Item No. 7	Classification: Open	Date: 15th November 2022	Meeting Name: Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Commission
Report title:		Overcrowding and housing allocations	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Karen Shaw Head of Housing Solutions	
Cabinet Member:		Councillor Darren Merrill, Cabinet Member for Council Homes and Homelessness	

RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. Note the content of the briefing and the actions taken to understand and respond to levels of overcrowding in the borough.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. Southwark has significant levels of housing need in the borough. This may include where households have no stable home or where the accommodation they occupy is unsuitable for their needs. There are two keys ways in which these levels of need are seen by the Housing Service – through applications to the authority as homeless or at risk of homelessness and through applications to join the housing register.

3. Overcrowding is one of the areas of housing need that is observed in both the homelessness and housing register pathways.

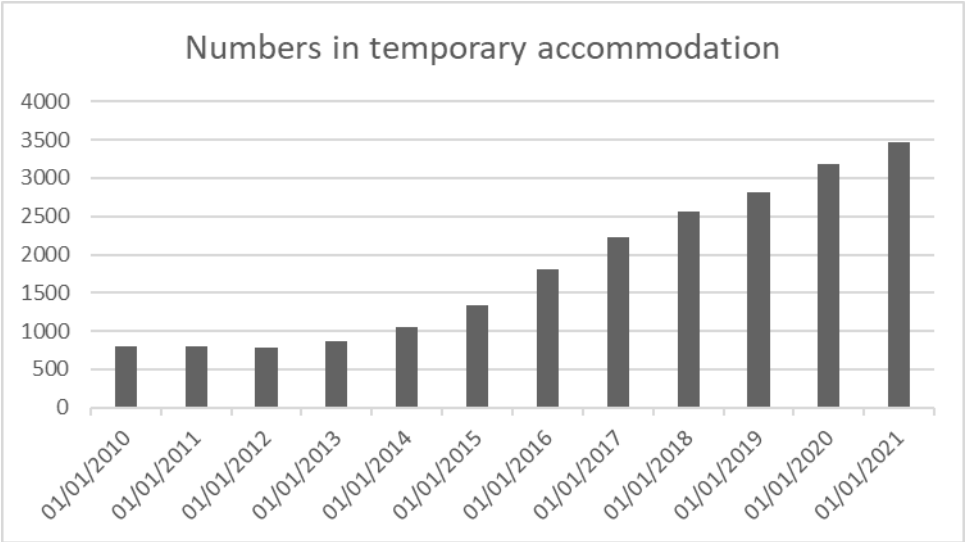
4. This report describes current levels of known housing need as captured through the housing register and homelessness and illustrates the place of overcrowding within that need. It also updates on activity to respond to overcrowding.

Housing need and overcrowding in Southwark

5. The number of households in housing need in Southwark can be described by considering the number of households who are being assisted because they are homeless or at risk of homelessness and by reflecting on the broader numbers on the housing register.

6. There are currently 3,607 households in temporary accommodation provided by Southwark. This number has been relatively stable during 2022/23 but table 1 below illustrates that over the last 10 years it has grown dramatically.

Table1:



7. The numbers of households approaching as homeless or at risk of homelessness reached a peak in 2020/21 when 3,883 households approached. This reduced in 2021/22 to 2,855. In 2022/23 current trends suggest approximately 2,500 homeless approaches by year end with an average monthly approach of 200 new households.

8. Those approaching as homeless largely do so because they have lost available accommodation either as a result of being excluded by family or friends or being evicted from the private rented sector. There are however a portion of households who approach because their current accommodation is unreasonable to continue to occupy. Legally this is a high threshold and so it is a smaller group than those who have lost their home. Amongst this group are a small number who are extremely overcrowded and as result can no longer remain in their current home.

9. A better picture of levels of overcrowding however is seen when viewing the profile of households on the council's housing register. There are two categories of overcrowding recognised on the register – overcrowding (band 3) and statutory overcrowded households in band 1 with the highest priority.

10. Table 2 below shows the number of households on the register broken down by band and bed size. This illustrates the high overall numbers on the register and the range of bed sizes required.

Table 2:

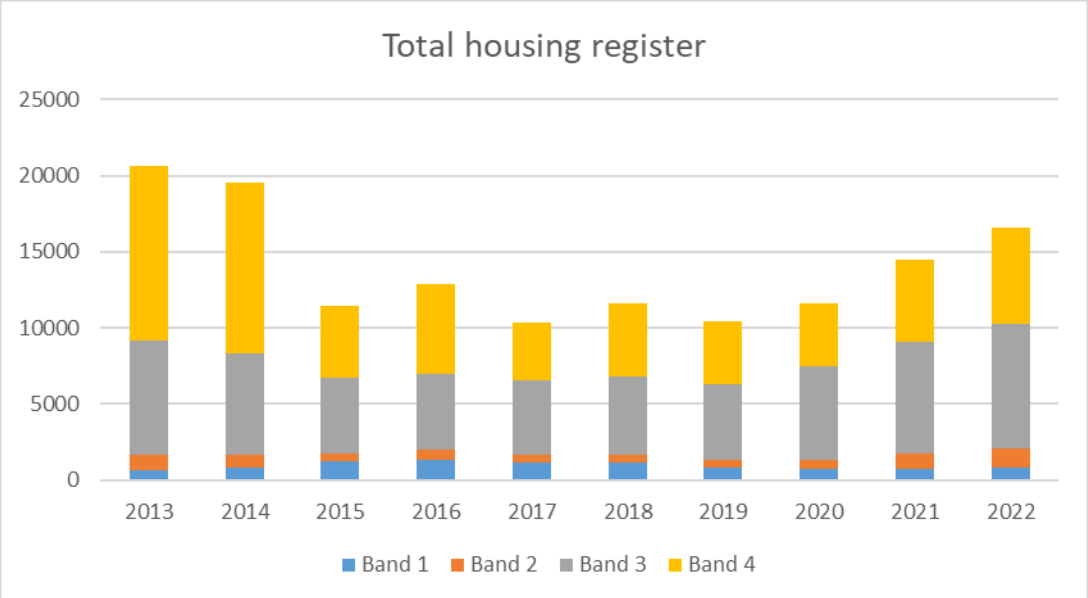
BED NEED	TOTAL BAND 1	TOTAL BAND 2	TOTAL BAND 3	TOTAL BAND 4	BAND TBC	NO. OF HOUSEHOLDS
1	346	422	2337	5368	26	8499
2	280	202	2849	977	64	4372
3	123	275	2046	441	19	2904

4	58	177	729	153	6	1123
5	16	42	213	41	1	313
6	9	8	32	9	0	58
7	3	0	14	2	0	19
8	0	0	2	0	0	2
TBC	1	3	35	3	0	42
TOTAL	836	1129	8257	6994	116	17332

11. The number of households on the housing register who are currently overcrowded is 4,807. Of these 69 meet the criteria for statutory overcrowding and the remainder are in band 3 with moderate overcrowding.

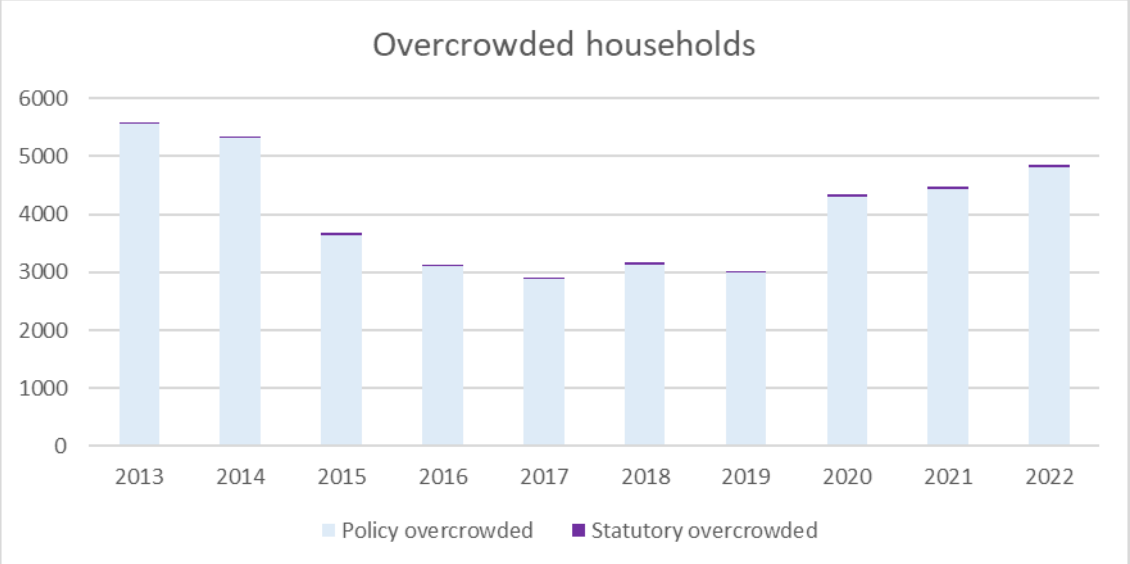
12. Over time the number on the register have fluctuated and the levels of overcrowding can also be seen to fluctuate. Table 3 and 4 below show the changes in those on the register by band over time and the changes over time in terms of overcrowding. Both are a snapshot position at the start of each financial year. The drops seen on the register in 2014/15 are the impact of a major applications review.

Table 3:



	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Band 1	685	855	1276	1321	1123	1161	851	720	777	868
Band 2	964	850	520	704	555	549	472	581	959	1233
Band 3	7519	6634	4906	4997	4903	5143	4976	6228	7387	8151
Band 4	11507	11195	4709	5828	3738	4724	4159	4054	5321	6342
Total	20675	19534	11411	12850	10319	11577	10458	11583	14444	16594

Table 4:



	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
B3 Policy overcrowded	5560	5310	3643	3100	2877	3138	2989	4308	4437	4803
Statutory overcrowded	31	32	34	30	26	32	31	29	31	44
Total Overcrowded	5560	5310	3643	3100	2877	3138	2989	4308	4437	4803

13. This shows levels of overcrowding have appeared to rise markedly since the beginning of the covid 19 pandemic, or perhaps more accurately, the numbers of overcrowded households who have decided to register for a social housing move have risen.

14. There are of course higher levels of overcrowding in the wider community which are not seen in these statistics because some overcrowded households do not or cannot join the housing register (for example those subject to immigration controls). The scale of this overcrowding may come out in the census statistics once these are released.

15. The 2011 census showed that 39% of households with dependent children living in the private rented sector were overcrowded by at least one bedroom. Based on analysis in a 2019 report on housing conditions this could be as many as 16,770 homes.

16. Cost of living issues and the broader housing crisis are likely to also impact on this issue. The availability of homes at the more affordable end of the private sector has shrink significantly in the last 2 years and reports show that the homes available are up to 17% more expensive. In this context it is likely some households on benefits or low incomes will rent smaller homes that they can afford within local housing allowance levels and this will contribute to rising overcrowding levels.

Responding to overcrowding

17. The Commission received a report in October which illustrated the work taking place within the council to address the issues of empty homes in the private sector and work to reduce the number of council void homes, significantly those requiring major works.

18. The efforts to reduce empty properties in the borough will make some contribution to meeting overall housing need and this will make a small contribution to reducing the numbers experiencing overcrowding.

19. Within the council housing stock there is focused work underway through the Rightsizing Action Plan. This aims to address levels of under occupation in the council stock and by association support the response to overcrowding. The action focusses on a number of areas illustrated below:

- **Moves through the housing register –** currently under-occupying and applicants on the Housing Register are awarded the highest priority Band 1 as an incentive for them to give up large properties and they have to bid for properties of their preferred choice. Successful bids are based on the date they have registered. Significant individual support is required to assist under occupiers to bid. There are currently over 400 under occupying tenants registered for a move.
- **Identifying under occupiers -** There are more under-occupiers in the stock who are not registered for housing and who may be reluctant to consider a move. They may however also be struggling with bills and the layout of larger homes as they get older. Work is underway to identify these residents and through the resident services area teams and through a variety of publicity and campaigns.
- **Mobility options** available include Housing Moves, the Pan London mobility scheme which support tenants of London boroughs to move to another home in a different borough, Seaside and Country Homes and mutual exchange options such as Homeswapper and House Exchange.
- **Home Purchase Grant Scheme** -This scheme is aimed at Southwark Council tenants who would like to vacate their tenanted properties and purchase a private property on the open market. Eligible and successful applicants get financial assistance in the form of a cash grant. The amount of the grant is based on the number of bedrooms within the property and additional funds may be given if it has any desirable features. The council can also pay for moving costs up to £3,000.
- **Smart Moves Scheme** – This is the Council's under occupation scheme that supports residents to downsize. Residents have band 1 priority on the housing register. In addition, the council offers £1,000 for every bedroom a resident gives up when they move. Other support if offered for households to move.

20. The number of social housing lets has declined year on year. In 2021 only 839 council and housing association homes were let through the register. Table 5 below shows the breakdown by bedsize.

Table 5:

Studio	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5 bed	6 bed	Total
49	297	295	149	41	4	1	839

21. This number of lets is inadequate to meet the demand for social housing from those on the housing register and the position has worsened over recent years, despite the contribution that the council's commitments to building new homes is making. Table 6 below shows the number of social housing lets over time.

Table 6:

Year	Supply let
2021	835
2020	853
2019	1,043
2018	1,462
2017	1,603
2016	1,410
2015	1,684

22. Covid 19 undoubtedly impacted on the number of social homes that were relet and delayed some new build schemes, however it is unlikely any significant increase in social lets will be seen in 2022.

23. Alternative responses, beyond the provision of a social home will be necessary to address this challenge. This might include measures to alleviate the impacts of overcrowding as well as looking alternative housing solutions, though this is challenging in the current market.