Subject: Overcrowding in London

Report to: Housing Committee

Report of: Executive Director of Assembly Secretariat

Date: 18 January 2022

Public Access: This report will be considered in public

1. Summary

1.1 This report sets out the background information for a discussion with invited guests on the topic of overcrowding in London’s homes.

2. Recommendation

2.1 That the Committee notes the report as background to putting questions to invited guests and the subsequent discussion.

3. Background

3.1 Overcrowding has a negative impact on people’s lives, especially for children, damaging both their health and educational attainment.¹ A study from Shelter found that cramped living conditions have been linked to depression, anxiety and stress as well as to a worsening of outcomes for those suffering from certain medical conditions, such as asthma.² In addition, a recent study by University College London found that throughout the coronavirus pandemic, those living in overcrowded housing had twice the risk of being infected compared to those who were not living in overcrowded housing.³

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¹ London Assembly, Crowded houses report, March 2011
² Shelter, Full house? How overcrowded housing affects families, 2005
³ UCL, Overcrowded households have much higher Covid-19 risk, March 2021

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V3/2021
Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, rates of overcrowding were generally higher in London than the rest of England. In 2018-19, 8.3 per cent of London households were overcrowded (based on the rolling average rate during the three years from 2016-17), compared to just 3.4 per cent across England as a whole.4,5

The challenge of overcrowding has been impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. A snapshot survey conducted as part of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government’s (now the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities’) Household Resilience Study found that in November-December 2020, overcrowding in London had risen by 6.2 percentage points to 14.5 per cent since 2018-19, while across England the rates rose to 5.7 per cent from 3.4 per cent.6

Tackling overcrowding is a core part of the Mayor’s London Plan and London Housing Strategy. With rates of overcrowding increasing before and during the coronavirus pandemic, it is essential to understand the data for London and the work that the Mayor and local authorities are doing to address the issue.

4. Issues for Consideration

4.1 The Committee may wish to consider:

• What are the main causes of overcrowding in London?
• Which tenure types, demographics, and areas of London are most likely to be affected by overcrowding, and why?
• Should the statutory definition of overcrowding be updated?
• Have the promised 2012 Games legacy benefits for overcrowding in the surrounding boroughs been realised?
• How has overcrowding changed in response to the coronavirus pandemic?
• What lessons have been learned from the pandemic and the impact it has had on overcrowding in London?
• What policies have the Mayor and local authorities implemented to reduce overcrowding in London, and what has been the impact of these policies?

5. Legal Implications

5.1 The Committee has the power to do what is recommended in this report.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 There are no direct financial implications to the GLA arising from this report.

4 GLA, Housing in London 2021
5 Measured according to the ‘bedroom standard’, where a household is overcrowded if it has fewer bedrooms than it needs to avoid undesirable sharing, based on the age, sex and relationship of household members.
6 GLA, Housing in London 2021
List of appendices to this report:
None.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

List of Background Papers: None.

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