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Title: Insecure Housing Tenure and Impact on Children's Health

Executive Summary

On 10 October 2019, the Committee agreed that authority be delegated to the Chair, in consultation with the Deputy Chairman, to agree any output from the discussion. [Insecure Housing Tenure and Impact on Children's Health]

Decision

That the letter on insecure housing tenure and the impact on children's health be agreed.

Assembly Member

I confirm that I do not have any disclosable pecuniary interests in the proposed decision and take the decision in compliance with the Code of Conduct for elected Members of the Authority.

The above request has my approval.

Signature

Date



19/12/2019

Printed Name

Dr Onkar Sahota AM, Chair of the Health Committee

Decision by an Assembly Member under Delegated Authority

Notes:

1. The Lead Officer should prepare this form for signature by relevant Members of the Assembly to record any instance where the Member proposes to take action under a specific delegated authority. The purpose of the form is to record the advice received from officers, and the decision made
2. The 'background' section (below) should be used to include an indication as to whether the information contained in / referred to in this Form should be considered as exempt under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoIA), or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR). If so, the specimen Annex (attached below) should be used. If this form does deal with exempt information, you must submit both parts of this form for approval together.

Background and proposed next steps:

On 10 October 2019, the Committee agreed that authority be delegated to the Chair, in consultation with the Deputy Chairman, to agree any output from the discussion. [Insecure Housing Tenure and Impact on Children's Health]

The decision will be reported back to the Health Committee meeting on 22 January 2020.

Confirmation that appropriate delegated authority exists for this decision

Signed by Committee Services  Date 12/12/19

Print Name: Lauren Harvey Tel: 4383

Financial implications

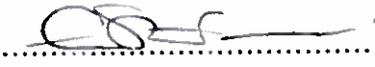
NOT REQUIRED

Signed by Finance N/A Date

Print Name N/A Tel:

Legal implications

The Chair of the Health Committee has the power to make the decision set out in this report.

Signed by Legal  Date 12.12.19

Print Name Emma Strain, Monitoring Officer Tel: X 4399

Additional forms may be provided for clarification.

Supporting detail/List of Consultees:

Steve O'Connell AM (Deputy Chairman of the Health Committee)

Public Access to Information

Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the FoIA, or the EIR and will be made available on the GLA Website within one working day of approval.

If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision (for example, to complete a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary. **Note:** this form (Part 1) will either be published within one working day after it has been approved or on the defer date.

Part 1 – Deferral

Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? No

Until what date: (a date is required if deferring)

Part 2 – Sensitive information

Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under FoIA or EIR should be included in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

Is there a part 2 form - No

Lead Officer/Author

Signed



Date 19/12/19.

Print Name

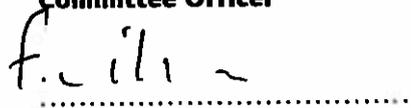
Lauren Harvey

Tel: 4383

Job Title

Committee Officer

Countersigned by
Director



Date 19.12.19

Print Name

Ed Williams

Tel: X4399

Chair of the Health Committee



Dr Onkar Sahota
London Assembly Member

City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA
Switchboard: 020 7983 4000
Minicom: 020 7983 4458
Web: www.london.gov.uk

Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London
(Sent by email)

19 December 2019

Dear Sadiq,

Health Committee investigation – insecure housing tenure and the impact on children's health

In October 2019, the London Assembly Health Committee examined the impact of poor quality and insecure housing on children's health and heard from a range of experts on this topic. This included representatives from the Children's Commissioner for England, academia, local authority public health and housing enforcement, Shelter UK, and Professor Paul Plant from Public Health England.

Insecure housing is an issue that affects the lives of many Londoners. One in four private sector rented homes fall below the Decent Homes Standard, which is the minimum standard used to measure homes and covers health and safety, state of repair, condition of facilities and thermal comfort.¹ Guests on the panel provided insight into how poor quality housing and residential instability impact the health of children, and the challenges faced by local authorities and health services in trying to minimise this impact. We also heard how you, as Mayor, can support both families with children, and local statutory services, to reduce the health inequalities caused by residential instability.

¹ English Housing Survey, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2018

Extending the scope of housing standards

The Committee heard how local authorities monitor the standards of housing at a local level, through regular inspections to identify homes that present health and safety hazards to the occupants and take action against landlords to address these issues. Boroughs will usually serve a notice on the landlords to remedy the hazard and have a range of powers at their disposal should the landlord not comply, or should the hazard get worse. Councils also possess the power to issue civil penalties of up to £30,000. ² Approximately 4,000 private rented homes a year fail safety inspections due to having a serious health and safety hazard. In 2018, 1 in 9 mandatory licensable Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) dwellings were reported as having serious health and safety hazards³.

While these inspections assess the physical health and safety risks, the framework should be broadened to include hazards that impact on the mental health of families. Poor housing has been shown to have a significant impact on the mental health of parents and children, particularly in overcrowded houses, or where there is residential instability. Studies have found that that approximately 370,000 children (under 16) in London live in households that are considered overcrowded⁴. These conditions increase the levels of stress and anxiety for both parents and children, impacting on children's behaviour and ability to concentrate⁵. If not addressed early, the mental health impact on parents and children can escalate and become long term in nature.⁶

The Committee, therefore, calls on you to lobby the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to extend housing standards to include hazards that impact on mental health. Assessments that include mental health hazards are likely to identify health issues that go beyond just physical health risks and will assist local authorities to signpost tenants to health services.

Recommendation 1

The Mayor should lobby Central Government to expand housing standards beyond assessments for just physical health hazards, and issue guidance for local authorities on how to assess the mental health impacts of insecure and poor quality housing too, by September 2020.

Closer aligned public health and housing strategies

Housing has long been recognised as a social determinant of health, yet the Committee was surprised to hear that, at a local level, strategies for public health and housing were not

² Shelter, [The Housing Health and Safety Rating System \(HHSRS\)](#)

³ Local authority housing statistics, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2017 & 2018

⁴ English Housing Survey, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019

⁵ Coley, et al, Early Exposure to Environmental Chaos and Children's Physical and Mental Health. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 2015

⁶ Mind, [Brick by brick – A review of mental health and housing](#), April 2017

better integrated. Since 2013, as part of the Health and Social Care Act 2012, local authorities are responsible for producing a Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which sets out the strategic priorities to improve the health of the local population. Ensuring that children and young people have the best start in life is always a central pillar to these strategies,⁷ although they rarely consider how other service areas, such as housing, will contribute to this⁸. The Committee heard that the linkage between what the housing directorate is looking to achieve, and what the Health and Wellbeing Strategy is trying to achieve, is not always there.⁹

The Committee is aware that you aim to support health in all policies,¹⁰ and this also needs to be reflected at a local level. The Committee urges you to promote to local authorities across the capital to include health impacts in all local strategies, and specifically, closer integration between local housing and health strategies to ensure a holistic assessment of the housing needs of the local population. The Committee is also aware that the new London Plan makes reference to Health Impact Assessments for new developments to identify the potential impacts of a development proposal on the health and wellbeing of the population. It is the Committee's view that wider adoption of HIAs should be encouraged with local authorities when considering development proposals.

Recommendation 2

As Chair of the London Health Board, the Mayor should promote the inclusion of health impacts in all local level strategies, and closer integration between housing and public health strategies, including wider adoption of health impact assessments for development proposals, with a commitment to doing so provided by April 2020.

Bringing front line health and housing teams closer together

Alongside the closer strategic alignment outlined above, the Committee believes there are practical actions which could be taken at a local level to help reduce the health impact of housing instability. One such measure is encouraging local authorities to raise awareness with their housing enforcement teams of the health impact of poor housing and housing uncertainty, and of the options available should they encounter this. Enforcement teams come into regular contact with families when undertaking inspections and assessment visits and will become aware of how housing circumstances contribute to their poor health. The Committee urges you to work with local authorities on raising awareness with their enforcement teams to identify signs of poor physical and mental health in the families they encounter on inspection visits, as well as signposting the services available to tenants where appropriate.

⁷ Local government Association, *A Better Start – Supporting Child Development in Early Years*, November 2018

⁸ London Assembly Health Committee, 10 October 2019

⁹ London Assembly Health Committee, 10 October 2019

¹⁰ Mayor of London, *The London Health Inequalities Strategy*, September 2018

The Committee also urges you to encourage expansion of landlord licensing schemes with local authorities. While HMOs are required to have licenses, individual councils can decide if licenses are required for landlords of properties other than HMOs. Licenses aim to improve living standards in the private rented sector, whereby properties are subjected to regular legal checks, and assess the property for health and safety hazards. Licenses protect tenants as well as landlords as regular inspections ensure that properties are kept in good shape, and identify crime and antisocial behaviour. Local authorities that make such licensing mandatory for all landlords are able to identify health hazards through regular checks and can enforce

Recommendation 3

The Mayor should work with local authorities on raising awareness with their enforcement teams of signs of poor health in families they encounter on inspections, as well as signposting the services available to tenants where appropriate.

Recommendation 4

The Mayor should encourage local authorities to expand landlord licensing schemes to include as many properties as possible in the private rented sector.

Raising awareness with primary care

The Committee found there is more which could be done by local health services in addressing health issues associated with poor or insecure housing. General Practitioners (GP) are often the first health professional with whom vulnerable patients will come into contact. This means that GPs are well positioned to provide clinical care, wider patient advocacy and community engagement. However, primary care services vary across London, and the level of engagement between GPs and relevant services such as housing is not consistent across the city¹¹. This can be due to a variety of reasons including time pressures, patients not being forthcoming with relevant information, or the clinician viewing this as beyond the limits of their knowledge or remit. The Committee heard that housing applications have specific assessment criteria, and while referral letters from GPs may be relevant for medical purposes, they are not always sufficient to meet the housing application criteria¹².

There is also a need for providing more targeted information to GPs so they can refer their vulnerable patients to appropriate services. GPs have found that social prescribing activity can help address wider determinants of health, and link workers can help patients who have more than just a medical need¹³.

¹¹ The Kings Fund, Tackling inequalities in general practice, 2010

¹² London Assembly Health Committee, 10 October 2019

¹³ NHS, [Social prescribing – Frequently asked questions](#)

I am also aware that the GLA and boroughs provide services that can be of help to vulnerable patients, however more awareness among GPs would allow wider use of these services. Moreover, these services can miss those with insecure or frequently changing tenancies. The GLA's Warmer Homes Advice Service provides fuel poverty advice, and is running a private rented sector pilot.¹⁴ Information on such programs should be distributed to GPs to encourage referrals of vulnerable patients.

As a minimum, a standardised approach should be developed to aid GPs in providing the relevant information on their patient to housing services. I have had to provide such information myself in my work as a GP, and as a result have developed resources to aid the process, including letter templates to housing services. The Committee calls on you to work with local authorities on developing a standardised template for GPs that ensures relevant information is being included to make an appropriate referral on a housing application.

Recommendation 5

The Mayor should work with local authorities to develop a standardised template for GPs to include the relevant information needed when the patient is making an application for housing services, and to raise awareness among GPs on avenues for services that can address health issues related to housing, such as social prescribing or schemes like the Warmer Homes Advice Service, by September 2020.

Recommendation 6

The Mayor should review the GLA's pilot providing the Warmer Homes Advice Service to the private rented sector and consider expanding the service. Learnings from the pilot should be shared with boroughs to support local efforts to support tenants. By September 2020.

I would be grateful to receive a response to our findings and recommendations by **19 February 2020**. Please also send your response by email to the committee's clerk, Lauren Harvey (lauren.harvey@london.gov.uk).

Yours sincerely,



Dr Onkar Sahota AM

Chair of the Health Committee

¹⁴ Warmer Homes Scheme, GLA, 21 June 2019 <https://www.london.gov.uk/questions/2019/12229>

