

Overcrowding Reduction Strategy

2010-2014



Contents

Foreword	3
Executive Summary	5
Why have an overcrowding reduction strategy?	9
The Strategy	10
Priority one – providing a range of housing options	16
Priority two - increasing the supply of larger homes	19
Priority three - making the best use of existing social housing	22
Priority four - developing and promoting re-housing opportunities within the private sector	25
Delivering the strategy	27
Glossary	31
Action plan	32

Foreword



I am delighted to introduce Croydon's overcrowding reduction strategy for the next 5 years. The strategy sets out a comprehensive approach to alleviating overcrowding within the borough.

Overcrowding is a serious problem, affecting families' health, welfare and educational outcomes.

Tackling overcrowding is a key element of the council's housing strategy as there is a desperate need for larger family accommodation in Croydon. Almost 2,000 of our residents are living in overcrowded conditions. I am pleased to say that we have already introduced some innovative measures which are beginning to tackle the problem:

In 2008, we were successful in securing £3.2m in grant to build 34 four and three-bed family homes to help larger families. The funding comes from a £21m pot offered through a competitive bidding process by the Mayor of London to all London boroughs. The homes were allocated either to overcrowded households on the housing and transfers registers or to those under-occupying even larger homes. We are seizing every opportunity to build new homes with starts made on 60 homes and a further 40 in the pipeline (subject to HCA funding).

Our Special Transfer Payment scheme provides under-occupiers with a cash incentive and help with removals and we have introduced an enhanced scheme (offering a generous £10,000 per room) for those releasing 4 bedroom and larger homes and trading down by at least 2 rooms. The scheme is being pro-actively promoted with visits to the tenants of all 345 larger homes in Council ownership.

Croydon's ground-breaking Croylease scheme is utilising the private sector helping us to rehouse families who are currently in overcrowded accommodation. This in turn frees up smaller properties at a faster rate to house other residents in need.

We have worked closely with Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) to reduce overcrowding in all social rented homes through:

- persuading most RSLs to join our overcrowding match-funding scheme (now covering 66% of RSL family homes) but aiming to increase further
- negotiating with RSL's to allow households to compromise and accept homes smaller than their assessed need in order to expedite their rehousing

Increasing the supply of larger homes is essential if we are to tackle overcrowding and we are lobbying for specific targets for 4, 5 & 6 beds in the Mayor's housing strategy.

We are committed to improving the lives of Croydon residents through this clear and comprehensive strategy and action plan.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dudley Mead". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Dudley Mead

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing, Finance and Asset Management



Executive Summary

Why have an overcrowding reduction strategy?

Overcrowding, particularly within the social and private rented sector has been increasing since the mid 1990's. Unless tackled, it will increase.

More than half of overcrowded families live in deprived areas. Overcrowding can have a devastating effect on families, adversely affecting the health of adults and children, childrens' physical development and education. Young people living in overcrowded families are more likely to leave home before they are ready. Overcrowding can result in anti-social behaviour and criminal activity, with young people being forced onto the streets due to lack of space at home. It can lead to relationship break-down and, in the worst cases, domestic violence.

Tackling overcrowding has been a key priority for the council for a number of years and we have developed a comprehensive and innovative approach. During the last two years, as an overcrowding pathfinder¹, we have been drawing together this body of work and expanding upon it.

Overcrowding in Croydon

Defining overcrowding

The legal definition of overcrowding has not been updated since its introduction in 1935 and no longer fits with modern day expectations. Whilst very few people would be defined as statutorily overcrowded² many families would feel that their home has more people in it than it can comfortably hold.

A more modern definition of overcrowding is used in the Survey of English Housing, known as the Bedroom Standard, developed in the 1950s.

The department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) requires overcrowding pathfinder authorities to adopt the Bedroom Standard for measuring overcrowding. In assessing housing need and relative priority on the housing and transfer registers, Croydon has already adopted a standard that is more generous than the Bedroom Standard.

Housing need and overcrowding in Croydon

Croydon, with 340,000 residents has the largest population in London. The borough has the highest number of young people aged 0-19 in London, and the 5th highest in terms of proportion.

Croydon's housing stock is dominated by a large owner-occupied sector and a relatively small council and registered social landlord (social housing) sector (17% of all properties), compared to the capital as a whole where the social rented sector accounts for 26% of all properties. Average earnings in Croydon are lower than the average for London.

Croydon council's housing needs survey 2002 estimated a total shortfall of 29,402 homes needed in Croydon over the following five years, in order to meet existing and backlog housing need and newly arising need. Across all tenures, it was estimated that larger family homes (defined as three or more bedrooms) account for 33% of the overall shortfall in housing. For affordable homes, the figure rises to 36%.

¹ Local authorities funded by department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) to develop strategies and action plans to tackle overcrowding

² Statutory overcrowding is defined in Part 10 of the Housing Act 1985.

Overcrowding – the overall picture

Applying the bedroom standard, 2.7% of households in England are overcrowded. Overcrowding in London is significantly higher, at 6.8% of all households.

The level of overcrowding in London varies by tenure, with social renters experiencing the highest level of overcrowding. 18% of all overcrowded households in England live in social rented homes in London³.

Overcrowding in Croydon

Croydon's level of overcrowding is comparable to the average level of overcrowding in outer London, using the census measure of overcrowding⁴. The average level of overcrowding in London was 17% of households. Overcrowding in inner London is far higher than outer London, 25% compared with 12% of households⁵.

Overcrowding within the sub-region

Overcrowding within the rented sector has been increasing, particularly within London and Croydon has followed this trend. Applying the bedroom standard, overcrowding in the social rented sector in London increased from 10.6% in 1995-6 to 12.7% in 2007-8 and, in the private rented sector it increased from 5.4% in 1995-6 to 9.8% in 2007-08. There has, however been some reduction in the last two years in Croydon, the result of a combination of measures to tackle overcrowding.

What action will we take?

There are four priority areas:

- a. Provide a range of housing options to overcrowded families
- b. Maximise opportunities to develop new social housing to meet the needs of overcrowded families and under-occupying households
- c. Make the best use of existing social housing
- d. Develop and promote re-housing opportunities within the private sector

Provide a range of housing options to overcrowded families

The main objective of this priority is to provide targeted advice and assistance to overcrowded families in social rented housing. There are three strands to the actions that will be taken:

- providing accommodation options that include information about the waiting list, mutual exchanges and private sector options
- practical options to mitigate the effect of overcrowding; this may be advice or small capital grants to fund space saving furniture, and
- sharing information through training and briefings to other frontline services

Key actions:

Our actions will be to:

- Implement a rolling programme of pro-active visits to overcrowded families
- Enable severely overcrowded families to move into the private sector
- Increase the number of overcrowded family moves through mutual exchange
- Conduct training and briefing sessions with frontline officers
- Utilise available funds to address severe overcrowding in the private sector

³ Housing in England 2007-08, September 2009, Communities and Local Government

⁴ *Persons per room*: this measure simply divides the number of people in the household by the number of rooms it occupies. Households with over 1.0 and up to 1.5 persons per room are described as 'overcrowded' and those with over 1.5 persons per room as 'severely overcrowded'

⁵ 2001 census

Maximise opportunities to develop new social housing to meet the needs of overcrowded families and under-occupying households

The aim of this priority is to increase the supply of larger social rented homes.

There are five main elements to the council's strategy to increase the supply of affordable larger homes:

- A council house building programme, delivering houses with three bedrooms or more
- Working with (registered social landlords) RSLs to deliver new affordable housing. The overall housing development programme contains a target to ensure that 30% of new homes have three bedrooms and 20% have four bedrooms or more.
- Extensions and de-conversions to create larger properties; a sub-regional programme funded through the Mayor of London's targeted funding stream.
- Partnership working with RSLs
- Preparing the Council's Local Development Framework, and in particular the Core Strategy and Site Allocations plans

Key actions:

Our actions will be to:

- Deliver a further 50-64 council homes, commencing autumn 2009
- Ensure that 30% of new affordable homes have 3 bedrooms
- Ensure that 20% of new affordable homes have 4 bedrooms or more
- Carry out 2009-2011 programme of 17 extensions and 1 de-conversion
- Ensure that 90% of family homes let by registered social landlords are let to applicants from the Croydon housing register
- Prepare a draft Core Strategy for submission to the Secretary of State in May 2011 setting out the overall planning framework for providing new homes in the borough
- Prepare a Site Allocations Development Plan Document by 2013 to accompany the Core Strategy, allocating specific sites in the borough for new homes and specifying the number of new homes, size and tenure mix on each site.

Make the best use of social housing

The main objective of this priority is to ensure that our existing social housing stock is used to accommodate those in the greatest need. We will achieve this in two ways:

- **Allocations priorities:** Our housing allocations scheme has been framed to give priority to families who are overcrowded or under-occupying their current homes. Applicants are assessed and placed in an appropriate band, with families who are overcrowded by three or more bedrooms (according to the council's definition) and under-occupiers being placed in the highest priority band.
- **Reducing under-occupation:** We will implement and promote a range of options to enable people under-occupying social rented homes to move to suitably sized accommodation.

Key actions:

Our actions will be to:

- Encourage 110 under-occupying social housing tenants per annum to move to smaller homes through a range of schemes
- Continue a rolling programme of visits to under-occupying households
- Review existing under-occupation initiatives
- Arrange 2 housing transfers days a year to promote options available to both under-occupying tenants and overcrowded families

Develop and promote re-housing opportunities within the private sector

The main aim of this priority is to widen re-housing options for overcrowded families by making best use of the private rented sector.

Key actions:

Our actions will be to:

- Enable at least 90 overcrowded families per annum to move into the private sector through a range of schemes
- Promote home ownership opportunities within the borough through 2 promotional days per year

Targets

Overcrowding is affected by factors such as birth rate and the wider economic climate. This makes it difficult to predict the outcome of our actions, particularly when setting a long-term target. We have set ourselves a range of targets aimed at making best use of existing social housing and relieving overcrowding through a range of measures. Given overall upward trends, the first step has been to halt the increase. Some success has been achieved over the past 12 months and we think it reasonable to set a 5% reduction target which will need to be reviewed (given the volatility of the housing market). Our intention is to sustain a reduction into the future tentatively set at 5% per annum but subject to ongoing review.

Implementing and reviewing the strategy

We have developed a comprehensive action plan detailing actions, timescales and responsibilities. We will set up structures to oversee the implementation, receive reports on progress and review the strategy action plan on an annual basis.



Why have an overcrowding reduction strategy?

Overcrowding, particularly within the social and private rented sector has been increasing since the mid 1990's. Unless tackled, overcrowding will increase.

There is evidence that poor housing can have both direct and indirect adverse physical and mental effects on both adults and children. Outcomes for children are adversely affected, with overcrowding linked to childhood development and poor educational achievement. Families with low incomes and from BME families are over-represented amongst overcrowded families within London⁶, and any strategy to tackle social exclusion and/or improve outcomes for children and young people cannot ignore the inter-relationship of poor housing.

Effects on physical health

Studies have linked respiratory conditions and meningitis in children to overcrowding. Families in Shelter's study of overcrowding⁷ reported adverse effects on their children's health resulting from overcrowding. Links have also been found between respiratory conditions and poor self rated health in adults who had lived in overcrowded accommodation as children. Studies have found evidence of an independent relationship between childhood and adult tuberculosis infection and overcrowding in deprived areas, such as the Bronx in New York⁸.

Effects on mental health

Research into the links between overcrowding and mental health has been limited in the UK. It is clear that overcrowding causes stress to family members; Shelter's study reported chaotic sleeping arrangements resulting from overcrowding, family arguments resulting from overcrowding and lack of storage space to be key factors in causing stress within families. A clear link has been found between poor mental health and overcrowding in black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. This may be because BME groups are disproportionately represented amongst overcrowded families with overcrowding being particularly prevalent amongst BME groups, in particular Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black African families⁹.

Effects on childhood development, growth and education

Overcrowding may have an impact on children's physical stature and growth rates. Shelter's study reported that lack of space to play adversely affected their children's development. This is particularly true in overcrowded accommodation without access to safe outdoor play areas. Families responding to Shelter's survey said that a lack of safe outside space for children to play made this worse. There is an increased incidence of childhood accidents in overcrowded households, and respondents to the Shelter survey highlighted this as a concern. Education may be affected directly through lack of space for homework and, indirectly through absences resulting from illness.

Family relationships

Shelter's study considered overcrowding to have a detrimental effect on family relationships. Families responding to the Shelter study described effects such as arguments between children, relationship breakdown and isolation resulting from overcrowding. Comments made included:

- 'Being overcrowded means no happy life for the family.'
- 'We cannot have visitors or relatives to come and spend time with us. Therefore, we feel lonely.'

Older children in overcrowded families may spend more time away from the home, simply to find privacy. There, they are more at risk of becoming involved in anti-social behaviour or crime.

Tackling overcrowding has been a key priority for the council for the council for a number of years and we have developed a comprehensive and innovative approach. During the last year, as an overcrowding pathfinder¹⁰, we have been drawing together this body of work and expanding upon it, for example, through the recruitment of an officer with the sole remit of tackling overcrowding.

6 GLA, London & sub-regional strategy support studies project, 2005

7 Shelter, Full house?: How overcrowded housing affects families 2005

8 CCHR, The impact of overcrowding on health and education: A review of the evidence and literature ODPM 2004

9 GLA, London & sub-regional strategy support studies project, 2005

10 Local authorities funded by department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) to develop strategies and action plans to tackle overcrowding

The Strategy

This document sets out our plans to tackle overcrowding. It identifies the key priorities in tackling overcrowding and draws together existing initiatives and new ideas.

Structure

This first section sets out the background, looking at the strategy's contribution to the corporate plan, community strategy and local area agreement (LAA) targets¹¹, national and strategic policy on overcrowding, analysis of overcrowding within Croydon and community engagement.

The second section sets out our key priorities to tackle overcrowding, and what actions we will take to deliver these priorities and the associated targets. These are summarised in a comprehensive action plan in appendix 1.

In the final section we set out how we intend to deliver, implement and evaluate progress against the key actions and targets in the plan. An equality impact assessment (EqIA) has been carried out and is included in appendix 2. The EqIA looked at whether any group was adversely affected by the strategy and whether any measures should be put in place to mitigate the effect.

Contribution to Corporate Plan, Community Strategy & LAA

This Strategy contributes towards the delivery of the six priorities contained in Croydon's Community Strategy and the Council's Corporate Plan and specific targets set out in the Local Area Agreement.

The six priorities are:

- Safer, stronger and more sustainable communities
- Achieving better outcomes for children and young people
- Promoting economic growth and prosperity
- Improving health and well-being
- Improving the environment
- Delivering high quality public services and improving value for money

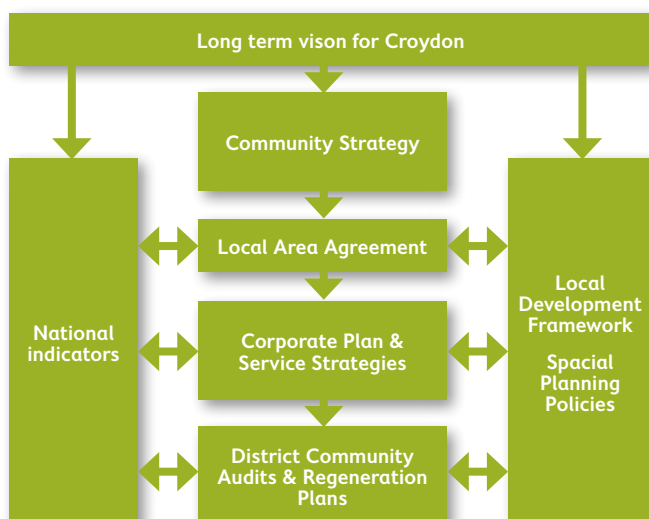
Needs and issues

National and strategic policy and overcrowding

On 12 December 2007, then Housing Minister Yvette Cooper announced the government's next steps for social housing 'People, not just houses'.

The Government's plans included the launch of a national £15m action plan to address unacceptable levels of overcrowding in social housing, with funding targeted at those local authorities which house an estimated 60% of all overcrowded households living in social housing. The overcrowding pathfinders included all London authorities plus five of the most overcrowded areas outside London: Birmingham, Bradford, Leicester, Liverpool and Manchester. Croydon has been awarded a total of £230,000 over two years to tackle overcrowding in social housing and to support overcrowded families.

The Mayor of London's draft London Housing Strategy sets out a target to halve severe overcrowding in London's social housing by 2016 and to reduce the number of tenants under-occupying social housing by two-thirds within the same period. It includes a target for 42% of social rented and 16% of intermediate homes to have three bedrooms or more. We lobbied for the final strategy to set targets for each bedroom size as well as an overall target for homes with three bedrooms or more. The Mayor's strategy on overcrowding has a focus on tackling overcrowding by increasing the proportion of family homes within new affordable housing and making best use of existing stock by tackling overcrowding, and considering how tenure and benefit reform could be used to make best use of existing social housing stock.



Our strategy links to London Council's 10-point action plan to tackle overcrowding which sets a target to reduce overcrowding in London by half by 2015, and to eliminate severe overcrowding entirely by that date.

Defining overcrowding

The legal definition of overcrowding has not been updated since its introduction in 1935 and no longer fits with modern day expectations. Whilst very few people would be defined as statutorily overcrowded¹² many families would feel that their home has more people than it can comfortably hold.

The census assumes that every household, including one person households require two common rooms (excluding bathrooms). Any household with one room too few is considered to be overcrowded.

A commonly used definition of overcrowding is used in the Survey of English Housing, known as the Bedroom Standard, developed in the 1950s. This is set out in table 1. Under the statutory standards it is estimated that some 20,000 households are overcrowded. Under the bedroom standard it is estimated that some 500,000 households are overcrowded, of which 200,000 are in the social rented sector¹³.

The Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) requires overcrowding pathfinders to adopt the Bedroom Standard for measuring overcrowding. In assessing housing need and relative priority on the housing and transfer registers, Croydon has already adopted a standard that is more generous than the Bedroom Standard. The table below compares the Bedroom Standard and Croydon's allocations scheme¹⁴. Overcrowding is measured by comparing the number of bedrooms available to a household with the bedroom standard for their household. The level of overcrowding is measured by subtracting the number of bedrooms the household has from the number they should have according to the standard.

Table 1:

Croydon bedroom standard	English house condition survey bedroom standard
One bedroom for each married or cohabiting couple	One bedroom for each married or cohabiting couple
One bedroom for each adult aged 16 years or more (not cohabiting)	One bedroom for each adult aged 21 years or more (not married or cohabiting)
One bedroom for each pair of children aged under 16 years (same sex)	One bedroom for each pair of adolescents aged 10-20 years of the same sex
One bedroom for each child of different sex with no minimum age restriction	One bedroom for each pair of children aged under 10 years regardless of sex
Children (aged under 16 years) will only be counted as needing a separate bedroom where they cannot share with another child of the same sex	Children aged less than 10 years will only be counted as needing a separate bedroom where there is not another child/young person with whom they can share. This may be another child of any sex aged less than 10 years, or another child/young person aged 10-20 years of the same sex.

Housing need and overcrowding in Croydon

Croydon, with 340,000 residents, has the largest population in London. The borough has the highest number of young people aged 0-19 in London, and the 5th highest in terms of proportion. 77,237 children are aged under 18, 40% of these are from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups. Croydon has 42,434 children of school age, London's largest school population.

Croydon's housing stock is dominated by a large owner-occupied sector and a relatively small social housing sector (17% of all properties), compared to the capital as a whole where the social rented sector accounts for 26% of all properties. Average earnings in Croydon are lower than the average for London.

Croydon council's housing needs survey 2002 estimated a total shortfall of 29,402 homes needed in Croydon over the following five years, in order to meet existing and backlog housing need and newly arising need.

Across all tenures, it was estimated that larger family homes (defined as three or more bedrooms) account for 33% of the overall shortfall in housing. For affordable homes, the figure rises to 36%.

Overcrowding – the overall picture

Applying the bedroom standard 2.7% of households in England are overcrowded. Overcrowding in London is significantly higher, at 6.8% of all households.

The level of overcrowding in London varies by tenure, with social renters experiencing the highest level of overcrowding. 18% of all overcrowded households in England live in social rented homes in London see Table 1. Overcrowding can be seen as a factor of social exclusion; over half of overcrowded households live in deprived areas.

Table 1: Overcrowded households by tenure (percentage)



Overcrowding is increasing in both the social and private rented sector.

Table 2: Overcrowding in Croydon in comparison to SW London sub-region

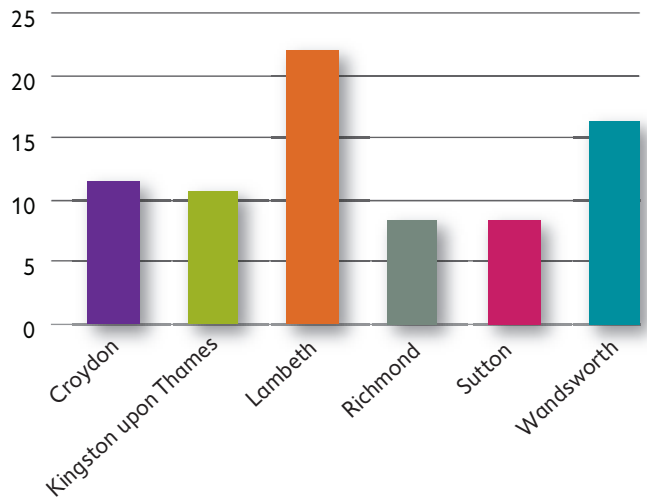
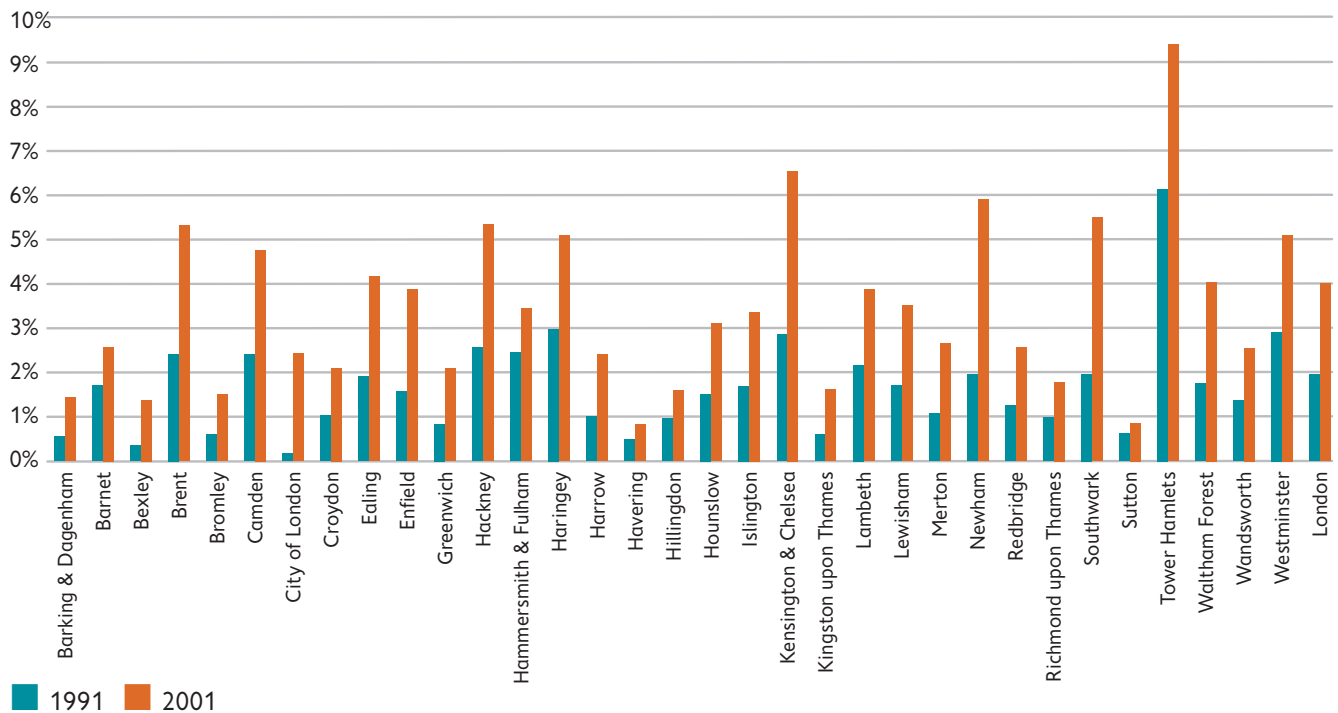


Table 3: Rates of overcrowding by tenure, London, 1995-96 to 2007-08, three year moving average



The National Housing Federation predicts that the number of people living in overcrowded homes in England will soar by 15% to 2.6 million within two years¹⁵. Fertility rates within Croydon are above average which may mean that demand for family housing is likely to continue to rise: the number of births has risen to more than 5,000 per year and is likely to continue to increase further¹⁶.

Overcrowding in Croydon

Overcrowding in Croydon is comparable to the average level of overcrowding in outer London, using the census measure of overcrowding.¹⁷ The average level of overcrowding in London was 17% of households. Overcrowding in inner London is far higher than outer London, 25% compared with 12% of households.¹⁸ See Table 2.

11 An agreement between the council and central government setting out the top priorities for the borough and specific outcomes we will be striving to achieve as measured through national indicators (NIs) taken from the government's list.
 12 Statutory overcrowding is defined in Part 10 of the Housing Act 1985.
 13 Tackling overcrowding – A discussion paper - CLG July 2006
 14 This document sets out how we operate our housing list waiting list of households who have applied to the council for housing. It includes information about how we prioritise households on the waiting list.
 15 National Housing Federation news April 2009 <http://tinyurl.com/r7a46z>
 16 Joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA) for Croydon 2008/09
 17 Persons per room: this measure simply divides the number of people in the household by the number of rooms it occupies. Households with over 1.0 and up to 1.5 persons per room are described as 'overcrowded' and those with over 1.5 persons per room as 'severely overcrowded'
 18 2001 census

Table 4: Overcrowding in Croydon

		2008		2009	
		Bedroom Standard	Croydon Allocations scheme	Bedroom Standard	Croydon Allocations scheme
Total		2062	3234	1977	3044
1 bed	Total overcrowded of whom severely overcrowded	1150	1325	1024	1135
		112	253	102	203
2 bed	Total overcrowded of whom severely overcrowded	692	1267	721	1270
		43	142	43	144
3 bed	Total overcrowded of whom severely overcrowded	204	566	213	564
		22	142	27	146
4+ bed	Total overcrowded of whom severely overcrowded	16	76	19	75
		5	15	3	20
Number who are social housing tenants		670	886	675	853

Overcrowding within the rented sector has been increasing, particularly within London and Croydon has followed this trend. Applying the bedroom standard, overcrowding London in the social rented sector increased from 10.6% in 1995-6 to 12.7% in 2007-8 and in the private rented sector it increased from 5.4% in 1995-6 to 9.8% in 2007-08 – Table 3. There has, however been some reduction in the last year in Croydon, the result of a combination of measures to tackle overcrowding.

Table 4 shows the number of overcrowded families on the housing waiting list. The table compares the Government’s Bedroom Standard with the more generous standard set by our allocations scheme.

Under-occupation

CLG reports that there are an estimated 69,000 people under-occupying properties in the social rented sector in London.

According to the 2001 census, 35% of single pensioner households and 60% of multiple pensioner households were under-occupying their homes. The methodology assumed that a property is too large if it has more than one spare room. Applied to 2001 census figures, this would equate to more than 11,000 households in Croydon. The Croydon housing need survey indicated that 58% of owner-occupiers with no mortgage, 12% of council tenants and 2% of RSL tenants were under-occupying their homes. These included households of all ages.

Applying a more subjective assessment of under-occupation (people on the housing waiting list saying they want to move because their home is too large for them), 21% of single pensioners and 19% of multiple pensioner households were under-occupiers. Applied to 2001 census data for Croydon, this implies about 5,000 households in self-defined need because of under-occupation.

Table 5 shows under-occupied tenants in social rented housing who are on the housing transfer and waiting list and want to downsize to smaller accommodation.

Table 6 shows the numbers of social rented tenants on the transfer register who require homes with two or more bedrooms compared with projected allocations to applicants in social rented homes and on the housing waiting list in 2009-10. Table 7 shows the numbers of families on the housing register (families on the waiting list who do not occupy social housing in Croydon) who require two bedrooms or more compared with the projected lettings for 2009-10.

Table 5: Under-occupied households on the housing waiting list and wanting to downsize

Size of accommodation occupied	2008	2009
3 bedrooms	206	188
4 bedroom	32	35
5+ bedrooms	5	19
Total	243	242

Table 6: The transfer register

Bedroom size needed	Families on the register - by bedroom size needed (number overcrowded)	Projected lettings 2009/10	Percentage assisted in one year
2 bedrooms	233 (103)	80	34%
3 bedroom	556 (496)	97	17%
4+ bedrooms	259 (229)	19	7%

Table 7: The housing register

Bedroom size needed	Families on the register - by bedroom size needed (number overcrowded)	Projected lettings 2008/09	Percentage assisted in one year
2 bedrooms	1648 (966)	513	31%
3 bedroom	1188 (713)	142	12%
4+ bedrooms	575 (447)	31	5%

Community engagement

We have consulted with our tenant and leaseholder panel which supported this strategy.

The strategy is being developed in partnership with RSLs in the borough.

Focus groups held with applicants aged 50 and over and on the housing register whilst developing our draft older persons' housing strategy, looked at the housing needs and wishes of under-occupiers in social housing.

What action will we take?

This document sets out our plans to tackle overcrowding. There are four priority areas:

- Provide a range of housing options to overcrowded families
- Maximise opportunities to develop new social housing to meet the needs of overcrowded families and under-occupying households
- Make the best use of existing social housing
- Develop and promote re-housing opportunities within the private sector

Ensuring fair outcomes

Our equalities impact assessment (EqIA) showed that black and minority ethnic (BME) families are disproportionately represented amongst overcrowded families, particularly amongst those renting from the council or RSLs. Our strategy will ensure that information about options (for overcrowded families will be targeted to ensure that groups who may be excluded, for example due to language barrier) are reached. We will adopt a partnership approach, ensuring that other agencies and community organisations which are in contact with families such as faith groups, health visitors and children centres have knowledge of the options available to overcrowded families in the social rented sector and know how to refer them for assistance. Actions to increase the supply of larger homes is key to meeting the needs of these families.

Our under-occupation strategy seeks to encourage and support under-occupying tenants to move to smaller homes through a range of practical and financial assistance. People in this group are quite likely to be older people. We will work with Croydon adult social services, Age Concern, district housing management offices, and neighbourhood wardens to ensure that under-occupying tenants who wish to move are made aware of the options available to them.



Actions and targets

Throughout this document we have set out some key outcomes. Some are quite specific, for example the number of overcrowded tenants we will help through various initiatives. Given overall upward trends in overcrowding, the first step has been to halt the increase. Some success has been achieved over the past 12 months and we think it reasonable to set a 5% reduction target which will need to be reviewed (given the volatility of the housing market). Our intention is to sustain a reduction into the future tentatively set at 5% but subject to ongoing review.

It is difficult to set clear targets because some of the approaches we are adopting are very new and the impact unknown, and also we are operating in a wider context which we cannot control.

Overcrowding will continue to occur to individual families at different stages in their lives. As we re-house overcrowded families, existing families increase and new families form. It is affected by factors such as trends in the housing market, external economic factors, unemployment and income levels. In January 2009, figures produced by the office for national statistics (ONS) confirmed that the UK had officially entered a period of recession. In Croydon, as elsewhere, many households will face unemployment or reduced income. Young people are particularly affected; between 2008 and 2009 claims for Jobseekers' Allowance rose by 80%¹⁹. Young people with no independent income are likely to stay in the family home for longer.

The number of house sales has fallen reducing opportunities for mobility.

At the same time the availability of private sector accommodation has risen and this has enabled us to offer alternative housing options to overcrowded families. Mortgage lending and house prices have fallen which has slowed house building.

There are many challenges for public spending in the coming years and, the continuing success of our approach will depend upon tackling overcrowding remaining a priority.

Appendix 1 sets out a comprehensive action plan for the council and our RSL partners. The strategy has set outcomes and its success will be judged on how far it contributes towards this.

19 According to a study published on 25.5.09 by the Prince's Trust and Cass Business School in London

Priority one - providing a range of housing options

Overcrowding cannot be tackled through one single measure. The needs of overcrowded families will vary depending upon factors such as the stage in their family lifecycle, financial resources and health and support needs.

Overcrowding is best addressed by bringing together a range of measures to create a menu of options available to overcrowded families.

We have appointed an overcrowding officer with the Overcrowding Pathfinder funding, and they will have developed an “overcrowding toolkit” aimed at overcrowded families in social housing. The officer will visit overcrowded families, offering advice and assistance on the options available to them and will provide training to frontline officers on delivering “overcrowding housing options advice”.

Accommodation options

The range of options in the overcrowding toolkit include:

- Maximising the chances of re-housing for overcrowded families through the transfer register through area and property choice, and compromising on size of accommodation
- The Homeswapper scheme, a national internet based matching service for social housing tenants seeking to move home through mutual exchange²⁰
- Referral to the Landlord Deposit Scheme (LDS) for assistance with finding privately rented accommodation and tenancy deposits
- Low cost home ownership options.

The officer provides comprehensive information on each of the options. For example, when providing advice on maximising the families chances of re-housing through the transfer register they will advise the householder of their position on the housing register overall and by area, provide information on the relative popularity of different areas as well as the likelihood of larger vacancies becoming available. They are able to provide local information such as schools, transport links, cultural and shopping facilities for households who may be unfamiliar with some parts of the borough.

Case study one

Miss P, her two daughters (aged 17 & 14) and nine year old son were living in a two bedroom flat. The overcrowding officer had arranged an interview with her to discuss her options.



Miss P spent some time describing the effect that overcrowding was having on her family. She was very concerned that her 14 year old daughter's studies were being affected by her siblings' behaviour. Her oldest daughter had started to come home late from her friends and disturb her two siblings. Her youngest son has a learning disability and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and needed to have the room to let off steam on his own.

Miss P agreed to be registered with Homeswapper for a mutual exchange from a 2 to a 4 bedroom property. The overcrowding officer told her about the LDS, where the council would help Miss P to find a larger home in the private sector and showed her the details of some available properties. They discussed the implications for Miss P of moving into the private sector, including her tenancy rights, effect on her priority for re-housing and implications for Right to Buy to ensure that Miss P could make a fully informed choice. Miss P decided to look in the private sector and she and the overcrowding officer viewed three properties together. Miss P instantly fell in love with the third, a new build town house with a large garden, and a large bedroom at the top of the house. Miss P has signed a one year assured shorthold tenancy with a view to it being renewed for a minimum of five years. Each of her children has their own room and Miss P's son has a large garden to let off steam in!

²⁰ A mutual exchange is a “homeswap” between council and/or RSL tenants

Practical options

The options visit includes a discussion on how to mitigate the effects of overcrowding. This includes both practical measures and support for the overcrowded family. The officer may simply provide advice; they also have access to a capital grants.

Practical measures include:

- Removing bulky furniture and replacing with smaller space saving furniture
- Storage options
- Small adaptations: wash hand basins in bedrooms, partitioning bedrooms

Case study two

Miss T her son and daughter (aged 7 and 1) live in a two bedroom flat. The overcrowding officer discussed alternative housing options. Miss T said that nobody would be interested in a flat like hers. She said that private renting wasn't 'her bag'.



Miss T told the overcrowding officer that she had an awful lot of repair issues and she would like someone to look at her property. The officer arranged to visit to see if anything could be done to mitigate the effects of the overcrowding and reported her repairs to the repairs team.

During the visit, the overcrowding officer saw that Miss T had little storage and, as a result the bedrooms were very untidy. She suggested rearranging some of the furniture and looking at space saving furniture. Initially Miss T became defensive at the suggestion that she re-arrange her flat but was interested in what space saving furniture was on offer. After the visit the overcrowding officer sent her an e-mail with samples of furniture that would suit her and her family. Miss T picked under-bed storage boxes, shoe boxes and a children's toy tidy.

Miss T has received her furniture and has invited the overcrowding officer back to the flat after the storage boxes have been delivered to have a look and see what other improvements she has made to her flat.

Support to overcrowded families:

In addition to providing practical measures to mitigate the effects of housing, our strategy will address the support needs of overcrowded families. The overcrowding officer is developing links and information with a range of services. The overcrowding options interview will include an assessment of support needs, with signposting and referral to services.

The overcrowding officer is developing links and information resources about relevant agencies to enable referral and signposting, for example:

- Parentline plus: providing practical support and information for parents
- Children's centres providing resources and support to young families
- HAP<25 multi agency youth housing advice service
- Homework and after school clubs

Tackling worklessness

In his large-scale review of social housing, "Ends and means: the future role of social housing in England", Sir John Hills highlighted the role of housing authorities in tackling worklessness amongst social housing tenants, where employment rates are significantly lower than amongst other tenures. As a key frontline service, the overcrowding officer has a role to play in addressing worklessness by providing information, support and guidance to overcrowded families. Addressing these issues may, in the longer term, enable overcrowded families to resolve their own housing needs, through low cost home ownership initiatives or intermediate renting. The overcrowding officer is making referrals to *Croydon's Broadening Horizons scheme which employs two information, advice and guidance officers to tackle worklessness. The officer may also refer younger members of the family to Croydon's HAP<25 service, a multi-agency youth housing advice service and to Connexions.

Sharing the knowledge

The overcrowding officer service will be a targeted one; identifying overcrowded families in social rented housing and making contact, prioritising those with the highest level of overcrowding first. It is important that those services that may be the first port of call for overcrowded families are aware of the options available to people and how to refer.

*Croydon Housing Options Trailblazer which is supported by CLG Grant

The overcrowding officer is carrying out a range of training and briefing sessions with professionals in frontline services, for example tenancy officers and health visitors. This targets professionals according to the nature of their contact with the family; some professionals will receive more in-depth training to enable them to deliver housing options advice. Other services will be given the tools to refer and signpost overcrowded families.

Advice and support to overcrowded households in the private sector

The council's allocation scheme has been framed to ensure that families with a high level of housing need such as severe overcrowding have a high priority, regardless of tenure.

Our strategy will address severe overcrowding in the private sector by building the capacity of the housing options and advice service which delivers housing advice and homelessness prevention services to deliver the overcrowding options toolkit. Officers will also have the discretion to pay small grants providing practical solutions to mitigate the effects of overcrowding where this will prevent homelessness resulting from parental exclusion or relationship breakdown.

Under the housing act, the Council has the power to take enforcement action where there is statutory overcrowding. The Council has also set overcrowding standards for houses in multiple occupation (HMOs). The council's housing enforcement team deals with complaints about the condition of private sector homes from tenants living in single family dwellings or HMOs. The team inspect the accommodation and carry out assessments based on the housing health and safety rating system (HHSRS). The assessment looks at 29 hazards, of which overcrowding is one. The hazards

are then scored. This process identifies whether the hazard is category 1 or 2. The council has a statutory duty to deal with category 1 hazards and a power to deal with category 2 hazards. Where the property is so overcrowded that it is rated as a category 1 or 2 hazard, the team will take enforcement action, by serving a notice. Notices may range from an immediate order prohibiting use of the property to a delayed enforcement order, providing an opportunity to resolve the situation.

The housing enforcement team will work in conjunction with the housing advice team and, where they identify private sector accommodation which is rated as a category 1 or 2 hazard and is overcrowded, they will make a referral to the housing advice team. The housing advice team will contact the tenant, and provide advice and in some cases, assistance to address their housing needs.

Key actions:

- Implement a rolling programme of pro-active visits to overcrowded families.
- Refer 3 overcrowded families to LDS per month
- Increase take up of Homeswapper scheme by 10% per year
- Achieve 20 overcrowded or under-occupier moves through Homeswapper per year
- Conduct 3 training and briefing sessions a year, providing information on overcrowding options advice, referring and signposting overcrowded families.
- Utilise homelessness prevention funds to address severe overcrowding in the private sector where this will prevent homelessness.



Priority two - increasing the supply of larger homes

In Croydon, demand for affordable housing considerably exceeds supply. Although house prices in Croydon remain lower than the London average, household incomes are also below the norm.

The number of households applying to the housing register has grown year on year. Croydon's housing strategy 2006-10 highlighted the relatively high levels of overcrowding and set, as one of its main priorities, meeting the need for larger properties in the borough. One of the key aims in our overcrowding reduction strategy is to increase the supply of affordable larger homes within the borough.

There are four main elements to the council's strategy to increase the supply of affordable larger homes:

Council house building programme

We have introduced a larger homes strategy, prioritising development of larger homes on council owned sites.

We have built 34 large family homes, equipped with environmentally friendly features such as solar panels, wind turbines and rainwater harvesting with £3.2m grant to help ease overcrowding. The project delivered a new supply of 19 four-bed and 15 three-bed houses at various locations across the borough, that were let to overcrowded families on the housing and transfers registers in 2009.

A further phase of council house building, delivering at least 50 and up to 64 homes on 11 sites is under way. We have set an ambitious target to deliver 100 homes every year following phase 2. We will seek to include new retirement homes, for example bungalows within the council's new-build programme to encourage older tenants who are under-occupying larger homes to move.

Working with RSLs to deliver new affordable housing

Croydon has had a healthy development programme where we doubled the amount of grant funding it received from the government in the 2006/08 national affordable housing programme. We are confident that we will maintain this record in the 2008-2011 development programme. The overall housing development programme contains a target to ensure that 30% of new homes have three bedrooms and 20% have four bedrooms or more.

Capital resources for social housing in London are channelled through five sub-regional partnerships. Croydon is a member of the South West London Housing Partnership (SWLHP)²¹ which has been successful in ensuring resources are allocated for new social housing. On average 272 affordable homes were developed every year between 2002 and 2007. In total, of 605 homes developed through the 2008/09 programme; 42% of these had three bedrooms or more, in total 253. Six of these larger homes were wheelchair accessible. At present we are expecting 761 homes in 2009 and 2010, of which 38 will be larger wheelchair accessible homes. This figure will increase as bids for funding additional homes are made continuously. Whilst we have a very healthy development programme and are developing above the housing needs index (the measure of need for housing development), any development is on behalf of the sub-region as a whole. Therefore Croydon only get 25% of the increase.

The council continues to maximise the development of affordable housing through planning powers. Private developers are required to ensure that 40% of homes on sites of more than 0.5 hectares or 15 homes and 50% on sites with 30 or more homes are affordable. This provides for mixed, balanced communities. This source of social housing has been adversely affected by the recession.

21 Containing the seven authorities in the South West sub-region of London: Croydon, Kingston, Lambeth, Merton, Richmond, Sutton and Wandsworth

Extensions and de-conversions to create larger properties

The south-west London housing partnership was successful in bidding for funding from the Greater London Assembly (GLA) to extend and de-convert (re-create a large family home where it has been split into two smaller flats) existing homes. The grant funding provided £50,000 per extension or de-conversion, with a total of £694,000 awarded to the partnership during the period 2006-09. The funding was conditional upon the homes being extended by a minimum of two bedrooms, one double and one single.

We have completed 11 extensions, funded through the grant, with top-up funding from Croydon council. 10 three bedroom properties have been extended to create five bedroom homes and one to create a six bedroom home. In two of the homes, the funding was combined with major adaptations grant to create two fully wheelchair accessible homes. Where possible, the other homes were brought up to Lifetime Homes standard²² and, where necessary to decent homes standard.²³ Two of the homes were extended for existing overcrowded tenants, the remaining nine have been, or will be, let to overcrowded tenants on the transfer register. Funding of £1,430,000 has been obtained to extend a further 17 homes and to de-convert one home in 2009-11.

Partnership work with RSLs

- The importance of RSLs as providers of social housing is growing rapidly and they now own around 9,000 properties in the borough. We have very well established strategic partnership arrangements with registered social housing providers in the borough through a registered social landlord strategic partnership and a number of working groups.
- We have successfully negotiated increases in the council's nominations entitlement to vacant family homes from the nationally agreed standard of 75% to 90%.

Promotion of low cost homeownership.

- We have agreed a number of priorities with the registered social landlord which delivers low cost home ownership in our area (local Homebuy agent), Tower Homes, which are included in the Regional Service Level Agreement. Social housing tenants are given the greatest priority for social housing because they release accommodation to help others. Amongst social housing tenants, the greatest priority is given to families with children living in the most overcrowded conditions.

Preparing the Local Development Framework

- The Council is committed to preparing a Local Development Framework with the first element of it, the Core Strategy due to be submitted to the Secretary of State in May 2011. It is likely to be formally adopted as the Council's planning policy in 2012. The Core Strategy will set the overall planning policy framework for the borough including setting out the overall number of new homes, the general locations where they are likely to be built and the type of new homes that the Council will look for developers to provide.
- A further element of the Local Development Framework, a Site Allocations Development Plan Document is due to be submitted to the Secretary of State in 2013. In the Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD) the Council will allocate specific sites in the borough for new homes and will specify the number of new homes, size and tenure mix on each site. As the Site Allocations DPD is a daughter document of the Core Strategy the size and tenure mix on each site will be consistent with the overall policy framework set out in the Core Strategy.
- Another DPD, the Development Management DPD will set out general planning policies for determining planning applications. This may contain policies on the size and tenure mix in windfall residential developments (those which were unknown at the time the Site Allocations DPD was being prepared). The Development Management DPD is due to be submitted to the Secretary of State in 2014.

Source of additional supply	2008/09	2009/10
Council housebuilding	32	50 (funding allocated-awaiting decision on further 14)
RSL development	253 actual further 340 expected	421 (funding allocated)
Extensions and deconversions	11	18
Total	636	489

²² A standard set to provide accessible and adaptable accommodation for everyone, from young families to older people and individuals with a temporary or permanent physical impairment.

²³ A standard for council and RSLs set by government to ensure that homes are warm, weatherproof and have reasonably modern facilities. Councils and RSL are expected to meet the Decent Homes standard by 2010.

Retirement housing

It is of equal importance to ensure that there is an adequate supply of good quality retirement housing to enable older people who no longer wish to live in larger homes to move, freeing up this accommodation for overcrowded families. Croydon's housing for older people draft strategy for 2008-13 looked at the need for retirement accommodation.

The strategy suggests that, taking into account existing need and the growing older population, about 200 to 300 new social rented homes a year are needed over the next seven years, and that retirement developments are likely to prove an attractive option within this need.

The need for new private sector homes for older people is estimated to be in the region of 450 to 550 a year over the next seven years. This contains demand for retirement developments which is most likely to be for homes for sale. The economic downturn may stall such developments in the near future but the need for more retirement housing will nevertheless increase. The strategy highlighted the need to develop different models of support and accommodation; sheltered housing has become unattractive for many older people who wish for more choice over the level and type of support they receive.

Key actions:

- Commence phase 2 of the council house building programme by December 2009
- Ensure that 30% of new affordable homes have three bedrooms
- Ensure that 20% of new affordable homes have four bedrooms or more
- Carry out the 2009-2010 programme of extensions and de-conversions
- Ensure that 90% of family homes let by registered social landlords are let to applicants from the council's housing register.
- Submission of the Core Strategy to the Secretary of State in May 2011.



Priority three - making the best use of existing social housing

Allocations priorities

Housing legislation requires authorities to give “reasonable preference” to people with certain housing needs within its allocation scheme. Included in the list of those to whom the authority should give reasonable priority are:

“People occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions”.

Croydon’s housing allocations scheme has been framed to give priority to households which are overcrowded or under-occupying their current homes. Under the allocations scheme, applicants are assessed and placed in an appropriate band. Band 1 applicants are considered to be in urgent need to move. Applicants who are 3 bedrooms or more overcrowded are placed in band 1. Similarly, tenants under-occupying their existing home are placed in band 1.

Croydon’s bedroom assessment under its allocations scheme is close to and in some respects more generous than the Bedroom Standard²⁴ and adopting the standard would result in a number of applicants being placed in a lower band. We have identified a tension between our allocations scheme that adopts a broad brush approach to addressing housing need, and uses waiting time as a means of determining priority, and creating a scheme that recognises the acute needs of severely overcrowded families. For example, a family with two boys and two girls occupying a two bedroom flat may find themselves in the same band as a family with two children of different genders; they both require a three bedroom property. We have started to consult over amending our measure of overcrowding.

There is a shortage of properties with 4 or more bedrooms. To give large families in overcrowded conditions the opportunity to alleviate their overcrowding more quickly and improve their situations, and in keeping with the choice agenda, seriously overcrowded families are able to choose a property which is smaller than their assessed needs but bigger than the current home, with their housing priority revised to reflect their changed housing need. We are able to offer this flexibility to all applicants moving into council accommodation and into some RSL properties, but our view is that a number of RSLs could still offer a greater degree of flexibility. We will continue our campaign to ensure that RSLs offer this flexibility.

We recognise the impact of allocations to larger homes on the sustainability of local areas. Our allocations scheme allows us to develop a lettings plan for allocations to larger developments, enabling us to take into account the effect that the mix of family sizes and the age of children may have on issues such as anti-social behaviour in the area.

The allocations scheme makes it possible to make an allocation to part of a larger family to allow the rest of the family to remain in present accommodation to alleviate overcrowding.

We have substantially increased family re-housing from the general waiting list in 2009/10, with 363 families re-housed compared with 14 in 2002-3. We housed 154 overcrowded families from the housing and transfer registers (including homeless families) in 2008-9. In the first two quarters of 2009-10, 207 overcrowded families have been re-housed.

Key actions:

- Increase the number of overcrowded families in social tenancies re-housed through the housing register by 20%

Reducing under-occupation

It is important to maximise new affordable development within the borough; this is addressed in “Increasing the supply of larger homes”. Alongside this we must make best use of existing social housing resources. Our actions for effective use of the housing stock include the council’s under-occupation strategy which employs a combination of incentives and personal approach to encourage moves which release larger dwellings.

Tenants releasing under-occupied properties are given priority within the allocations scheme as well as being offered a range of incentives, including cash payments, arrangement and payment of removals, arranged by a specialist allocations officer.

24 Proposed measure of overcrowding defined by CLG

The Special Transfer Payment (STP) scheme provides a payment of £2,000 per bedroom released, and provides practical and financial assistance with arranging removals. We have set a target of 60 moves. The incentive is also payable when a tenant moves through mutual exchange. Where tenants release four bedroom and larger homes and trade down by at least two rooms, enhanced payments of £10,000 per room are made. Provision has been made for 10 moves. We have made pro-active visits to all 324 four bedroom and larger homes in our stock to ensure that under-occupiers are aware of the available opportunities. We will continue to do so, developing a rolling programme to ensure that new under-occupiers are visited and existing under-occupiers are reminded about the scheme.

We have extended the council's financial incentive payments to the RSL sector to ensure the best use of all the rented social housing in the borough, STP payment to RSL tenants, reimbursing 50% of the £2000 that RSLs pay to tenants who move to a smaller home. RSLs offer the resultant family home to an overcrowded family nominated by the council. We have already secured RSL partnership which covers 75% of RSL family homes and includes the largest RSLs in Croydon and have set a target of 10 moves.

Development opportunities within the RSL new build programme are identified and we ring-fence specific developments considered attractive to under-occupiers. The older peoples' housing strategy found that older under-occupiers generally wanted good quality independent retirement housing: ground floor accommodation (preferably bungalows) in good condition, and in a quiet neighbourhood but close to public transport.

The Assisted Private Purchase scheme (APPS) is a cash incentive scheme which assists council tenants to become homeowners by way of a cash grant and is actively promoted to under-occupying tenants who may be considering home ownership. Unlike Right to Buy, where the tenant purchases their existing home, APPS releases the social rented property for another household in housing need.

The Seaside and Country Homes²⁵ scheme is actively promoted, with tenants trading down through this scheme being entitled to the Special Transfer Payment scheme. At the time of writing the strategy, Croydon has the largest number of tenants registered with the scheme in the SWLHP (34) and has achieved the highest number of moves since August 2007 (14).

A specialist allocations officer allows us to take a personal approach in encouraging moves to release larger dwellings. The officer provides practical support to under-occupiers by arranging removals. Under-occupiers wishing to move out of borough can be supported to register on other local authority housing registers, to bid for properties within choice based lettings schemes and to access sheltered accommodation outside Croydon. Once accommodation has been secured, support to move can include cash incentives and help with removals.

Focus groups with older applicants on the housing register, held during the development of the older peoples' housing register looked at older applicants views about what they wanted from general needs or supported retirement housing. People felt pressure to let vacant homes quickly restricted the time for taking up offers too much, especially for people transferring to smaller homes or where the new home needed decorating. The strategy also found that coping with the practical and emotional aspects of moving can be a barrier to older people moving to a smaller home. We will enhance the level of support provided to under-occupiers who move, initially by appointing a second overcrowding officer, with a portfolio that will include developing a more comprehensive information and support package for under-occupiers as well as leading on a number of new initiatives. Subject to available funding, we deliver a pilot project offering practical and emotional support to under-occupiers who are moving to smaller accommodation, irrespective of tenure and qualification for financial incentive schemes in 2010-2011.

This service may, in the future together be delivered through a one-stop older people's housing advice service which would provide the practical support that older people may require when moving, an action identified in the older people's housing strategy.

25 A housing mobility scheme that offers older households living in Council or RSL housing in Greater London the opportunity to move home

For some under-occupiers, financial assistance and practical support are insufficient to encourage them to move. They may be unwilling to leave a family home that they have maintained themselves over several generations for a smaller home that is of average standard. For others, the idea of decorating or furnishing the home is daunting. We offer an enhanced level of decorations to properties which have been pre-allocated to under-occupiers. In 2009-2011 we aim to improve four 2 bedroom properties to a high specification, through the **SWLHP Your Move scheme**. Improvements will include a high standard of decorations, providing soft furnishings, white goods, new kitchens and bathrooms. The improved properties will be offered to under-occupying tenants trading down by two bedrooms or more. The family homes they vacate will be let to severely overcrowded families.

It is important that we actively market the range of incentives and options available. We will continue to do so through a variety of means such as leaflets distributed to GPs surgeries, libraries and lunch clubs, promotion by tenancy officers and neighbourhood wardens, and regular articles in the residents newsletter "Open House". We will continue to run "transfer days" at locations across the district providing information on housing options for overcrowded families and under-occupiers and attended by agencies such as Homeswapper and Seaside and Country Homes.

Larger homes released through initiatives to make best use of housing stock

Initiative	homes released
Special transfer payment	70
APPS	30
Seaside and Country homes	10
Your move	4
	114

London housing partnership (SWLHP) initiatives

The South-West London Housing Partnership's overcrowding project is an initiative funded with grant provided by the CLG. The grant provides funding for a project manager working across the boroughs in the sub-region. There are four streams of work within the project:

- Raising the performance across boroughs on dealing with under-occupation and co-ordinating use of the CLG funding.
- Developing increased options for over-crowded families.
- Working on sub-regional and London wide liaison and events.
- Setting up an under-occupation scheme for RSL's in the subregion. The Perfect Fit South West London scheme is an under-occupation scheme designed for RSL tenants who wish to move within the SWLHP region. All 7 boroughs and 10 RSLs are signed up to, and fund the scheme, with some funding made available from the department of Communities and Local Government (CLG). The scheme will aim to promote under-occupation for RSL tenants, create more moves by under-occupying RSL tenants and release family homes to let to severely overcrowded tenants of the ten RSL partners.

The partnership will be hosting a sub-regional housing options day in 2009, with a focus on under-occupiers and those seeking mutual exchanges.

Key actions:

- Encourage 70 under-occupying social housing tenants to move to smaller homes (60 council and 10 RSL tenants)
- Implement a rolling programme of visits to under-occupying households
- Recruit a second overcrowding officer with a focus on under-occupation
- Develop a pilot project to support under-occupiers in 2010-2011
- Re-house four under-occupying households through the SWLHP Your Move scheme in 2009-2011
- Release 30 family homes through APPS
- Achieve 10 moves through Seaside and Country Homes
- Arrange two housing transfers days a year to promote options available to both under-occupying tenants and overcrowded households

Priority four: developing and promoting re-housing opportunities within the private sector

Our housing stock is dominated by a large owner-occupied sector and a relatively small social housing sector, compared to the capital as a whole.²⁶

Tenure	Croydon	London
Owner occupation	69%	57%
Rent from council	10%	17%
Rent from RSL	7%	9%
Private rent	14%	17%

This limits our ability to tackle overcrowding through the use of social housing alone. Severely overcrowded families requiring larger properties will wait a number of years until they have sufficient priority within the banding system to be offered a property. Our private rented sector is closer to the average for London and provides good quality accommodation and a solution to many families. The private sector also provides opportunities for tenants to move outside the borough.

The landlord deposit scheme (LDS)

We have been running this scheme for a number of years; initially developed to provide good quality temporary accommodation for homeless families. The scheme is, essentially a tenant matching service, with the council paying the deposit for the tenant, and the landlord committing to a tenancy of two years or more. Accommodation procured through the LDS is subject to a number of checks: against the HHSRS²⁷, to ensure that rents align with the Local Housing Allowance (LHA)²⁸, and to check that the family can afford the rent payments. Tenants may be referred to a resettlement service. Landlords are provided with a follow-up service for the first two years of the tenancy with the procurement team assisting them with housing benefit claims and mediating between landlord and tenant.

The LDS has been highly successful and popular amongst housing applicants and tenants. We have been looking at ways to increase the number of tenancies we are able to secure within existing resources and have launched a “bond” model. The council, rather than providing a cash deposit, provides a surety to the landlord.

The LDS is promoted by the overcrowding officer as one of the options available to families who are overcrowded by more than two bedrooms. The implications of accepting a private tenancy in terms of tenancy rights, priority on the housing register and Right to Buy are fully explained. The overcrowding toolkit also involves giving realistic information about the availability of social housing within the borough and the length of time the family may wait, allowing them to make an informed choice between the options available. Tenants have the option of moving outside the borough if they choose.

Croylease

Croylease is a pilot scheme, with a target of providing accommodation to 50 overcrowded tenants. The scheme assists overcrowded social housing tenants who are currently occupying two bedroom properties and need three bedrooms, and releases two bedroom homes for new and homeless families who the council has a duty to house. Under Croylease, landlords lease properties to the council for a fixed term of five years, renewable to ten with break clause after one year. The properties must be within the borough of Croydon and meet decent homes standards. The properties are managed and maintained by the council throughout the lease term. At the end of the lease period the property is handed back in its original condition.

The scheme was launched in 2008 and, initially, promoted to overcrowded families who had been waiting the longest to move. We found that these tenants, once the scheme had been explained to them, chose to wait for a social housing tenancy. It has been those tenants who had been waiting a shorter time and therefore had less priority on the transfer register who opted for the scheme. At the time of writing the strategy, twenty-four tenants had moved to a larger home since August 2008, and we have a target to move a further 26 by 31 March 2010 (now met).

26 Croydon's housing strategy 2006-2010

27 A health and safety risk assessment carried out by environmental health inspectors

28 The level of housing benefit paid for the size of property, household and area

Bringing empty properties back into use

We employ a range of measures to return empty properties to use, including empty property grants funded through the Mayor’s Targeted Funding Stream. In 2008/11 Croydon has £1,480,000 which will fund approximately 60 grants. These grants will be tied to properties being rented or leased through schemes aimed at households in housing need, for example the Croylease scheme described above. We have a target to bring an additional 340 empty properties back into use through the action of an empty property officer and the use of enforcement powers.

Out of London scheme

This is a SWLHP scheme, targeted at social rented tenants who will release homes for severely overcrowded families. A private company, the HCR Group, facilitates moves to private sector accommodation outside London and is paid a fee for doing so. The HCR Group takes out a two-year tenancy and is responsible for paying the rent to the landlord. The tenant pays rent to the HCR Group.

We will promote this scheme proactively to both under-occupying and overcrowded households, targeting the most severely overcrowded families.

We will continue to actively look for new opportunities, and bring these into the options “toolkit” available to overcrowding and under-occupation officers.

Additional larger homes secured through private sector initiatives

Initiative	Additional homes
Landlord deposit scheme	50
Croylease	30
Out of London scheme	10
Empty property grants	400
Total	490

Low-cost home ownership

We have agreed the following priorities with our local Homebuy agent, Tower Homes. People with a priority for assistance as included in the regional service level agreement are:

- Council tenants & RSL tenants living in Croydon
- Applicants in temporary accommodation living in Croydon
- Applicants living in Croydon who are currently living in accommodation with:
 - Three fewer bedrooms than they need
 - Two fewer bedrooms than they need
 - One fewer bedroom than they need
 - Other applicants living in Croydon, and in accommodation with inadequate bedrooms for their need
 - (Households with children to be prioritised within each of the above groups)

We will actively promote this option to tenants who are able, and who wish to move into home ownership, through direct contact, promotional events and marketing through the council’s website.

Key actions/targets:

- Move 50 overcrowded families through the Croylease scheme by 31.3.10
- Refer 10% of families receiving overcrowding options visits to the landlord deposit scheme
- 30 social housing tenants to move into the private sector, through the LDS scheme by 31.3.10
- Refer 10 overcrowded or under-occupying households to the Out of London scheme by September 2010
- Promote home ownership opportunities within the borough through 2 promotional days per year



Delivering the strategy

Resourcing the strategy and action plan

There are several sources of funding which are used to tackle overcrowding in the social housing sector. One initiative, Croylease is self-financing.

Capital funding

Capital funding has been made available through more than one source:

- Through social housing grant (channelled through the SWLHP) and the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) approved development grant. The overall housing development programme contains a target to ensure that 35% of new homes have three or more bedrooms.
- Through the Greater London Authority (GLA) Targeted Funding Stream which is allocated on a sub-regional basis to SWLHP: We have been able to fund development of 34 three and four bedroom council houses and a programme of 11 de-conversions and extensions. Through SWLHP we have been successful in obtaining funding to carry out 18 extensions and de-conversions during 2009 to 2011 from the Targeted Funding Stream. Funding from this stream has also been allocated to increase under-occupation moves by renovating four 2 bedroom properties in desirable areas to a high specification as well as to enable 10 social housing tenant households who are overcrowded or whose move will release a family-sized home for an overcrowded family to move out of London to a private sector property.
- The council's under-occupation schemes, Special Transfer and Enhanced Transfer Payment schemes, and the under-occupation officer are funded through the housing investment programme. Revenue for this programme is taken from the housing revenue account (HRA), income from council housing rents.

Revenue funding

- CLG overcrowding pathfinder funding for 2008-09 and overcrowding grant for 2009-10 will be used to develop our strategy, fund the work of the overcrowding officer increase the number of under-occupation moves from council and RSL homes, fund rent deposits for overcrowded families seeking to move to the private sector, make small payments to offer practical solutions to tenants living in overcrowded social housing and fund small adaptations such as washbasins in bedrooms to mitigate the effects of overcrowding.
- Revenue funding through the council's general fund, income raised from council tax is used to fund assisted private purchase scheme.

Sub-regional initiatives

The SWLHP's overcrowding project is an initiative funded with grant provided by CLG. The grant provides funding for a project manager working across the boroughs in the sub-region. The project is a response to the government's drive to find solutions to the problem of overcrowding, particularly in social rented housing in London. It covers both local authority and RSL partners' activity in this area.

Monitoring and reviewing the strategy

The action plan in appendix 1 sets out a comprehensive work plan for the council and our partner RSLs. We will ensure that the strategy is integrated into the service plan that sets out the annual work plan for the year and is used to present work priorities for teams and officers. The process ties in with the budget setting process.

The strategy has set out a number of outcomes and the success of the overcrowding strategy will be judged against how far it contributes these. A number of actions will contribute towards wider local area agreement priorities.

The strategy should be seen as a “live” document, and should be kept under review. We are currently reviewing the terms of reference of our homelessness strategy implementation group with the intention of creating a housing needs and homelessness group. This group would then monitor and review this strategy along with the homelessness strategy and other action plans relating to the work of the housing needs and options division. Rather than renewing the strategy in 2014, our plans to tackle overcrowding will be incorporated into the housing strategy; developing this overcrowding reduction strategy will mean that tackling overcrowding will be given high priority in the future housing strategy.

Our outcome reporting to CLG measures the level of overcrowding against the Bedroom Standard. Our baseline data was reported in April 2008. We will use this data to measure the overall success of our strategy. We will benchmark our performance against performance data released by CLG and share good practice.

Whilst we have been developing this strategy, we have recognised a gap in obtaining customer feedback on our strategies to tackle overcrowding. We will be addressing this by incorporating targets to obtain feedback from our customers. For example, we will obtain feedback on our under-occupation schemes and from tenants who have moved into the private sector.

Key actions:

- Benchmark performance against CLG data and review targets for tackling overcrowding
- Review the overcrowding reduction strategy annually
- Build actions into service planning for 2010-2014
- Conduct evaluation of our services with customers

Relevant partnerships

This strategy has been formulated in partnership with RSLs within the borough, and within the SWLHP. Increasingly, private landlords are key partners in tackling housing need in the borough. As with many other areas of social exclusion, the issue of overcrowding cannot be tackled by one agency alone and relies on effective multi-agency partnerships. We rely on the involvement of both statutory and community agencies such as health services and faith groups to ensure that the most vulnerable families are aware of the options to tackle overcrowding, and to set realistic expectations. Similarly GP's, neighbourhood wardens and older people's services are essential in spreading the word about under-occupation incentives to those tenants who want to move to smaller accommodation but don't know how to approach it. This may be through displaying leaflets in GP's surgeries, or by briefing other professionals on the options available and referral mechanisms.

The strategy will be aligned to the “joining up at the front line” initiative; with frontline staff in a number of areas receiving awareness training in overcrowding and under-occupation initiatives and equipped with the necessary information to signpost and refer to appropriate services.



Links to other council strategies

The prime reason for overcrowding in both the private sector and social rented sector is a shortage of affordable housing, both in Croydon and in the south-east of England in general. A housing need survey in 2002 identified the need for 21,000 new affordable homes (social rented and low cost home ownership homes) over the next five years to meet both existing and future housing need in Croydon. New housing supply has not been keeping abreast of this requirement.

Croydon's housing strategy 2006 to 2010 recognised overcrowding as a housing need. The strategy set out objectives to improve housing supply by making the best use of existing homes and increase the supply of larger homes in order to reduce overcrowding. The overcrowding reduction strategy should be seen as a supporting document to the existing housing strategy and key actions and objectives will be incorporated into the next housing strategy. The future housing strategy will have reference to the Mayor of London's Housing Strategy, a statutory document that sets out targets to halve severe overcrowding in London's social housing by 2016 and to reduce the number of tenants under-occupying social housing by two-thirds within the same period. The strategies of London local authorities are statutorily required to be in conformity with the London housing strategy.

Our homelessness strategy 2008-13 recognises the impact that overcrowding can have on youth homelessness; this overcrowding reduction strategy will contribute towards targets to tackle youth homelessness. Our strategy to reduce under-occupation in social housing has a clear link to the older persons' housing strategy, which sets out the way in which housing services will develop in coming years. *Improving health and well-being: our plan for a healthy Croydon 2008-11*, produced by the Healthy Croydon Partnership, recognises that people living in poor housing conditions experience health inequalities.

The reduction strategy contributes to the SWLHP strategic objective to make best use of existing stock, including using the private sector to meet housing need.

We will ensure that our priorities are incorporated into other strategies and plans where relevant. This will be achieved through working with established forums.

Risks and mitigation

Investment in council housing, extensions and de-conversions and the use of the private sector should allow us to alleviate some overcrowding in the borough in the shorter term. There are some real risks and external pressures that we cannot control which may affect our ability to continue to deliver this strategy in the longer term and to meet ambitious targets such as those within the Mayor's housing strategy.

- The current recession has resulted in a rapid decline in private sector development. Development started on 90,430 homes in 2008/09, a reduction of 42% compared with 2007/08. There was a slight increase in RSL development, which increased by 5% between 2008/09 and 2007/08, but private house building declined by 51% in the same period.²⁹
- Croydon has been awarded growth borough status in recognition of the potential for housing intensification within the borough. It is likely that the focus for new housing and commercial development will be along a housing growth corridor stretching from the metropolitan centre south to Purley and Coulsdon and north to Thornton Heath and Norbury. The need for family housing will be taken into account in this growth.
- Social housing development is likely to decline for a number of reasons:
 - Falling receipts from low-cost home ownership which has in the past subsidised social rent
 - Private finance is scarcer and more expensive
 - Affordable house building resulting from section 106 agreements³⁰ has dried up as private house building has fallen
 - Government spending controls injecting in the HCA developed programme
- There is a significant shortage of larger homes within London. Only 16% of new homes built in 2005/06 had three or more bedrooms. The supply of new, larger homes fell every year from 2000/01.³¹ We have set targets for larger homes in our development programme, but RSLs have expressed concern that the scarcity of private finance may impact on its deliverability. Subsidy paid on a grant per unit, rather than a grant per bed-size basis acts as a disincentive to RSLs producing larger homes.

29 House Building: March Quarter 2009. England, UK Statistics authority

30 Where developers are required to provide social housing on developments beyond a certain size

31 Housing provision in London 2005-2006, GLA 2007

- The Council has seen an increasing number of private landlords willing to work with us since the recession, and we have been able to meet overcrowded families' needs within the private sector. How long this supply will continue when the recession comes to an end is uncertain.
- Many of our initiatives are funded externally, with funding from CLG and from the Mayor's funding scheme and, as a result are time limited. Without that funding, initiatives would need to be delivered within existing resources and balanced against other priorities funded through the general fund and housing revenue account.
- The recession, rising unemployment and loss of earnings may have an impact on revenue raised both through the general fund and housing revenue account. There is a possibility that council tax and rent arrears will rise, with more households facing economic pressures. The council is taking proactive steps to provide information to households facing financial difficulties and to maximise benefit take-up in order to mitigate this effect: A credit crunch website has been developed www.croydoncrunch.com, and regular information on sources of help is provided in the council's publication "Your Croydon", and we are recruiting additional advisers to our welfare benefits team.

Summary of equalities impact assessment

The obvious beneficiaries of this strategy will be families with children. Older people may also benefit from under-occupation initiatives.

BME families are over-represented amongst overcrowded families within London. The London & Sub-regional Strategy Support studies project (GLA, 2005) found that overcrowding was particularly prevalent amongst Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black African families, with 32.8%, 21.2% and 20.9% of families in each of these groups overcrowded respectively. White British and White Irish households were more likely than others to be under-occupied.

The EqIA found that overcrowded BME families were over-represented compared with the proportion of BME households on the list overall.

- Overcrowded Asian households represent 14% of overcrowded households compared to 12% of households on the waiting list
- Black households represent 45% of overcrowded households compared with 44% of the waiting list overall, and

- Households recorded as "other" represent 10% of overcrowded households compared with 3% of the waiting list overall. White families comprise 26% of overcrowded households compared with 34% of the waiting list.

There are variances between levels of overcrowding and tenure:

- Overcrowded Asian families are more highly represented on the transfer register amongst households requiring four or more bedrooms.
- Overcrowded Black families on the housing and transfer register are more highly represented amongst families that are overcrowded by two or more bedrooms according to the Croydon standard and require family homes of three or more bedrooms.
- Families recorded as "other" have a proportionately higher level of overcrowding across all bedroom sizes and levels of overcrowding.

The strategy should have a positive effect on overcrowded BME families, particularly measures to increase the supply of larger homes and to differentiate between levels of overcrowding within the allocations scheme in order to give more priority to severely overcrowded families.

The EqIA found that overcrowded families containing a disabled family member could be more likely to experience accidents within the home. Increasing the supply of larger homes will increase this group, but targets will need to continue to be set for accessible properties.

The EqIA also explored the impact of the strategy on older people and disabled people. The assessment found that the overall effect of the strategy would be to increase the supply of accommodation for these groups and therefore to benefit them.



Glossary

ADHD	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
APPS	Assisted private purchase scheme
BME	Black or minority ethnic persons
CCHR	Centre for Comparative Housing Research
CLG	Department of Communities and Local Government
EqIA	Equalities impact assessment
GLA	Greater London Assembly
HAP<25	Housing advice project for under 25's
HCA	Homes and Communities Agency
HHSRS	Housing Health and Safety Rating System
HMO	House in multiple occupation
Homeswapper	“Homeswap” service for social rented tenants
HRA	Housing revenue account
JSNA	Joint strategic needs assessment
LAA	Local area agreement
LDS	Landlord deposit scheme
LHA	Local Housing Allowance
NI	National indicator
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (now CLG)
ONS	Office of National Statistics
RSL	Registered social landlord
Seaside and Country homes	Organisation assisting older social tenants to move out of London
Social rented housing	Council or registered social landlord rented homes
STP	Special transfer payment scheme (under- occupiers of social rented properties)
Enhanced STP	STP for council tenants giving up more space
SWLHP	South-west London housing partnership containing seven authorities in the South West sub-region of London: Croydon, Kingston, Lambeth, Merton, Richmond, Sutton and Wandsworth

Priority this contributes to	Actions (SMART)	Target Date	Named Lead Officer	If relevant – Partnership or Partner lead
Provide a range of housing options	Visit 25 overcrowded social housing tenants per month to offer pro-active housing options advice	April 2009 - March 2010	Housing supply manager	Housing needs and homelessness group
	Refer 3 overcrowded social housing tenants to LDS per month	April 2009 - March 2010	Housing supply manager	Housing needs and homelessness group
	Increase take up of Homeswapper scheme by 10% per year	April 2009 - March 2010	Housing supply manager	Housing needs and homelessness group
	Achieve 20 overcrowded or underoccupier moves through Homeswapper per year	April 2009 - March 2010	Housing supply manager	Housing needs and homelessness group
	Conduct 3 training and briefing sessions a year to statutory or community agencies, providing information on overcrowding options advice, referring and signposting overcrowded families.	April 2009 - March 2010	Housing supply manager Housing options manager	Housing needs and homelessness group
	Utilise homelessness prevention funds to address severe overcrowding in the private sector where this will prevent homelessness	April 2009 - March 2011	Housing options manager	Housing needs and homelessness group
Increasing the supply of larger homes	Commence phase 2 of the council house building programme: • 50 units over 9 sites	By December 2009	Development manager	
	Ensure that 30% of new affordable homes have 3 bedrooms, and 20% have 4 bedrooms or more	2008 - 2011	Development manager	
	Carry out 2009-2011 programme of extensions and de-conversions to social rented properties: • 5 extensions – 1 add bedroom • 12 extensions – 2 add bedrooms • 1 de-conversion	By December 2011	Development manager	
	Ensure that 100% of new-build family homes and 90% of all family homes let by registered social landlords are let to applicants from the Croydon housing register	2009 - 2014	Director of housing needs and options	Housing needs and homelessness group

Making the best use of social housing	Encourage 70 under-occupying social housing tenants to move to smaller homes (60 council and 10 RSL tenants)	March 2010	Housing supply manager	Housing needs and homelessness group
	Set an annual target for under-occupation moves	April 2011 - March 2014	Housing supply manager	Housing needs and homelessness group
	Implement a rolling programme of visits to under-occupying social housing tenants	April 2010 - March 2014	Housing supply manager	Housing needs and homelessness group
	Recruit a second officer with a focus on under-occupation	March 2010	Housing supply manager	Housing needs and homelessness group
	Seek external funding to develop under-occupation support pilot	March 2010	Business development manager	Housing needs and homelessness group
	Re-house 4 under-occupying social housing tenants through the SWLHP Your Move scheme	March 2011	Housing supply manager	SWLHP
	Release 30 family sized council tenancies through assisted private purchase scheme (APPS)	March 2010	Housing supply manager	Housing needs and homelessness group
	Set annual target for moves through APPS	April 2010 - March 2014	Housing supply manager	Housing needs and homelessness group
	Achieve 10 moves through Seaside and Country Homes from family sized social rented homes per annum	March 2014	Housing supply manager	Housing needs and homelessness group
	Arrange 2 housing transfers days a year to promote options available to both under-occupying tenants and overcrowded families	March 2014	Housing supply manager	Housing needs and homelessness group
	Free up between 30 and 35 RSL properties with 3 bedrooms or more	March 2010	Priscilla Masava, Perfect Fit, SWLHP	SWLHP
Developing and promoting re-housing opportunities within the private sector	Move 50 overcrowded social tenants through the Croylease scheme	March 2010	Procurement manager	Housing needs and homelessness group
	Move 30 overcrowded social tenants into the private sector through the Landlord Deposit Scheme or a similar bond scheme	March 2010	Housing supply manager	Housing needs and homelessness group
	Bring 400 empty private sector homes back into use, through grants and new empty property loans.	March 2010	Director of assets and renewal	
	Refer 10 overcrowded or under-occupying social tenants to the Out of London scheme by September 2010	October 2010	Housing supply manager	SWLHP
	Promote home ownership opportunities within the borough through 2 promotional days per year	March 2014	Housing options manager Development manager	Housing needs and homelessness group

Delivering the strategy	Benchmark our performance against CLG data from other councils and set stretch targets	2009 - 14	Housing supply manager	Housing needs and homelessness group
	Review the overcrowding strategy annually	2010 - 2014	Business development manager	Housing needs and homelessness group
	Ensure that actions in the strategy are built into service plans	2010 - 2014	Director of housing needs and options	Housing needs and homelessness group
	Provide awareness training for frontline housing management, care management and substance misuse staff in overcrowding, under-occupation and the options available	2009 - 2010	Housing enforcement manager	Housing needs and homelessness group
	Conduct follow up surveys with overcrowded families who have moved into the private sector through the Landlord Deposit Scheme and Croylease	2010 - 2011	Housing supply manager/ head of service development	Housing needs and homelessness group
	Carry out follow up evaluation of the effectiveness of furniture grants in mitigating the effects of overcrowding	2009 - 2011	Housing supply manager/ head of service development	Housing needs and homelessness group
	Conduct exit surveys at tenant open days to test the usefulness of the information provided	2009 - 2011	Housing supply manager/ head of service development	Housing needs and homelessness group

