved within the past couple of years from living in overcrowded conditions with a family member.

The family has experienced many challenges relating to their previous overcrowded accommodation where there were six people living in a 2-bedroom property, and then in temporary accommodation which was unsuitable for the family's needs.

The main challenges experienced when overcrowded related to the shortage of space and lack of privacy, often leading to raised stress levels and arguments:

*It was bumping into each other and **just not having the space really that affected us the most... It was difficult to just breathe.** Not having the kids' space as well... It was the arguments as well. You'd get into silly arguments and then it escalates over that.*

When talking about the lack of privacy, personal space and arguments, Steven and Helen are clear that moving home to a better property, better suited to their needs, has led to a great improvement in the family's wellbeing and the children's ability to focus at school:

*...How they was in school really affected the situation so they were constantly tired...if one person wakes up, everyone is going to wake up...So, the kids yeah it affected their education at the start but once we moved it stopped, it was just instant. **It was an instant change... It was that living environment that messed things up for a little bit. And then once we were out of that the kids were happier.***

The impact of the overcrowding had a detrimental effect on Steven's health. It was as a result of this illness that the family were able to access additional support from Housing and other Council departments to enable the family to move home following hospital treatment via temporary accommodation and fairly quickly into a housing association property.

Now that the family are settled in their new home, they can identify improvements in their quality of life such as the ability to socialize and entertain at home, and the parents highlight clear benefits for their children.

Yeah, it sounds dramatic, but it definitely changed our lives. It saved us. My daughter having her own room, has given her confidence and self...not respect but she's more open, she's got space to do what she wants, she's more happy.

For Steven and Helen, having the stability and comfort of a safe private home where the family can relax together has been central to wellbeing.

To me, as long as I can come to my home, to my safe space where I feel comfortable, and wind down from a bad day, a good day. All I do is come home, sort the kids out, they've got a roof over their heads, they've got clothes, food, then I'm happy.

Maintenance and repair – quality of homes

Homes that are overcrowded are also often lacking in maintenance and repair, and overcrowding can exacerbate these issues. Improving standards in both the private and social rented sector is a priority for LB Newham and other authorities. For one of our interview respondents, the challenges of an overcrowded home that was affected by damp and mould were often overwhelming. Ayesha lives with her family including 4 children in a 2-bedroom property. She feels desperate about the need for the family to move, based on the health issues facing her family – which she feels have been exacerbated by their overcrowded and damp home.

Since five years I've been after the council, but they've been repainting, they are not doing anything to rehouse me or anything. It keeps coming back and the health condition is going worse as well... so it's just the asthma is going worse because of this damp condition plus it's not good - overcrowding, overcrowding, it's too severely overcrowding here. (Ayesha)

She reflects on the fact that the family are unable to all spend time together in the main sitting room of their home because of the poor ventilation and there being too many people in a small space, a problem familiar to other overcrowded households, and which overcrowding can exacerbate:

It's extremely overcrowded, it's not overcrowded, it's extremely overcrowded, because all our family if they sit in the sitting room, blurry windows, there's steam. This how much it's affecting us (Ayesha).

For another parent, there was a sense of shame and not wishing to have friends around because of the difficulties in living in overcrowded conditions.

I like the area, we know people and my children have good friends. But I don't like this house. I don't like to have my friends round because of it, I feel ashamed. (Mariam)

Local space and resources

Due to the limited space within people's homes, many Newham respondents highlighted the key role that local facilities and spaces play in helping alleviate some of the difficulties experienced at home.

I love the area, my kids' school, everything. We have the park behind our house, we have the Beckton library as well. I also enrol all the kids in extra classes because I want them to perform above a certain threshold, education is the key, so I believe I have to put in a lot of effort for them to achieve higher and greatness... We have the gym, they go swimming, the leisure centre. (Angela)

Aysha, for example, who has four school-age children and lives in a 2-bedroom flat, highlighted the role that local activities and facilities (that are safe and affordable) could play in easing tensions and providing respite:

*The local parks maybe if there is any activities, or local area like just a few roads away there, any community centre... I would suggest Newham council to increase any voucher system or something like that even for schools or something for the local children they can go there to do activities but it has to be something like **free activities for the children, whoever's struggling at home it's too little space to enjoy even play board game or anything, they can at least go out for activities in the local area.** (Aysha)*

However there were also concerns expressed about the safety of external spaces and lack of care and maintenance shown to communal or public spaces that would otherwise provide respite for families.

Social networks – connection to schools and local area

The value of social networks and connection to the area and / or to local schools emerged strongly though our fieldwork in Newham and from our work alongside our research collaborators from School-Home Support (detailed below):

*This area is too busy, I like it because of the park and school being very near. **The main reason I would stay here is for the good schools.** When we were researching about the schools, these were a lot better, so for my children's future we need to stay here (Vishal)*

For one parent, currently awaiting eviction from her home, the lack of security and clarity on what was happening and the potential disruption to the lives of her children and their education was causing distress:

*...My child has ADHD / autism so it's really worrying to think that in the next few weeks **all the hard work we've been doing over the past 2-3 years, and just getting him a good positive attitude to school, and it's a safe and fun environment, maybe all of that will be up in the air because Newham may move us completely out of the borough, and then that's completely out of the school and for him that will be an overload.** That's too much happening at one time and with nothing being familiar and it's kind of just come out of the blue (Zara)*

In many cases the resources and networks within the neighbourhoods where people lived were vital as a mitigating factor when faced with housing precarity, insecurity and challenging conditions within the home. Farzana, for example, has issues with her home but really likes the area and the social networks they have established there:

Life Story: Farzana

Farzana lives with her husband and three children in a 2-bedroom house rented from a private landlord.

The house has some problems related to damp and mould which Farzana believes has caused or exacerbated the health conditions for herself and her family.

Nobody wants to come to our house because they feel their breath when they enter, they feel it. Especially in winter, if you enter my house, you will feel the smell of the damp, we spend so much money every week, almost all of the shopping is for cleaning stuff.

The landlord is not responsive to requests for maintenance and repair and in some cases has behaved in a threatening and unprofessional way towards the family:

They don't repair the house properly. The landlord is not good, they don't want to spend money to repair the house, that's the main problem... We complained from the beginning... then the landlord came and threatened us if you do too much complaining about the house, I will take the home back... So that's why we don't complain.

Farzana is currently being evicted from the property and has concerns about how her children will manage with the change and disruption to their daily lives.

So, it is very difficult all the time thinking maybe this is the last day here... When the eviction letter came, now we are waiting for the bailiff letter. The children are upset because I don't know where they are going to send us because they will be affected for school and everything.

The family are settled in the area and are well located for schools and other resources, as well as social networks. Farzana values the stability that attending the same primary school has provided for her children and feels comfortable speaking to staff and teachers there:

I don't want to move because my eldest son also finished primary here, when we moved there, everyone told us to move school, but they know me here – almost 15 years. All the teachers know us, so I don't want to change.

The insecurity and precarity of their present housing circumstances are impacting on Farzana's sense of wellbeing and that of her family. Being in a situation where she doesn't know when they will have to move, and where they will move, means that the family is living in a sense of limbo with belongings packed up but not knowing if they will be able to take their furniture etc to their new (possibly temporary) accommodation:

Actually, I want a settlement, every day I am thinking about any letters that come I am scared, maybe I need to move.

School-Home Support

As part of our engagement work in Newham we established a partnership arrangement with School-Home Support.

School-Home Support is a national charity which supports families whose children are absent from school by addressing the root causes of high absence through whole family support.

- Practitioners provide bespoke support to help understand and tackle barriers to good school attendance and attainment.
- The remit is to improve attendance. School-Home Support do this by building trust, resilience, and skills across the whole family. Children and families are at the centre of everything the charity does.
- School-Home Support works with families to create a positive cycle of support.
- The ultimate goal is to make an effective, long-lasting impact in the lives of children, young people, families and communities by strengthening the bridge between home and school.

Source: <https://www.schoolhomesupport.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Statutory-Accounts-2022-2023-compressed.pdf>

A School-Home Support practitioner is based in one of the Newham schools we visited, and we were able to collaborate and coordinate with the team there. Through an online survey run by School-Home Support staff, which included simplified questions based on our interview checklist, we were able to hear from 42 families with children at the school. From this survey it was clear that many families at the school experienced challenges with their housing. Some of the headline findings include:

- Almost half (45%) of respondents said their home did not meet their needs.
- A third (31%) of respondents said their home did not have enough space for all the people who lived there.
- 42% of adult respondents were having to share a bedroom with at least one child.

When asked what helps people manage the challenges relating to their housing, respondents cited access to outside space such as the park or other facilities outside of the home:

...go out to park and library and wander around shops to avoid being in the room - it is a hotel room so there is no kitchen or separate bedroom and no private space, and we have to buy take away every day because no kitchen.

As in our other interviews in Newham, the families expressed how they were motivated to ensure their children were able to progress at school and the challenges of balancing the need for more space or improved housing with other needs such as stability, social connections, and education:

It is one room in a shared house and 16 living in the house with four bedrooms and living room and cellar all being rented out. I want to change housing circumstances, but my child is settled in school, and I would have to move too far away to afford something with outside space and separate bedrooms. So, I can't do that. School is a happy safe place for my child with lots of activities and teaches him social and good values which is why I do not want that happy place to be taken away by having to move.

Families also felt the impacts of poor housing on their health and the health of their children:

*I want the best for my children and the next generation, and it **doesn't feel good going around in bad surroundings or bad at home.***

*To have **suitable accommodation so my daughter has stability and space to do homework and to have healthy meals not fast food and also routine would improve her health - she has asthma so fast food not good for health.***

Summary: key headlines from fieldwork

Our qualitative work in Newham has highlighted key learning from those with lived experience of overcrowding and housing insecurity within Newham. The tables below summarise what Newham residents told us about how their housing circumstances – mainly focused on overcrowding and precarity – impacted on their health, wellbeing and ability to live their lives:

Figure 11: Summary of resident impacts on health and wellbeing

Impacts of housing situation (including overcrowding) on:			
<i>Interviewee</i>	<i>Health</i>	<i>Ability to deal with everyday life</i>	<i>Overall happiness and sense of wellbeing</i>
1	X	X	X
2	X	X	X
3		X	X
4	X	X	X
5	X	X	X
6		X	X
7	X	X	X
8			X
9	X	X	X
10	X	X	X
11	X	X	X
12	X	X	X
13			
14	X	X	X
15		X	X
TOTAL	10	13	14

For all but one of the respondents, they expressed that their current housing situation was affecting their general sense of overall happiness and wellbeing, 13 of the 15 indicated that their ability to deal with everyday life was impacted, and 10 of the 15 felt that their health (or that of their family) was being affected. A summary of the main point made in relation to children, community, and health is below:

Figure 12: Key finding around main themes

Theme	Key findings from fieldwork
Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of space for play and study within the home is a key challenge for children • School is a vital source of stability and continuity for children • There is a significant challenge in meeting the needs of children of different ages. Older children and teenagers need privacy and younger children need space to play.
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local resources such as leisure centres and libraries - and community-based facilities – are vital, but they need to be affordable and hyper local • Green space and external play areas are important to families, although there are concerns over safety of children and young people • Social networks are crucial to supporting families through difficult times • Access to face to face advice such as the Family Navigators and to trusted individuals and organisations such as schools enabled people to find help and support
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overcrowding leads to stress and relationship difficulties • Physical health issues related to quality of homes, including damp and mould, leading to respiratory illnesses, are common in overcrowded households

In terms of mitigations the main suggestions made by residents centred around being able to **access more support** with their housing challenges and circumstances (from the council or other trusted organisations) and, linked to this, being able to take actions that would help alleviate overcrowding, such as moving home.

The role of **support**, either through more accessible and transparent Council services, or through charities, community-based or other services e.g. schools, was really important. There is a strong case for increased partnership working with community based organisations and trusted agencies to ensure that people can find sources of support and advice more effectively. Where statutory services currently exist, additional work may be needed to enable residents to access them.

Local activities and resources also came out highly as something that could help. For those families struggling for adequate space within the home, having spaces (inside and outside) in the local area that were available for children to use to study, play and let off steam were seen as something that would benefit families.

3.A review of London Borough of Newham's existing programmes and how they mitigate overcrowding harms

Newham has a comprehensive range of programmes to address the problems of poor housing and overcrowding. In this section we have identified those actions which are already aimed at mitigating the harms of overcrowding, as these can be built on to increase their effectiveness and impact.

The most prominent relevant strategic programme is Newham's health and wellbeing strategy, *50 Steps to a Healthier Newham 2024-2027*, includes a theme on promoting health through housing and several commitments that are relevant to overcrowding.

The *Children and Young People Strategy* notes that household overcrowding is a major issue, and that quality of life can be affected by overcrowding, including lack of sleep, lack of privacy, depression, stress, anxiety and that it can affect family relationships, particularly true when overcrowding is combined with multi-generational living, where it may also increase infection risk. It notes the importance of Children's Centres whose core purpose is addressing the need to improve outcomes for young children and their families, and reducing inequalities between families in greatest need and their peers. It also notes Newham's continuing objective to further develop the community outreach programme to ensure that services are not hard to engage, and break down barriers of engagement.

The *Community Wealth Building* strategy notes the correlation between poverty as a determinant to a range of health conditions. The strategy sets out how building new council homes at genuinely affordable rents is a key element of addressing the borough's housing needs, as well as preparing underused council land for new homes, and addressing energy efficiency of homes. The strategy also promotes the use of social prescribing, which is when health professionals refer patients to non-clinical support services in the local community to help their health and wellbeing, where appropriate. In parallel, the *Air Quality Action Plan* aims to reduce the concentration of, and exposure to, air pollution, and improving air quality in the borough has a role to play in mitigating overcrowding and poor housing harms.

The *Early Help Strategy* does not specifically address overcrowding issues, but sets out the strategy of developing localised hubs embedded within local communities to serve as one-stop shop for families' needs, providing access to universal services and multidisciplinary teams under one roof. The Corporate Plan also sets out a commitment to development of a family support model, to be delivered in Family Hubs. The Family Information Service online resource is also part of the strategy to ensure that free, impartial and easily accessible information and advice on the services for children and young people (from birth to 25 years old), parents and families available in the borough.

The *15 Minute Neighbourhood Delivery Plan* mentions Forest Gate, Manor Park, and Plaistow, and Little Ilford as being neighbourhoods within its programme area that experience challenges due to overcrowding,

The *Social Exclusion Strategy* sets out actions to plan resident engagement activities across the council which embed social integration, and to create a robust partnership with the voluntary, community and faith sector in the borough to work together on issues of equality and inclusivity. The strategy also includes commitments to make improvements to the provision of housing repairs and remedying of poor housing conditions, although nothing specifically around other aspects of overcrowding.

The *Newham Food Security Strategy* is relevant to the wider health needs of households living in overcrowded homes, and is a wider strategy for addressing the eating and health issues of all households in the borough.

A further relevant strategy is the linking of local health services of the *East London NHS Foundation Trust (ELFT)* to embody the "Marmot Trust" approach. The ELFT five year strategy for 2021-26 has partnered with the UCL Institute of Health Equity in this programme. Policy objectives include "Give every child the best start in life," "Create fair employment and good work for all," and "Ensure a healthy standard of living for all".

Newham has a range of existing programmes and policy documents that set out aims to tackle overcrowding in the borough, or specific actions that are being taken to address the harms of overcrowding. In this section, we set out the main areas of overlap and action. This review of existing work informs our later recommendations. These programmes are linked to the overarching framework set out in the *Newham Corporate Plan 2022-2026* and reference to this Plan is included in relevant places below.

Newham's health and wellbeing strategy, *50 Steps to a Healthier Newham 2024-2027*, includes a theme on promoting health through housing, including several commitments that are relevant to overcrowding:

- Explore ways to mitigate the health, social and educational harms of living in overcrowded accommodation. This study will provide evidence to inform this action.
- Support people in temporary accommodation to live well, acquire the skills they need, and to move on and sustain independence. This work will seek to prevent and mitigate a range of issues associated with temporary accommodation, of which overcrowding is one.
- Improve multi-professional awareness and understanding of the impacts of damp and mould and how to access advice and support, which will aim to improve how residents affected by damp and mould are identified and increase access to support on this issue (which is commonly linked to overcrowding).
- Continue to deliver LB Newham's selective private sector licensing scheme, which is designed to drive up standards of privately rented homes including reducing overcrowding. This is also reflected in the Corporate Plan 2022-26 which indicated that the licencing scheme demonstrates "*the Council's zero tolerance of rogue property owners who exploit residents*".

The *Children and Young People Strategy* has a section on Housing and Temporary Accommodation where it notes that household overcrowding is a major issue, and that quality of life can be affected by overcrowding, including lack of sleep, lack of privacy, depression, stress, anxiety and that it can affect family relationships. It also sets out that this is particularly true when overcrowding is combined with multi-generational living, where it may also increase infection risk.

The *Community Wealth Building strategy* notes that the correlation between poverty and poor health is well evidenced, with those in ill health more likely to be excluded from the labour market, to have

temporary or transient employment, lower household incomes, and face early retirement. It sets out that, for those reasons, improving health and wellbeing outcomes of Newham residents is an essential part of the Community Wealth Building strategy. The strategy sets out how building new council homes at genuinely affordable rents is a key element of addressing the borough's housing needs, as well as preparing underused council land for new homes, and addressing energy efficiency of homes, including through the refurbishment of 16,000 existing homes.

In addition, the Community Wealth Building strategy sets out that the *Well Newham* programme will connect residents with a range of health and wellbeing services and activities in Newham by bringing together information, advice, and links around them into one place. This approach also encourages the use of social prescribing, which is when health professionals refer patients to non-clinical support services in the local community to help their health and wellbeing, where appropriate. It sets out that as the health of residents can be affected by a variety of social, economic and environmental factors, and that social prescribing helps to address these issues. In parallel, the *Air Quality Action Plan* aims to reduce the concentration of, and exposure to, air pollution to positively impact the health and quality of life of residents. Poor air quality particularly affects the most vulnerable in society: children, older people, pregnant people, and those with existing heart and lung conditions. There is often a strong correlation with overcrowded homes and with people on low incomes and/or who experience discrimination, because areas with poor air quality are also often less affluent area and areas with high levels of overcrowded homes. It notes health priorities, including respiratory disorders such as bronchitis, asthma and emphysema, which can also be aggravated by overcrowding as noted elsewhere in this report, and so improving air quality in the borough has a role to play in mitigating those harms.

The *Early Help Strategy* does not specifically address overcrowding issues, but is relevant to the provision of mitigating the harms of overcrowding as it affects children and adolescents. It sets out the strategy of developing localised hubs embedded within local communities to serve as one-stop shop for families' needs, providing access to universal services and multidisciplinary teams under one roof. The aforementioned Corporate Plan also sets out a commitment to development of a family support model, to be delivered in Family Hubs. This includes the development of peripatetic family support outreach services; of a parent-led Family Navigators programme to remove barriers that may exist for families to access support; of a digital platform for those families that cannot access Family Hubs physically but require quick access to support online or via web chat; and of the Family Information Service online resource to ensure free, impartial and easily accessible information and advice on the services for children and young people (from birth to 25 years old). The value of these services, and particularly the Family Navigator service, was frequently mentioned during the qualitative research with overcrowded families in the borough. We will explore their potential role in mitigating the harms of overcrowding later in this report.

The *Children and Young People: Strategy and needs assessment* sets out the wide range of services available to households with children. It notes the importance of Children's Centres who have as their core purpose the need to improve outcomes for young children and their families, and reducing inequalities between families in greatest need and their peers – which certainly overlaps with the needs of overcrowded families. The strategy notes Newham's continuing objective to further develop the community outreach programme to ensure that services are not hard to engage, and break down barriers of engagement. This approach will also be necessary during the implementation of any proposed mitigation actions for overcrowding, to ensure services are accessible to those who need them. The strategy also notes that referrals to the Early Help Hub from survivors of domestic abuse make up the highest number of needs presenting, and in many cases, those presenting are from overcrowded homes.

The section on Housing/Temporary Accommodation in this strategy starts by noting that overcrowding is a major issue to address. It echoes some of the key points made in this report, including its impacts on quality of life, lack of sleep, lack of privacy, depression, stress, anxiety and its effect on family relationships, as well as the increased infection risk and physical health risks when combined with multi-generational living. Throughout the strategy there is a focus on deprivation and inequalities as factors which affect children and young people. These factors are likely to also be issues for families in overcrowded homes, although the specific links to overcrowding are not drawn out further than as set out above.

The *15 Minute Neighbourhood Delivery Plan* mentions Forest Gate, Manor Park, Plaistow, and Little Ilford as being neighbourhoods within its programme area that experience challenges due to overcrowding, which is in line with the Census 2021 evidence cited earlier in this report. While the Neighbourhoods programme does not specifically mention any housing or overcrowding objectives, it sets out actions around community and enterprise, as well as around shared spaces, which will be of benefit in mitigating some of the harms of overcrowding.

Similarly, the *Social Exclusion Strategy* sets out actions to plan resident engagement activities across the council which embed social integration, and to create a robust partnership with the voluntary, community and faith sector in the borough to work together on issues of equality and inclusivity. These objectives are important in planning actions to mitigate the harms of overcrowding, and many of the recommendations set out below build on these, including the need for local partnerships, and addressing equality and inclusivity as an enabling element of delivering mitigation actions. The strategy also includes commitments to make improvements to the provision of housing repairs and remedying of poor housing conditions although nothing specifically around other aspects of overcrowding.

The *Newham Food Security Strategy* is relevant to the wider health needs of households living in overcrowded homes, and is a wider strategy for addressing the eating and health issues of all households in the borough.

Another innovative Newham initiative is seen in the linking of local health services of the *East London NHS Foundation Trust (ELFT)* to embody the "Marmot Trust" approach. This approach makes improving population health a strategic priority. The ELFT five year strategy for 2021-26 has taken a novel approach to this challenge by partnering with the UCL Institute of Health Equity to become the first "Marmot NHS Trust" in the UK. As such, the Trust is exploring how an NHS organisation can implement the Marmot principles, a set of evidence-based policy objectives to reduce health inequalities, such as; "Give every child the best start in life," "Create fair employment and good work for all," and "Ensure a healthy standard of living for all²⁸". Some practical ways in which ELFT has taken action on the social determinants of health have included piloting the provision of welfare and financial advice in its children's clinical services, and facilitating access to employment at the Trust for its service users and local people facing barriers to the labour market. These actions can help households in overcrowded homes to improve their health outcomes, as part of this Borough-wide initiative.

In conclusion, there are a wide range of existing Newham programmes and policies that take steps to mitigate the harms of overcrowding, either as a stated objective or as a benefit of other objectives. It is helpful to keep these in mind when assessing the recommended actions for mitigating harms related to overcrowding, as set out below, as they may provide routes to

²⁸ See The British Medical Journal (2024). 'Opinion: The Marmot NHS Trust approach could help NHS organisations tackle health inequalities.' *BMJ* 2024;384:q95 <https://www.bmj.com/content/384/bmj.q95>

implementation of new actions, or examples of existing networks and policy tools that can support implementation.

4.Reducing overcrowding: strategic approaches and learning from other local authorities

Summary

A review of existing policy and programme by other local authorities in relation to their approach to tackling overcrowding and mitigating its harms indicates there are a wide a range of approaches which tackle overcrowding in different ways, varying from increasing the available suitable stock, to improving conditions in overcrowded homes. In this section we summarise the findings from this review.

Identifying and incentivising action to provide bigger homes

This includes finding more properties which might be suitable and arranging moves to free up underoccupied homes.

- Financial incentives to under-occupying households to move, including rent deposits, incentive payments, and paying for removals and other costs of moving
- Programmes to buy or lease bigger properties in the private sector pending newbuild of social housing
- Addressing tenancy fraud to free up bigger homes
- Creating a database of registered provider or private sector landlords' larger properties and actively matching overcrowded families
- Identifying void or abandoned larger properties in the borough to bring them back into use
- Buyback programmes for large right to buy properties
- Communications and community-based events and briefings to engage local people in assisting in identifying and stimulating movement between under and over occupying households
- Fast track process for void larger properties

In relation to changes to overcrowded homes, actions include:

- Architect led advice on internal works to the home to free up space including room dividers, bunk beds, and separating bathrooms and toilets
- Similar advice and programme to identify and action home/attic extensions as well as knock-through to vacant adjacent flats where the opportunity arises
- Advice on de-clutter strategies for all the family possessions

Actions in relation to the organisation of actions around overcrowding include:

- Dedicated officers/outreach advisers to work on all overcrowding and under occupation activities
- Cross departmental task force to monitor progress in tackling overcrowding and progress in reducing these harms
- Specific and regular communications outreach which in particular includes outreach to communities who may be unaware of mitigation options – including where language and cultural barriers exist.

Providing affordable homes of an adequate size to meet the needs of all Newham residents, including those with children or other dependent family members, and those with disabilities or

other special needs, is an overarching objective of the local authority. The current overcrowding problem has many drivers, including: a lack of social housing; high rents in the private rented sector; the level of housing benefit available to meet these high rents due to the restrictions on the Local Housing Allowance; the lack of affordable homes to buy, particularly for first time buyers; and more general pressure on housing in London due to high demand from existing and new households who live and work here. This pressure has also led to high numbers of households living in temporary accommodation, where overcrowding is often a consequence.

This pressure on London housing, in the context of the wider problems of overcrowding across England, have been the subject of strategic initiatives by the Greater London Authority (GLA), by the London Boroughs themselves, and by national government over several years. The solutions are clear – to have more housing available for sale and rent, in the right places, at affordable costs, and occupied by households who need housing of the size they occupy – but are difficult to achieve. Some of the main strategic approaches to moving towards less overcrowding are already known to Newham, and later in this report we will consider how Newham are implementing these in its resource-constrained context. It will be helpful, however, to review briefly some of the main strategic ideas which have been considered and tested at London and national level to combat overcrowding and general housing pressures.

The most recent and relevant initiative is the GLA approach set out in the London Housing Strategy²⁹. Having noted that what is needed is “a step change in investment and powers from Government to be able to build all the affordable homes Londoners need”, it sets out immediate measures which can be put in place, including:

- **Housing targets and the level of affordable housing:** ...London needs to build enough of the right sort of homes to eradicate overcrowding. The Plan includes ambitious housing targets and strong policies to increase levels of affordable housing in new developments.
- **Low cost rented homes for overcrowded households:** ...the Mayor’s draft London Plan also includesa requirement that boroughs’ planning policies set out guidance on the size mix of homes for low cost rent to be delivered in their area.....This guidance applies to all new low cost rented homes in a borough, irrespective of how they are funded or delivered.
- **More homes in outer London:** ...London Housing Strategy....and the London Plan encourage a shift in development towards outer London. Market homes delivered in these areas are likely to be cheaper than those delivered on larger sites in inner London, and so building family-sized homes that families can afford will be more viable.
- **Helping people to downsize:** Enabling would-be downsizers to move out of larger homes is also important, as it frees up these homes for families who are currently in homes too small for their needs. [This includes] local authorities’ and housing associations’ transfer policies and the Mayor’s schemes that create opportunities for social housing tenants to move.
- **A welfare benefits system that helps to eradicate overcrowding:** Government could ease the affordability pressures that are preventing many overcrowded Londoners from moving. The Benefit Cap, in particular, can leave families with just two or three children where nobody is able to work with very little money to cover housing costs.

²⁹ Mayor of London (2018). *London Housing Strategy*. Greater London Authority: London https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2018_lhs_london_housing_strategy.pdf

In addition, The London Plan 2021³⁰ directs boroughs to take account of overcrowded households when providing guidance on the size of units to be developed.

At a national level, there have been several initiatives to strengthen the legislation around tackling overcrowding – including how it is defined and the powers to tackle it³¹. Perhaps more importantly, earlier work by the Department of Communities and Local Government (now Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government) focused on the practical and immediate measures which local authorities could take to reduce overcrowding and make better use of existing stock. This was made available through a 2007 Action Plan³² and a report on the impact of work in pilot local authorities from 2008³³. These reports still have considerable relevance to Newham and the actions currently being taken. The pilots were funded initiatives within local authorities to respond to overcrowding pressures, and some key learning includes:

- Understanding the scale and severity of overcrowding locally is a necessary part of developing a strategy to tackle it – good data and information is required.
- Enabling an overcrowded household to stay in the same property by making modifications to property and engaging family members with relevant support services can reduce the harms of overcrowding.
- Given the right encouragements, tenants will take increased responsibility for improving their own housing conditions.
- Moving from an underoccupied property, and therefore freeing up larger properties for overcrowded households, is a voluntary decision, and so deploying the right incentives is essential. Cash incentives appear to have little impact when used in isolation; providing effective personal support with the move is a key success factor.
- A case management approach to both overcrowding and underoccupation moves, with ample personal targeted advice, is effective. For underoccupation moves, additional reassurance and handholding leading up to and during the move process is an essential part of the overall incentive to tenants to move.
- It is possible to add to the total stock available by entering into arrangements with registered social landlords (RSLs) – for example by including them in underoccupation schemes. Member-level and senior officer commitment to measures to tackling overcrowding is essential if the work is to secure the necessary priority within an authority. Raising awareness of the issues and developing and presenting an effective, evidence-backed business case will help secure this support.

Additional and supplementary points from the Action Plan itself include:

- Securing better deals with the private rented sector can incentivise a move to a suitable PRS property. The pilots found that many larger households will opt to move to the private sector

³⁰ Mayor of London. (2021). *The London Plan 2021, London's spatial development strategy*. GLA : London https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/the_london_plan_2021.pdf

³¹ See for example Wilson, W. (2023). *Overcrowded Housing (England)*. House of Commons Library: London <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN01013/SN01013.pdf>

³² Department of Communities and Local Government (2007). *Tackling overcrowding in England: An action plan*. UK Govt: London <http://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2007-0328/DEP2007-0328.pdf>

³³ Department of Communities and Local Government (2008). *Tackling Overcrowding in England: Lessons from the London pilot schemes and sub-regional coordination*. UK Govt: London. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-overcrowding-in-england-lessons-from-the-london-pilots>

if it means a better standard of living for their family. Making better use of an accredited landlord scheme and seeking to broker longer leases will help provide greater security for these families.

- Overcrowding can be caused by more than one generation living together as one household. Where some family members wish to move to their own tenancy, local authorities can offer support by, for example providing rent deposits to move to the private sector, giving them greater priority for bedsits and one-beds, or advice on low-cost home ownership.

The Action Plan also considers initiatives around changes to allocations policies and choice based lettings. Newham has recently introduced a new allocations policy framework and have set out clearly that there is limited scope for further changes to the framework at this stage, so options around allocations have not been included in this report.

There are also similar lessons, some of which have been shared with Newham as part of cross-London discussions:

- **Waltham Forest** have an active underoccupation scheme which:
 - pays £1,500 for downsizing one room, and £500 for each additional room
 - has other cash incentives for transfers, mutual exchanges, and Seaside & Country Homes moves
 - Offers free removals within London
 - Also has a loft conversion / home extension scheme to add one or two extra bedrooms to council properties, as well as a damp & mould taskforce
- **Tower Hamlets** have put in place:
 - A damp and mould taskforce prioritising overcrowded homes
 - A programme exploring and delivering knock throughs, extensions and home improvements
 - Initiatives to address tenancy fraud
 - Help for underoccupiers to down size
 - Improved communications with tenants around swaps
 - In the private sector where there are overcrowded shared homes/HMOs, additional actions to apply and enforce applicable mandatory licensing rules and in more cases taking over the management of the property by issuing an Interim and/or Final Management Order. This includes designating all wards in the Borough as subject to additional licensing under section 56 (1) of the Housing Act 2004 and applying the rules to smaller multi occupied properties.
- **Islington** proposed an overcrowding strategy in November 2023 which included:
 - promoting issues around existing incentives for under occupiers such as mutual exchanges, including reviewing financial incentives
 - regular sessions/ briefings/community drop in sessions to promote downsizing and mutual exchanges to address overcrowding.
 - adopting an overcrowding communication plan across the council that could be used by all departments when working with families experiencing overcrowding. This could include tips and ideas for addressing overcrowding and related issues.

- asking residents for their ideas to help the council to develop new ways of working to address overcrowding. These resident engagement forums should include the views of a diverse range of residents that reflect local communities
- exploring opportunities for collaborating more with community groups to promote advocacy services within all communities
- promoting better collaboration between Health, Adult Social Care, Housing, and Children’s Services to further develop joint working between local services to best address these issues.
- working in partnership with social landlords and others to assist in identifying more voids /abandoned homes that could be used to rehouse larger families
- considering how language barriers may hinder under-occupiers from downsizing and engaging in mutual swaps, and exploring what support can be made available to address this.
- fast tracking 3-, 4- or 5-bedroom properties through the voids process to ensure they can be re-let as soon as possible.

An overview of the outcomes of the pilots and other local authority actions is attached as Annex Three.

This short review of strategic options and ideas has informed the recommendations and options set out later in this report, which draws on other evidence examined during the course of this research, and importantly, from the workshop with a wide range of LB Newham partners held in December 2023.

5. Co-developing mitigations through a cross-departmental, multi-agency workshop

In the final phase of the research, we held a stakeholder workshop to co-develop mitigations, informed by the evidence presented earlier in this report. This section describes the methods and the main themes from the workshop. Our recommendations, presented in Section 6 of this report, are based on the mitigation ideas developed during this workshop along with the data and evidence presented above.

The workshop involved council officers from a range of departments and external partners from the NHS, School Home Support, and community agencies. A full list of attendees is at Annex 3 as well as the programme for the day and a short record of ideas suggested by participants.

The event started with presentations on evidence gathered so far by the LSE team, and also by research teams based in UCL working on health, and UCL/CITIZENS work on schools. These UCL presentations, including findings in relation to health harms and their mitigation³⁴, have been explored in more detail in Section 2 of this report.

Following the presentations, the workshop split into four groups to consider possible mitigation around the following themes: housing; children; communities; and health. Each group was asked to focus on overcrowding-related issues and harms in each of these areas, consider how those harms could be mitigated, and identify the highest priority actions. Participants were encouraged to think broadly and creatively about what might be done to mitigate the harms of overcrowding, including extending and building on initiatives already in place and of which they had direct experience. The notes and ideas suggested by the participants on the day have been collated and are included in Annex 3. Below we have summarised key points in each of the four themes.

Housing

The overall approach to mitigations in housing were along two main lines: better use of space, and additional community provision to meet day-to-day needs.

- First, can people's existing homes be made to function more effectively in terms of providing better use of space, or can additional equipment, repairs, or adaptations create better spaces to live?
- Second, can the lack of space be mitigated by providing additional communal facilities and spaces in the neighbourhood where some necessary day-to-day activities could be carried out, including laundry, homework, and play.

³⁴ Nixon L, Eveleigh E, O'Donoghue M, et al; Ucci, M., Ortegon-Sanchez, A., Mead, N.E., et al.

Children

Newham already has many initiatives and services that support families living in overcrowded and poor housing, including those provided by the council and community and voluntary organisations. Many of the suggestions in the workshop, and our subsequent recommendations, build on these existing actions and services. The need for multi-agency working was emphasised, recognising the potential for greater impact through more joined-up working and the intersectionality of overcrowding and domestic abuse, sexual violence, mental health, and risks to youth, which means that these issues should be addressed together in many cases.

Other ideas drew on the recommendations from external research on overcrowding recently undertaken in Newham schools, as noted earlier in this report. These centred on the role that children's services, schools, and community organisations can play in mitigating educational and other harms of overcrowding. There was also a focus on the needs of children in families claiming asylum, who can experience additional, unique challenges.

Community

Building stronger partnerships with voluntary and community sector organisations came through strongly in this theme, as well as making the most of local assets and resources for people most affected. Co-producing mitigation actions with local organisations and residents, harnessing local assets, are a central focus of the actions explored in this report.

Health

One of the principal areas of focus of this report is the mitigation of the health and social harms associated with overcrowding. Most of the potential ways to mitigate health harms are in fact addressed in the other themes. Nevertheless, several mitigation ideas were specifically health-related, with a focus on prevention and targeted health interventions for people living in overcrowded homes.

6. Recommendations

Our recommendations bring together the data and evidence reviewed in this study, offering suggestions for a range of effective and viable options for mitigating the harms of overcrowding in Newham. We used the following questions to guide and prioritise the final set of recommendations:

- To what extent does the suggested action directly and wholly address the overcrowding harm it is intended to mitigate?
- Could Newham's considerable existing work already in place – and noted in the section above on Newham's wider existing programmes - be adapted or expanded to more fully mitigate the harm?
- Alternatively, is the suggestion one which could prompt innovation or a new development in the services offered by Newham or partner agencies?

The recommendations are organised in four themes based on the predominant issues, harms and potential mitigating actions identified in the evidence: housing; children; community; and health.

Housing

- Convene a specific cross-departmental officer group to initiate, monitor, and evaluate cross authority action in mitigating the harms of overcrowding, including setting up a database of actions and outcomes to monitor and report on progress;
- Carry out a review of how overcrowding can be made an appropriate part of all Council considerations in relation to a wide range of planning, housing, urban design, social services, children and young people and other policies;
- Continue to enforce against overcrowding in the private rented sector using the Accommodation Standards;
- Enforce the borough-wide Article 4 direction against the creation of new HMOs;
- Pay specific attention to finding local, larger properties within a small set of areas. This reflects the evidence from interviews that many families wish to remain near to existing family, schools, and community networks;
- Explore setting up a space assessment service, which could assess how limited space is currently being used in overcrowded LB Newham-owned properties and make minimally invasive adaptations to homes. This could include identifying where more storage could be gained, and where hooks and other space efficiency measures could be installed;
- Explore how to advise other social landlords, PRS and owner-occupiers on doing the same, which could include making available space-saving designs, products, and how-to-guides;
- Continue to publicise the reality of availability of social-rented properties and manage expectations;
- Explore how to facilitate home extensions in all tenures, giving consideration to planning constraints, quality, and issues around affordability;
- Consider prioritising overcrowded households for repairs where the issue is limiting their use of space or might exacerbate health and wellbeing harms;
- Provide advice, discounts or arrange offers for group purchase of space-efficient equipment and furniture, such as beds, desks, low condensation washing and drying machines. These would be allocated or sold to overcrowded tenants or owners, including

in the social rented and PRS sectors. This could include building on current schemes picking up unwanted furniture and making it available to families in need;

- Provide advice on, or arrange group discounts for, noise cancelling headphones and earplugs to improve sleep and concentration for school-aged children and university students;
- Explore how to use available space on housing estates, and regeneration sites with empty properties to set up community facilities, either using an existing space or a modular self-contained unit. These facilities could include:
 - Showers
 - Laundries
 - Communal cooking spaces
 - Play and soft play areas and sports equipment
 - Workspaces with Wi-Fi and plug sockets
 - Locked storage spaces
 - Comfortable armchairs and sofas with a kettle and mugs where people could hang out together (building on the existing Warm Havens scheme)
 - Advice and support workers on a specific day.

Children

- Explore scaling up the Family Navigator service and consider providing walk-in access to family navigators at housing hubs, and where possible broaden access to navigators with locally-spoken languages;
- Increase the focus of family hub services on the specific harms of overcrowding and providing support to overcrowding households;
- Increase partnership working on overcrowding between the council and voluntary and community sector organisations, recognising the key role the sector plays in supporting families;
- Focus on schools and colleges as trusted, safe, support spaces where children already are every day. Schools may be able to provide or expand:
 - Extended school opening hours
 - Homework/after school clubs
 - A breakfast club/morning club offering, and greater partnerships between groups of schools to share after school club provision
 - Space within schools for pupils to complete their homework
 - Additional learning resources e.g. tutoring, online support, laptops
 - Specialist staff (e.g. from School-Home Support or Social Services) embedded in schools to offer advice and support, or therapy, and listen to pupil's concerns
 - Work with colleges of further education to raise awareness of the problems of young people who live in overcrowded conditions and seek to promote specific programmes of assistance tailored to that age group.
- Look to increase services for young people, including safe and appropriate spaces for young people outside of the home, considering whether young people in overcrowded households could have priority access. This might include:
 - Utilise youth and children's services and facilities as centres for advice

- Provide subsidies and vouchers for sporting clubs and play and leisure facilities for overcrowded families to burn off energy, and encourage play and activity in a safe setting.
- Explore alternative provision of activities besides in youth centres, to target those who avoid the centres. Some young people resist coming to a building and service which can feel overly formal and claustrophobic.
- Additional monitoring and support services that address the risks of youth crime of all kinds due to overcrowding stresses would provide valuable evidence for mitigating the harms.
- Expand access to ESOL, life skills classes and other capacity building support for parents to enable them to better support their children.

Community

- Raise awareness of mitigation initiatives or provision in local areas where there are pockets of overcrowding. This might include:
 - Providing information locally about initiatives or provision, including information materials such as advertising placards, and meeting with local groups or residents to promote what is available.
 - Using the data around which groups are more likely to be overcrowded in which areas, to tailor information to ensure it is culturally appropriate and accessible
 - Working with local voluntary, community and faith organisations on communications and delivery of information;
- Build relationships and explore opportunities to support local organisations and businesses, such as cafes, to enable 'long stays' and warm spaces for using laptops, providing snacks, and toilets in areas with high rates of overcrowding. This might include:
 - Discounts for overcrowded residents
 - Having a badge on the window to let people know it's a welcoming, safe space for overcrowded people
 - Involving local non-council leisure services (including for example yoga class providers or gyms).
- Organise additional activities and resources in parks and park buildings to promote healthy use of green spaces. As part of this, review provision of play equipment for younger and older children and include options for activities families can do together. This might include:
 - Review the design of benches and other seating as places to meet, talk, eat and play in the open air.
 - Provide better street lighting, and better street cleaning and monitoring.
 - Create mini-parks/outdoor living rooms for small groups of adults to socialise in hyper-local green spaces.
- Support the provision of community spaces for kitchens, laundry and social spaces (as mentioned in the housing section) which might be supported or facilitated by voluntary, community and faith organisations.

Health and public health issues

- Identify people in overcrowded homes with existing health conditions, particularly those which are exacerbated by the overcrowding, and prioritise prevention and management of conditions for these individuals;
- Integrate consideration of the cultural, social and health needs of different communities and households who are likely to experience overcrowding to ensure actions to mitigate health harms are equitable and take account of these wider needs and preferences;
- Consider ways to maximise the health co-benefits through mitigating action, such as improving access to food storage and cooking equipment which can both save space and increase access to good food, including air fryers, fridges and freezers;
- Consider the specific needs of overcrowded households and people who are survivors of domestic abuse, as well as overcrowded families with no recourse to public funds, or those recently awarded rights to remain and so evicted from Home Office accommodation. Consider what additional actions may be needed for these groups given the specific way they may experience harms from overcrowding.

7. Conclusion

In this report we have addressed three main questions:

- How does overcrowding present different problems and need different mitigation actions compared to the needs and actions taken to address the more general problems of poor housing and deprivation?
- To what extent do the extensive current health and social programmes in Newham address overcrowding? How could these programmes be more effective in mitigating harms?
- What additional or new actions could be put in place to reduce harms of overcrowding, building on existing Newham actions, additional actions seen in other comparator authorities, suggestions from the Workshop held as part of this research, and wider evidence in this report?

Overcrowding is a recognised policy and programme priority in Newham. It is primarily driven by supply and affordability of housing, compounded by restrictions on Housing Benefit (and related Housing Benefit Subsidy) and Universal Credit. Larger households, particularly where there are several dependent children or there is an extended household, are likely to be facing greater difficulties in finding appropriate accommodation, and at greater risk of the health, educational and social harms due to their housing conditions than is the case for other households. This is not a matter simply of housing repair or general poorer quality housing, but is directly linked to family size and composition.

There is strong evidence that overcrowding is linked to physical and mental health conditions. In addition, the evidence also points to negative and potentially lifelong impacts on the educational and social development of dependent children.

In terms of whether overcrowding requires different solutions or mitigations to other, general housing problems, it would be correct to say that providing more high quality, appropriately sized, and affordable housing through new build, regeneration, major repair, and different income subsidy arrangements would mitigate a wide range of housing needs, overcrowding being one. In the long term, the solution to overcrowding is to have more and better homes. However, the main focus of this report is how to mitigate harms in the immediate future. Our recommendations present a range of options for practical ways to reduce or prevent health, educational and social harms associated with overcrowding. Some focus on how current programmes and services could play a greater role in mitigating overcrowding-related harms, such as a key role for schools and children's services, while others suggest new and complementary initiatives, such as using available space on housing estates and regeneration sites to set up community facilities. Overall, this project has added to our understanding of the harms of overcrowding in Newham and offered a range of recommendations for policy and practice to help address these harms in the short term.

Annex One: Overcrowding Mitigations: Local authority case studies

Where?	When?	What mitigations were put in place?	What were the outcomes?
Barnet	2007-2008 pathfinder scheme	Barnet recruited Private Lettings Negotiators to acquire family-sized properties in the private rented sector (within and outside of LA boundary). Overcrowded households are dealt with on a casework basis by a visiting officer, who gets to know the households circumstances and makeup.	Between April 2007 and June 2008, 26 overcrowded families were rehoused. The visiting officers had visited over 150 overcrowded households, assisting with bidding on appropriate social rented homes. Early intervention support reduced homelessness and temporary accommodation.
Camden	2007-2008 pathfinder scheme	Camden developed tailored intervention packages for overcrowded households, including space management, health, education, play and parenting, to improve the quality of life for households in their existing home. Alongside this, they also provided housing advice to help those who wanted or needed to move elsewhere.	The project started in 2007, and by June 2008, they were working with 251 households; 40 properties were identified for improvements; 56 households engaged with alternative housing options; and 8 household members engaged with a local employment project that aimed to improve the life and employment skills of unemployed tenants
Hackney	2007-2008 pathfinder scheme	Greater priority given to underoccupiers in the allocations framework, including financial support to cover the cost of moving and a bespoke handholding service	Increased the number of transfers from 136 in 2006/07 to over 200 in 2007/08 – freeing up family homes which were then ringfenced for overcrowded families.

		for elderly tenants throughout the moves process.	
Kingston Upon Thames	2007-2008 pathfinder scheme	KuT aimed to procure 30 large family homes in the private sector, on long leases, for overcrowded council tenants – ‘breathing space’ whilst bidding for appropriate social rented home. Breathing Space homes are offered to households for up to 4.5 years. By June 2008, 15 of the 30 homes had been procured.	Families have more appropriate sized homes – if temporary - rather than being overcrowded whilst waiting for the right sized social home to become available
Tower Hamlets	2007-2008 pathfinder scheme	Tower Hamlets offered enhanced grants to underoccupying tenants in three bedroomed + homes. A dedicated support officer was provided, as well as a packing and removals service for vulnerable tenants. Alongside this, intensive support was offered to overcrowded tenants with specific health needs, including advice and information on housing options.	90 under-occupying households were rehoused in the year to June 2008, freeing up those homes for overcrowded families.
South East London Perfect Fit Scheme	2007-2008 pathfinder scheme	Five boroughs and 12 social landlords developed a database of underoccupied tenants from participating social landlords. Each landlord contributes around five ‘desirable’ properties for currently underoccupying households and an Under Occupation Officer matches the clients to the available property. A hand holding service is provided, including home visits, accompanied viewings, removals, utilities connections, etc. A financial incentive of £200 per bedroom released are	Between August 2007 and 2008, the scheme achieved 22 moves

		<p>offered to the underoccupying tenants that move. The landlords then allocate a severely overcrowded family from their own waiting list.</p>	
<p>All the above case studies are from <i>Tackling Overcrowding in England: Lessons from the London pilot schemes and sub-regional coordination</i> https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/Data/Business%20Support%20Overview%20and%20Scrutiny%20Committee/20091210/Agenda/obs20091210r-10.pdf</p>			
<p>Notes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These pilot schemes had positive outcomes for the people involved, but each scheme required significant time inputs, resources, and staffing. The number of overcrowded families helped by each pilot is not insignificant, but considering the extent of overcrowding in Newham, they don't offer a fast-fix or 'silver bullet'. • The pilots took place in 2007/08, when pressures on private rented housing were less acute, which also reduces the potential efficacy of these type of mitigation actions. • The schemes promoting under occupying tenants to be rehoused, freeing up larger houses, may be a potential avenue for Newham, or a space management/home improvement scheme 			
<p>Tower Hamlets https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/tower-hamlets-reducing-overcrowding</p>	<p>2009-2012</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Cash incentive schemes</u>, including grants to encourage under-occupiers to move into the owner-occupied sector; encouraging under-occupiers to downsize to smaller accommodation: the greater the number of bedrooms tenants give up, the higher the priority they are given to move; a rent deposit scheme to encourage council tenants to secure private sector accommodation. • <u>Knockthroughs</u>: If a property becomes vacant next to a dwelling where the family is overcrowded then it will be considered for a knockthrough 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twenty-one tenants have been supported through cash incentives to buy their own home. Twenty have similarly been support to move into the private rented sector, and more than 40 households have moved from under-occupied three-bed home, thus freeing up family-sized homes for overcrowded households • Seventy-five ex-council 'Right to buy' houses were bought back over the last 12 months, re-

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Better living conditions in existing overcrowded homes:</u> separating toilets and bathrooms and adding wash-hand basins; additional kitchen cupboards; a quicker response to repairs. • Allocated £19.4 million to <u>buy back</u> ex-council three-bed plus 'Right to buy' properties • Tower Hamlets Homes provides space-saving furniture, community play and work facilities 	<p>housing 146 over-crowded households</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Around 20 knock-throughs are approved per year
<p>Camden / JKA Architects</p> <p>Camden Extensions Project Brochure Jan Kattein Architects.pdf (jankattein.com)</p>	<p>2004-2012</p>	<p>JKA Architects devised a training programme for Council staff to deploy immediate solutions for families including the provision of bunk- and sofa beds, using shelving as room dividers and innovative storage solutions for de-cluttering homes.</p> <p>They also developed concepts for sub-dividing rooms, installing additional toilets and showers and moving kitchens into living rooms. JKA designed and built a series of extensions to homes across Camden to provide additional living space, using simple typologies and innovative construction methods, and taking account of the individual circumstances of the families we worked with and the opportunities presented by each site.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovative Space Management seminar series has been delivered to over 200 housing officers across London • Avoids the need for families to relocate by extending existing homes

<p>Haringey Council overcrowded_homes.pdf (haringey.gov.uk)</p>		<p>A dedicated overcrowding advisor, as well as a dedicated underoccupation officer, and financial incentives offered to those that move into a smaller home. Access to homework clubs for children who need somewhere quiet to study – a Family Information Service Directory available online with details of services, support and activities in Haringey</p>	<p>-</p>
<p>Stonewater Housing Association Stonewater takes steps to ease overcrowding : Housing Digital</p>	<p>2023-24</p>	<p>The creation of a dedicated overcrowding taskforce; moving residents or providing extensions and storage solutions; downsizing of underoccupying households including facilitated mutual exchanges of those wishing to downsize with those requiring a larger home</p>	<p>Over 170 families have been assisted, with 141 overcrowded households moved to larger homes, and 20 households provided with storage solutions. An additional 11 moves or extensions are said to be currently in progress.</p>
<p>Solihull Community Housing (an Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO))</p>	<p>Current</p>	<p>Solihull allow an urgent priority bandings to be awarded to those social housing tenants that are under occupying their home to encourage release of that property for those that are seeking larger family homes. Band A priority will be awarded where the persons are releasing 3 or more bedrooms in a house or ground floor flat/maisonette in a council or partner housing association properties within the Solihull Borough; Band B can be awarded where the applicant is releasing 1 bedroom in a</p>	<p>Those that are underoccupying but interested in moving are more likely to be able to successfully bid for a social property of their choosing</p>

		house or 1 or more bedrooms in a flat or maisonette.	
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Annex Two: Resident Interviews

Checklist for resident interviews:

1. Can you tell us about your home?
2. How long have you been living in your current home?
3. How do you feel about your home? Could you give it a mark out of 5?

1.	2	3	4	5
Terrible	Bad	OK	Good	Excellent

4. Does your home meet your needs as a family?
5. Can you tell us a little about how you use the rooms in your home? *E.g. rooms used for sleeping that also used for other things such as cooking / children sharing with adults etc.*
6. Do you have any outside space? Safe space for children to play outside the home?
7. Do you have to share any facilities with people outside of your household – *kitchen / bathroom / other?*
8. Does your home have any specific problems that you have reported to the landlord /housing officer? *E.g. damp / mould / pests*
9. Do you have enough space in your home for everyone who lives here?
10. How overcrowded would you say it is in your home?

1	2	3	4	5
Not overcrowded	Just enough space	Not sure	Quite overcrowded	Very overcrowded

11. Does the level of overcrowding in your home change over time, depending on who is living there? *E.g. young people living / studying away / people working shifts*
12. What would you say are the problems caused by the lack of space?
[Who is most affected – you, your children, other household members?]
13. Do you think these problems affect:
 - a. Your health, or the health of your children or other family members?
 - b. Your ability to deal with everyday life (going to work/shopping/cooking/ doing homework etc]
 - c. Your overall happiness or sense of wellbeing
14. Is there anything you do to try to help deal with these problems?
15. Does anyone help you to deal with the problems/ have you made any applications for help in dealing with the problems?
16. Have you taken any of the following steps to ease overcrowding in your home?
 - a. *Council tenants / HA tenants and on transfer waiting list for a larger home*
 - b. *On LA waiting list for a larger home (PRS or other tenancy arrangements currently)*
 - c. *Asked people to leave the home*
 - d. *Other steps – which ones?*
17. How do you feel about the area where you live?
 - a. Could you give it a mark out of 5 (where 5 is the best and 1 is the worst)?
 - b. What do you like / dislike about the area?

Methods

- We wanted to capture the experiences of a broad range of families (all to include at least one child / young person under 18) across Newham.
- We carried out interviews in a number of locations including Newham Council services and community resources.
 - Canning Town Housing Hub
 - East Ham Library
 - Newham Community Project
 - West Ham Primary School
- Interviewees received a remuneration voucher to the value of £15 for their participation.

Annex Three: Workshop

Overview

This annex sets out information about the mitigations workshop that was held on 11th December 2023. The workshop was an opportunity for a range of council officials, community partners, and other stakeholders to come together to discuss the problems of overcrowding in the borough. The team from LSE Housing and Communities shared the findings of their research into overcrowding in the borough, and participants also heard from other expert speakers. The workshop was specifically focussed on what more could be done to help families in Newham, particularly those with children, to cope with the problems which overcrowding causes. The main aim was to critically examine the options that the LSE Housing team had identified as possible mitigation actions to reduce the harm caused by overcrowding, as a co-production group.

The format of the workshop

The two-hour workshop was held at Newham Council's Dockside offices. After a brief introduction by Claire Greszczuk, Assistant Director of Public Health, there were three presentations about current research into overcrowding, followed by breakout group discussions.

1) Presentations

- **Presentation 1 – LSE Housing Research: Overcrowding in Newham**
Bert Provan and Laura Lane, LSE
This presentation outlined LSE Housing and Communities' research into overcrowding in Newham, including data analysis, mapping of main areas of overcrowding, and qualitative findings from interviews with residents.
- **Presentation 2 – Health and Housing**
Marcella Ucci and Jessica Sheringham, UCL
Marcella and Jessica presented emerging and current evidence about the links between

poor quality and overcrowded housing, harms, and possible mitigations, building on research carried out in Tower Hamlets and Bradford.

- **Presentation 3 – The Impacts of Overcrowding on Children**
Penny Bernstock, UCL and Laura Lane, LSE

This presentation provided insights into children’s experiences of overcrowding, drawing on research by Penny Bernstock into the impact of inadequate housing on educational experience, and Laura Lane’s qualitative research with families in Newham experiencing overcrowding.

II) *Breakout Groups*

Following the presentations, participants were organised into breakout groups looking at what more could be done to assist people living in overcrowded homes around four key themes:

- Mitigating actions linked directly to housing conditions
- Mitigating actions linked to health problems
- Mitigating actions focused on children and young people
- Mitigating actions linked to wider use of community resources, leisure, and older children

Participants were assigned to the different groups based on their job role, department or area of expertise. Each group had a coordinator who led the discussion, and an assigned notetaker. Each group was provided with a list of possible mitigating actions, developed by the LSE Housing team from the research with residents and stakeholders, and discussions with other academic partners.

Each group was tasked with thinking through the best ways to deal with the problems under discussion, bringing their insights and ideas on the mitigations suggested. They were also invited to contribute their own ideas about what could be done to assist overcrowded households. Each mitigation action was assessed as to its practicality, viability, potential cost and resourcing implications, and ease and speed of implementation. Towards the end of the breakout session, the groups were asked to agree two main ideas for mitigating the harms/impacts discussed in their group and that LB Newham should look to further develop as an output of the workshop.

Outcomes

The workshop allowed us to sense check the feasibility of mitigation actions that we had developed from the research with the council departments and stakeholder organisations that would be responsible for their implementation. As a coproduction tool, the workshop gave us an opportunity to work out which mitigation actions were credible; what funding would be required; and what departments or organisations would need to work together to deliver them. The workshop brought together previously siloed parts of Newham Council and fostered strong links and motivation to move ideas forward.

The breakout groups prioritisation of mitigation actions highlighted the actions that were most credible for further development, which then fed into the main recommendations of this report. Some of the actions identified as a priority were overarching activities, relating to the need for higher prioritisation of overcrowding families for council services and use of council facilities; a need for more face-to-face support for overcrowded families; and better communication of existing and new services that could mitigate the harms of overcrowding. Others were specific

actions, such as setting up a space assessment service; providing co-located community services in meanwhile spaces; expanding school provision of extra-curricular activities; and reviewing play provision and other outdoor activities for children and young people.

The research team were keen for the workshop to have real world impacts and not simply be an academic exercise. A key element in the success of the workshop was having buy in from high-level council executives. Both the Head of Housing and Head of Public Health were fully involved in the workshop and agreed to support the workshop by sending out the invitations to participants. Their involvement highlighted the specific priority that Newham Council had given to overcrowding as a problem, and to the workshop as a policy development tool.

**Agenda for Newham Overcrowding Workshop,
12pm – 2pm, 11th December 2023
1000 Dockside**

12:00 – 12.10pm	Introduction to the workshop <i>Darren Levy, Head of Housing, and Jason Strelitz, Head of Public Health, London Borough of Newham</i>
Research Presentations	
12.10pm – 12.30pm	LSE Housing Research: Overcrowding in Newham <i>Introduction to the research and findings by Dr Bert Provan</i> <i>Clarification questions</i>
12.30pm – 12.50pm	Health and Housing <i>Emerging and current evidence about the links between poor quality and overcrowded housing, harms causes, possible mitigation</i> <i>Dr Marcella Ucci and Dr Jessica Sheringham, UCL</i>
12.50pm – 13.10pm	The impacts of overcrowding on children <i>Laura Lane, LSE Policy Officer, and Penny Bernstock, UCL</i>
13.10 – 13.15pm	Refreshment/toilet break
Breakout Groups	
13.15pm – 13.45pm	Breakout group session Aim: Discuss overcrowding's impacts on four key topics: health, housing, education, young people and communities in small groups on tables. Explore list of mitigation actions and discuss. Identify additional mitigation actions. Prioritise identified mitigations. <i>Each breakout group will have two group facilitators to lead discussion, as well as a notetaker to summarise the ideas and actions resulting from the discussion.</i>
13.45pm – 13.55pm	Reconvene main group <i>Each group to give short feedback from discussion, summarising one or two points maximum</i>
14.00pm	Close of meeting

Attendance List

NB. To maintain privacy, we have only included the job roles and organisations of those attending, and not names or personal details

Role	Organisation
Deputy Director – Newham	East London Foundation Team
Director	Heal Together Community Group
Policy and Public Affairs Manager	London Borough of Newham
Family Hubs Service Manger	London Borough of Newham
Director of Education, Inclusion and Achievement	London Borough of Newham
Head of Allocations and Choice Homes	London Borough of Newham
Commissioner (Sports and Leisure)	London Borough of Newham
Operations Manager (Greenspace)	London Borough of Newham
Principal Planner – Policy	London Borough of Newham
Void Performance Manager	London Borough of Newham
Director of Public Health	London Borough of Newham
Head of Private Sector Housing Standards	London Borough of Newham
Assistant Director, Resident Engagement and Participation	London Borough of Newham
Assistant Director, Public Health	London Borough of Newham
Director of Housing	London Borough of Newham
Assistant Director, Housing Options and Supply	London Borough of Newham
Head of Homelessness Prevention	London Borough of Newham
Private Sector Housing Organisations	London Borough of Newham
Housing Strategy Manager	London Borough of Newham
Policy Officer	London School of Economics
Research Assistant	London School of Economics
Senior Policy Fellow	London School of Economics
Research Assistant	London School of Economics
Distinguished Policy Fellow	London School of Economics
Research Manager	London School of Economics
Project Manager	Newham Community Project
Community Consultant	NewmanFrancis
Consultant Community Paediatrician	NHS
Homeless Health Lead	NHS
Deputy Director, Integrated Care Board	NHS
Head of Impact and Digital Delivery	School Home Support
Policy and Public Affairs Lead	School Home Support
Service Manager, London	Shelter
Honorary Senior Research Fellow	University College London
Associate Professor	University College London
Head Teacher	Virtual School

Notes from the Breakout Groups

1) *Children Breakout Group*

Key mitigation suggestions:

1. **Increase provision of face to face housing advice – increase Family Navigator service or walk in access at housing hubs with appropriate language support**
 - Group agreed that most important suggestion is that Family Navigators provision in key community settings should be scaled up
 - Should be in schools, libraries, community centres more widely across Newham
 - Children/families are seen every day at school – a key site for support
 - Family navigator role is very important, skilled, independent – there to advocate for you and don't have a bias
 - Many families in Newham are experiencing a culture shock – significant language barriers for asylum seekers. Family Navigators with multiple languages who can accompany people to services is key

Concerns:

- Newham tends to have a focus on box ticking... refer them to this intervention, tick – but who is checking or following up? Need oversight of the interventions and outcomes

2. **Create / increase provision of multi-agency support hubs where families with children can access help with housing / health issues / education and employment support**

Reactions:

- The group agreed that a 'One stop shop' approach is key
- Somewhere to do homework, a safe space to play – which also has services attached
- Dealing with issues in isolation will not work – Intersectionality of overcrowding and domestic abuse, sexual violence, risks to youth
- Early intervention for these issues is key and a co-location approach enables a range of support needs to be addressed at an early stage

3. **Support and extend existing community / council and other venues e.g. libraries / community centres that offer homework clubs – longer hours and more availability of computers**

Reactions:

- Focus on schools as a key site where children already are every day, already a trusted safe space
- Important to work within existing assets – rather than setting up new facilities/projects where support already exists
- Suggestions/ideas:
 - Extending school opening hours
 - Expand school provision of extra curricular activities
 - Strengthen existing facilities within schools to provide a range of activities
 - Greater partnerships between schools to share after school club provision

- Overall, school senior leadership teams do want to collaborate, but its mainly a money issue. Although some schools want to be separate e.g. some faith schools
- Concerns:
 - Cannot be expected within existing resources
 - After school/before school clubs already exist and schools are open for long hours – but schools face resource constraints
 - Concern that schools need more funding, not just about staff – problems with heating and electricity costs. Schools are in deficit budgets in some areas
 - Key questions around who would offer staff support – teachers already overstretched, have been striking over workload
 - Core funding is a huge issue, e.g. at Community Links they have recently bought a table tennis, foosball table etc – but don't have the resources or staff to open centre to the public
 - Community Links are running a project to explore youth mental health, The centre opens every Wednesday evening to accommodate that group coming together but goes in as a volunteer to do this. Community Links have many volunteers who could support with this, but don't want to exploit their volunteers - need funding to pay for £15 travel/food expenses as a minimum

Other reactions:

- Children in Newham take primary role in advocating for families. Children have communication skills that many parents don't have. Children are much more empowered now but also more pressure on them, e.g. Rozina has heard of children at Community Links who are in charge of household energy bills etc and have a lot of responsibility. Offering parents ESOL, life skills classes etc will support parents to support children
- Doncaster Council promoted notion of being a learning city and encouraging libraries – the city didn't place focus on overcrowding but encouraged actions that would mitigate overcrowding harms
- Voluntary sector massive part to play in supporting families – must utilise their expertise. Voluntary sector have better understanding and empathy of problems but there is a lack of communication between council and voluntary sector
- Emergency is now. Whatever actions are taken, make them quick. Need simple, quick interventions to actually happen

II) Community Breakout Group

Mitigation ideas and responses:

Better communication and direct accessibility of pre-existing support initiatives and offers

- There are lots of offers available in leisure centres/parks etc. but people don't know about them – need to change messaging strategies and make sure the offers reach the right people. Some people don't even know where to start looking, so better outreach needs to be achieved
 - advertising boards and placards can be useful
- Make sure people are getting advice when attending youth clubs – have a captive audience when in these buildings and the clubs are well-resourced
- Target advertising for areas where overcrowding is a particularly bad issue, make sure there are adequate schemes in those areas especially

Collaborating with voluntary sector and businesses to make the most of what we've got

- It is not only about what is provided by infrastructure, but about the partnerships which determine what happens in those spaces. Often the voluntary sector can deliver a lot of the stuff which helps us achieve our aims – need to connect better
- Should team-up with businesses – instigate schemes like 'safe space' cafes – cafes stay open longer or which have a badge on the window to let people know it's a welcoming, safe space etc.

Making sure initiatives are tailored to wider groups/demographics

- Thinking about parks and what kind of provision would benefit everyone? Most additions are things like sports equipment or play facilities for young children
 - Can think about play equipment for younger and older children? Also, activities families can do together – there is a lot more on offer out there to bring people together
 - Replacement of benches as places to talk, redesign them, get something a bit different in
 - Council trying to put in more benches on streets but there are lots of challenges – for example how to avoid anti-social behaviour. It becomes a political issue
- Thinking about youth clubs and whether other activities could be arranged besides youth centres (to target those who avoid the centres). People don't always want to come to a building – feels formal and claustrophobic. Should maybe attempt other areas of engagement, and consider other settings

Regeneration of wasted space

- Lots of empty space in Newham which could be regenerated
 - Could run community kitchens or spaces to dry your laundry (for people whose houses are too damp/mouldy) – spaces people would really value, and would be low cost to set-up
 - How to make this a corporate priority?
 - Do have to consider limited resources, lots of the ideas provided on the sheet are good but would depend on large resources (staff extra time, buildings kept open

longer) – still cheaper than building new houses but need to redirect to make feasible?

- Have to consider value for money – if for small amount of extra hours you get huge benefits, might be worth it?

Prioritising overcrowding more in planning/investment strategies

Should introduce overcrowding dimension/criteria as a specific clear value, both for resources and activities

Planning policies on protecting family-sized homes

It is critical we protect the stock we already have, planning plays an important role in that. It also plays an important role in how homes are designed – space standards, adequate private space between entrance to private home and public space etc.

Ensuring that open space/play areas designed for/as part of new developments are accessible to the wider neighbourhood as well

Group response: or is it more important to ensure good-quality space for the people living on the development? But in general do need to squeeze resources and make the most of new developments in terms of infrastructure

III) Health Breakout Group

Mitigation suggestions:

Focus on improving the wellbeing of people with existing health conditions

Preventative work to improve people's health i.e. improving access to food

General discussion and reactions

- Interventions need to think about the needs of individual communities and not lump everyone together i.e. in Somali communities culturally young people stay in the home until they move out, so work can be done with these communities to support these young people to move out in a way that meets their needs.
- For some young women it is not culturally appropriate for them to access some community services, adaptations should be made so people feel comfortable participating e.g. women's only spaces.
- The frontline need support in how to have harm reduction conversations, and what they can help people with immediately
- Mitigations should build on existing services, social prescribers should be trained in understanding overcrowding and its harms
- A lot of overcrowding is in homes above shops on the high streets with high levels of pollution which can exacerbate existing health conditions, people should be taught the importance of accessing clean air in green spaces

Mitigation suggestions from conversations

- Provide air fryers and freezer to help store and cook food
- Provide space people could use for children's parties
- Work with specific community groups to meet the needs of individual communities
- Encourage people to access green spaces so they have time away from homes with high levels of pollution.
- Training for frontline staff e.g. social prescribers in understanding the harms of overcrowding and possible mitigations

IV) *Housing Breakout Group*

Mitigation Actions Suggested:

- Newham's PRS regulation means that the housing situation is more difficult, as there are reduced numbers of HMOs, but what there is should be better quality
 - Article 4 limits houses being turned into HMOs without planning permission, to try and keep larger family homes within the stock
 - **Beefing up enforcement on PRS sector and HMOs should improve the quality of PRS and reduce overcrowding** in properties where there are multiple families per home illegally/against PRS regulation BUT it creates a problem for the evicted families

- Mitigation proposal: *Advise on and facilitate home extensions in all tenures—owner occupied, PRS and social—with model designs and how to guides, on condition home is subsequently inspected for crowding levels.*
 - There has been some action on this previously, including setting up a loan facility for PRS to create larger homes, but planning is often a barrier
 - Also some concerns around loans being used for 'dodgy' extensions done by family members/friends rather than legitimate, quality extensions
 - Incentives do exist but extensions remain unaffordable for many and have led to limited action in practice

- Mitigation proposal: *Advise on use of the choice-based lettings system, to reduce problems/address anxiety*
 - The focus on choice-based lettings is a red herring, as even with the best advice and support in the world, 99% of people on the waiting list will not get a home
 - It is a queue, not a lottery, so better information and access doesn't lead to a better 'chance' of getting a home
 - For those that are not currently in the current banding, information and support to understand the allocations policy is useful (e.g. if severely overcrowded and have an additional priority need) as will put them into current banding. **But** even in the correct banding, the likelihood of being allocated a property is still very low
 - What would be more helpful is **recognising and communicating the very limited stock and giving people a realistic understanding of wait lengths, etc.** and providing them with alternative options

- Mitigation proposal: *Allow development of non-self-contained housing space in gardens and yards, perhaps with model designs, on condition home is subsequently inspected for crowding levels.*
 - How can you enforce quality?
 - Any self-contained space should be used as storage/study space, not bedrooms

- **A better/more aligned relationship with the planning department** would be beneficial in tackling overcrowding – use of meanwhile space, spaces that are not suitable for residential use, making physical interventions and adaptations in homes, etc.

- The council should **utilise space on estates**, in regeneration sites, empty shops, etc. to set up community facilities for people experiencing overcrowding, **co-locating various services**:
 - Homework clubs
 - Laundries with subsidised washers/dryers
 - Storage facilities
 - Children's indoor play spaces
 - This could support with mitigating the impacts of overcrowding, as well as improving community cohesion, social exclusion (e.g. parents using the laundry/letting their kids play and networking)
 - Advice and support workers could also be based there on a specific day (money advice/housing/etc.)
 - Costs: management, on-site supervision, costs of equipment (should be portable so can be moved between spaces as they are developed)
 - Use existing space, or use modular/self-contained units on estates

- The council could set up a **repairs/DIY/assessment service to assess properties for efficient use of space and do minimally invasive adaptations**
 - Identify where more storage could be gained/where hooks and other space efficiency measures could be installed
 - Could also provide guidance to PRS landlords on making effective use of space
 - Would need funding

Top two ideas suggested by group:

- Utilising existing sites for co-located services and community facilities for people experiencing overcrowding
- Setting up a space assessment service to assess properties and make minimally invasive adaptations to homes

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