

# Housing Scrutiny Commission Report

---

## **Overcrowding Reduction Strategy (LCC Stock)**

Lead Member Briefing: 29<sup>th</sup> June 2020  
Housing Scrutiny Commission: 7<sup>th</sup> September 2020

---

Assistant Mayor for Housing: Cllr Elly Cutkelvin  
Lead Director: Chris Burgin

## Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
- Report authors: Justin Haywood, Service Manager – Housing Solutions & Partnerships, Caroline Carpendale, Head of Service - Homelessness, Prevention & Support.
- Author's contact details: [justin.haywood@leicester.gov.uk](mailto:justin.haywood@leicester.gov.uk)  
[caroline.carpendale@leicester.gov.uk](mailto:caroline.carpendale@leicester.gov.uk)
- Report version number: 1.0

### 1. Purpose

- 1.1 To inform Members of the Housing Scrutiny Commission of a new initiative to develop and implement an Overcrowding Reduction Strategy. The strategy aims to take a multi-pronged approach to reduce and ease overcrowding in the city, focussing on those in most need. Although it is unrealistic to aim to eradicate overcrowding, the programme will set ambitious goals to make a significant and ongoing difference through a large programme of projects over time.
- 1.2 The strategy will focus initially on reducing overcrowding within Council stock, but it is intended to later roll out any successful elements to other housing sectors within the City, where they can be practically applied – i.e. Housing Associations, Private Rented Sector.
- 1.3 As such the longer-term vision is to create an Overcrowding Reduction Strategy covering all tenure types within Leicester City. There are risks associated with attempting this approach from the start, so a phased approach will be taken, starting with LCC Tenants, and lessons learned will help to form the wider strategy. Furthermore, social housing has higher levels of overcrowding than the private rented sector.

### 2. Background

- 2.1 The Council continues to face challenges in meeting the huge demand for affordable housing and attempting to reduce the overcrowding that many of our Tenants experience.
- 2.2 Overcrowding remains the single biggest reason why households apply to the Housing Register. This is followed closely by homelessness, of which a proportion of family exclusions are at least partially as a result of overcrowding. As such, we know it to be a significant issue in the City.

#### Overcrowding Standard, Bedroom Standard and Leicester's Housing Allocations Policy

- 2.3 Overcrowding has been a cause for concern since the public health and social reforms of the 19th century.

- 2.4 Although the intention of the legislators in 1935 was that the standards should be regularly updated, they were in practice carried over unchanged into the 1985 Act. They are as a result now well out of line with contemporary expectations. For example, a couple with a boy aged 15 years and a girl aged 13 years in a one-bedroom flat would not be statutorily overcrowded because the father and son could share one room and the mother and daughter the sitting room (or even the kitchen).
- 2.5 Although this remains the standard for assessing Statutory Overcrowding, a more modern definition of overcrowding is used in the Survey of English Housing, known as the Bedroom Standard. This is based on the ages and composition of the family. A notional number of bedrooms are allocated to each household in accordance with pairings by age, sex and relationships of family members. A separate bedroom is allocated to each pairing, and one to any family member left over. This standard is then compared with the number of bedrooms available for the sole use of the household.
- 2.6 Under this standard the family described above would be entitled to three bedrooms rather than one.
- 2.7 The Housing Act 1996 and 2004 respectively have given further scope for identification and direction of how to decide whom is overcrowded.
- 2.8 Leicester City Council's Allocations Policy uses this Bedroom Standard and the most recent guidance to identify bedroom need when awarding priority banding to households applying for re-housing.
- 2.9 Tenants with a bedroom deficit will be awarded Band Priority 1, 2 or 3 - dependent on severity.

**Band 1 – Statutory/Critical Overcrowding**

Where a household's size exceeds the maximum occupancy level of the property, either by assessment of Statutory Overcrowding, or stock intelligence.

**Band 2 – Severe Overcrowding or families in 1-bed accommodation**

Where a household does not meet Band 1 need, but their current home is 2 or more bedrooms smaller than ideal, or where a family is residing in a 1-bed flat.

**Band 3 - Overcrowding**

Where a household does not meet Band 1 or 2 need, but their current home is 1 bedroom smaller than ideal. Most commonly seen with families in 2-beds who need a 3-bed due to growth of the family.

- 2.10 Tenants with a bedroom excess will be awarded Band 1 or 2 depending on level of under-occupation.

Housing Register Data – Overcrowding (focussing on LCC Tenants):

- 2.11 Based on a recent<sup>1</sup> report a total of 605 LCC tenants are currently on the Housing Register wanting to move to a larger property. Of these;

---

<sup>1</sup> May 2020

- 352 families require one extra bedroom. i.e. living in a 2-bedroom property requiring a 3 bedroom, or in a 3-bed requiring a 4-bed.
- 90 families are currently living in 1-bedroom flats, wanting to move to a 2-bedroom property.
- 163 (27%) are severely/critically/statutorily overcrowded, (requiring two or more extra bedrooms).

#### Census data – Overcrowding (all tenure types):

- 2.12 The 2001 Census found that 10.6% of Leicester’s households were overcrowded compared with 7.1 % nationally.
- 2.13 Ten years later the 2011 Census found that overcrowding in Leicester had reduced and 9.8% of Leicester’s households were experiencing overcrowding. However, compared to 4.6% nationally, the reduction in Leicester was slower than average. Overcrowding in Derby and Nottingham was 5% and 6% respectively.
- 2.14 The ward with the highest level of overcrowding was Wycliffe, with around a third of households living in overcrowded accommodation.
- 2.15 North Evington, Westcotes, Stoneygate, Belgrave, and some areas of Beaumont Leys wards also recorded high levels of overcrowding with around a fifth of their households living in overcrowded accommodation.
- 2.16 If we cross compare this with data referenced in 2.11, we see correlation for Wycliffe, Evington, and concentrated areas of Beaumont Leys, but contradiction with regard to Stoneygate, and Belgrave (See Appendix 1 and 2 for further information). Further research into this; and potential correlations with ethnicity, housing types / tenure / ownership within Wards, and other relevant factors; will be done as part of the early stages of the Strategy (see 3.2).
- 2.17 This research may provide valuable information about the need for targeted community approaches, or different forms of communication, which will inform strategy objectives and development of solutions.

#### Housing Register Data – Under-occupation (focussing on LCC and RP Tenants):

- 2.18 **Note on this section:** *It is important to include RP (Housing Association Registered Provider) Tenants as they are awarded priority for a downsize move to release more social housing for overcrowded households. They can mutually exchange with Council Tenants and are therefore relevant.*
- 2.19 By contrast we have a total of 165 LCC and RP tenants who are currently on the Housing Register wanting to move to a smaller property. Around 80% want to move from family accommodation into 1 bed accommodation.
- 2.20 Generally, only 5% of lettings are to cases who are under-occupied. Whilst the exact reasons are not known, it is likely that this is largely down to the low bidding activity by the cohort, due to lack of urgency and the ability to wait for an ideal, rather than just suitable, solution.

Census data - Under-occupation (all tenure types):

2.21 The 2011 Census found that Leicester has relatively low levels of under occupation (55.4%) compared to England as a whole (68.7%)

### **3. Overcrowding Reduction Strategy**

3.1 The aim of the strategy will be to develop a multi-faceted and corporate approach (led by the Housing Division) to tackling overcrowding, comprised of the following five broad priorities:

#### **3.2 a) Further develop a detailed profile of overcrowding and under-occupation within LCC stock**

3.2.1 Build on the pilot that was undertaken to address known gaps in intelligence regarding overcrowding and under-occupation to include the barriers preventing tenants from downsizing, including identification of any equality issues.

3.2.2 Research can be undertaken in the following forms;

- Via welfare visits / housing options planning visits.
- Via Survey / mandatory annual online data collection exercise of tenants requiring completion of their current circumstances, composition/occupants, income information etc.
- Via further analysis of the Housing Register, and data obtained through information sharing agreements with other areas of the Council e.g. the Revenues and Benefits Service.
- Involving other partners such as Public Health, especially with renewed focus on the city following developments with the COVID-19 pandemic

#### **3.3 b) Provide a range of enhanced housing options to overcrowded and under-occupied households. This includes use of Planning to promote and deliver an increased and targeted Housing offer.**

3.3.1 Making use of the information gained in (a), the main objectives of this priority are to; 1) create increased mobilisation within the stock and 2) create more opportunities for overcrowded and under-occupying households to move out of LCC stock to release Social Housing stock for those most in need. For example:

- Convene a Programme Board to holistically review the City's position, and creatively explore new and existing opportunities to resolve overcrowding and under occupation. Examples include:
  - Prioritising the most severely overcrowded households for a case-managed approach. Identified households will have an individualised housing plan

created to look collaboratively at all of the options available to them. This will enable their housing needs to be assessed beyond current application processes, and managed in agreement with the tenant, to fully maximise the range of housing options available to them. This approach will therefore be similar to that taken for applicants who apply to the service with a threat of homelessness.

- Review the recent changes to the Allocation Policy that re-prioritised overcrowding across all 3 bands of the Housing Register to reflect different severity and to ensure a high priority for the most overcrowded. Look to propose further changes to try to ensure that a proportion of available properties are ring-fenced to LCC tenants experiencing high need.
- We will work to create and promote alternatives to the Right to Buy to assist people into home ownership whilst reducing the number of stock-properties lost. Examples include:
  - Working in partnership with EMH Housing to promote Shared Ownership as an alternative housing option for those unable to access the housing ladder but able to afford a supported shared ownership scheme.
  - Exploring Property Purchase Grant Schemes such as the one currently active in the London Borough of Southwark.

### **3.4 c) Ensure that we are making best use of current LCC housing stock**

3.4.1 The Programme Board and Project Team will also work to review and evaluate the current position, and ensure our stock is being effectively use to prioritise households most in need, and to ensure that under-occupation is reduced so homes can be fully utilised in terms of size. Examples of items on the agenda include:

- Review and evaluation of the current process for promoting mutual exchanges to achieve a higher number of home swaps between under occupied and overcrowded households.
- Re-introduction of the Easy Move Scheme which offers support and financial incentives to tenants who want to downsize, who are under-occupying family homes. This will remove barriers and increase the number of exchanges.
  - The scheme will support tenants through the whole moving process until they have been successfully rehoused. It is recognised that some tenants will require more support than others.
  - The scheme will offer a cash incentive for tenants under occupying to move. Along with this incentive payment there will be the offer of the removals and disconnection and reconnection of appliances.
- Making existing accommodation more suitable to reduce the need for moves, and improve the profile of stock. For example, looking at the feasibility of extending

homes that are overcrowded as an alternative resolution. This would enable families to remain in their neighbourhood and maintain existing support networks.

### **3.5 d) Maximise opportunities to develop new social housing to meet the needs of overcrowded and under-occupying households, for example**

3.5.1 We know that a great portion of those under-occupying LCC homes are elderly Tenants. We intend to use collection methods in Priority (a) to gather evidence on how best to develop stock to attract older aged Tenants to give up family homes. Specific consideration should be had with regard to;

- development of an attractive Sheltered Housing offer
- a focus within the building programme to develop bungalows / age designated new-build flats
- building larger family homes – a closer examination of accommodation in the city, and buying larger homes ‘off the peg’ as part of the acquisition programme.
- A focus to develop or acquire housing in areas of the city favoured by those ethnic groups for whom statistics show are more affected by overcrowding.

### **3.6 e) Ensure that solutions, whether through the Housing Register or other options, have longevity and sustainability at the core**

To ensure that solutions and new initiatives can be further developed and regularly reviewed to confirm that we continue to have a range of options available to manage under-occupation and reduce overcrowding to mitigate the need to introduce flexible tenancies.

## **4. Next Steps**

4.1 A Programme Board will be set up to take the aims and objective of the strategy forward and it is intended to provide regular updates to HSC as the strategy develops. This will include a series of more defined aims and targets as each individual project within the strategy is started, so progress and results can be monitored and evaluated.

The Programme Board will consist of Project / Workstream Leads within Housing, and will also seek to include regular representatives from;

- Children’s Services – to take into account the impact on children and families
- Adult Social Care – to take into account the impact on vulnerable adults

Irregular/ad-hoc representation may then also be sought from other areas such as IT Equalities, Planning, Public Health, as needed to complete objectives. As mentioned previously, the intention is to expand this strategy to beyond LCC tenants if successful, at which point we would seek representation from Regulatory Services to ensure that statutory responsibilities relating to overcrowding are appropriately cited within the Private Rented Sector.

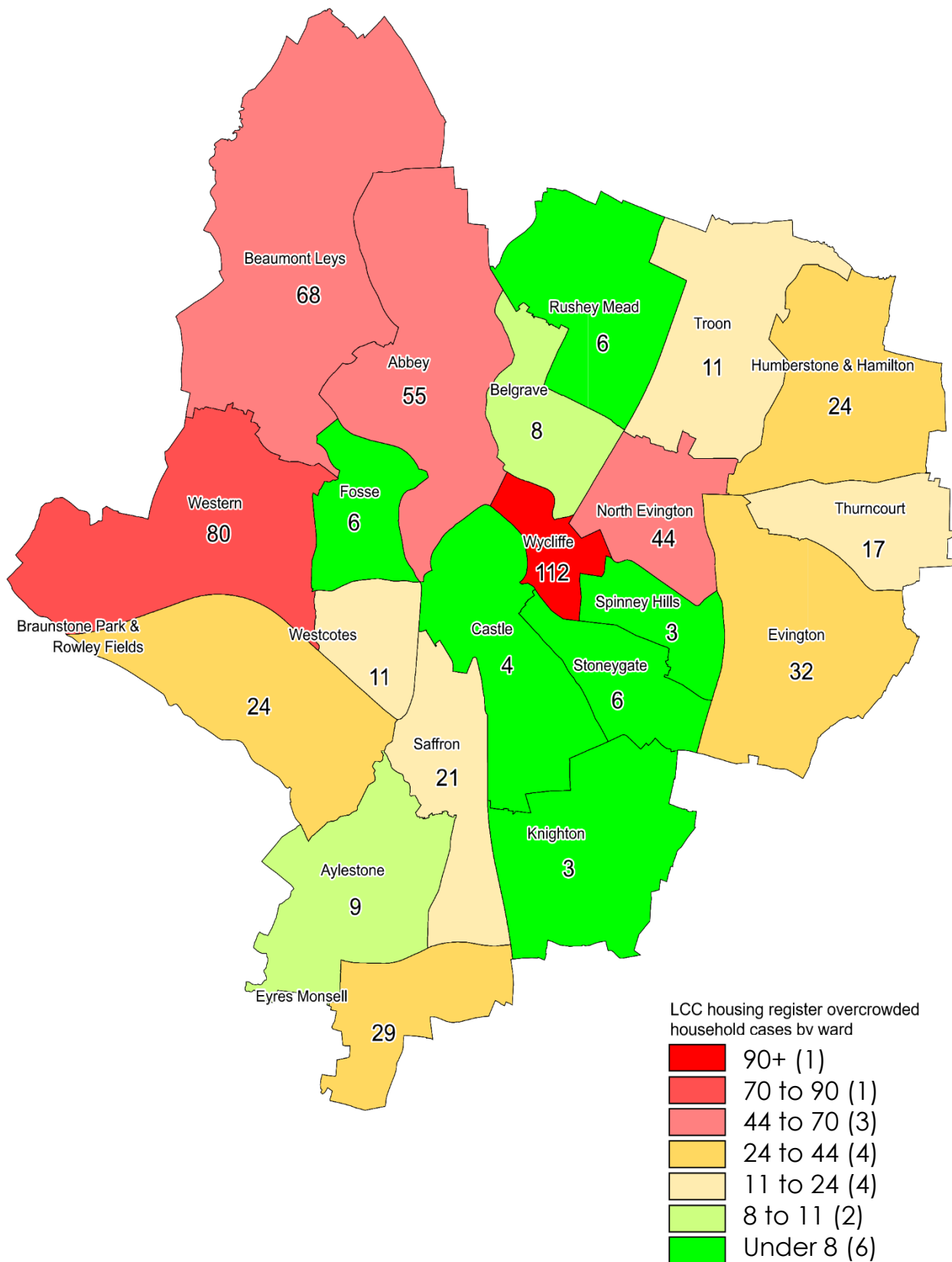
To enable the Board and Housing Scrutiny Commission to monitor progress, a small number of Programme KPIs will be set up, and a larger number of PIs will also be set up relevant to particular workstreams. With regard to the broader Programme KPIs we intend to set up monitoring for:

- To reduce:
  - Overall LCC Overcrowding Quotient – a figure based on a weighted formula, using Housing Register data.
  - Number of households on the Housing Register lacking 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5+ bedrooms.
- To increase:
  - Number of overcrowded households rehoused...
    - ...through the Housing Register
    - ...through Mutual Exchange
    - ...through other solutions (e.g. shared ownership, private rented sector)

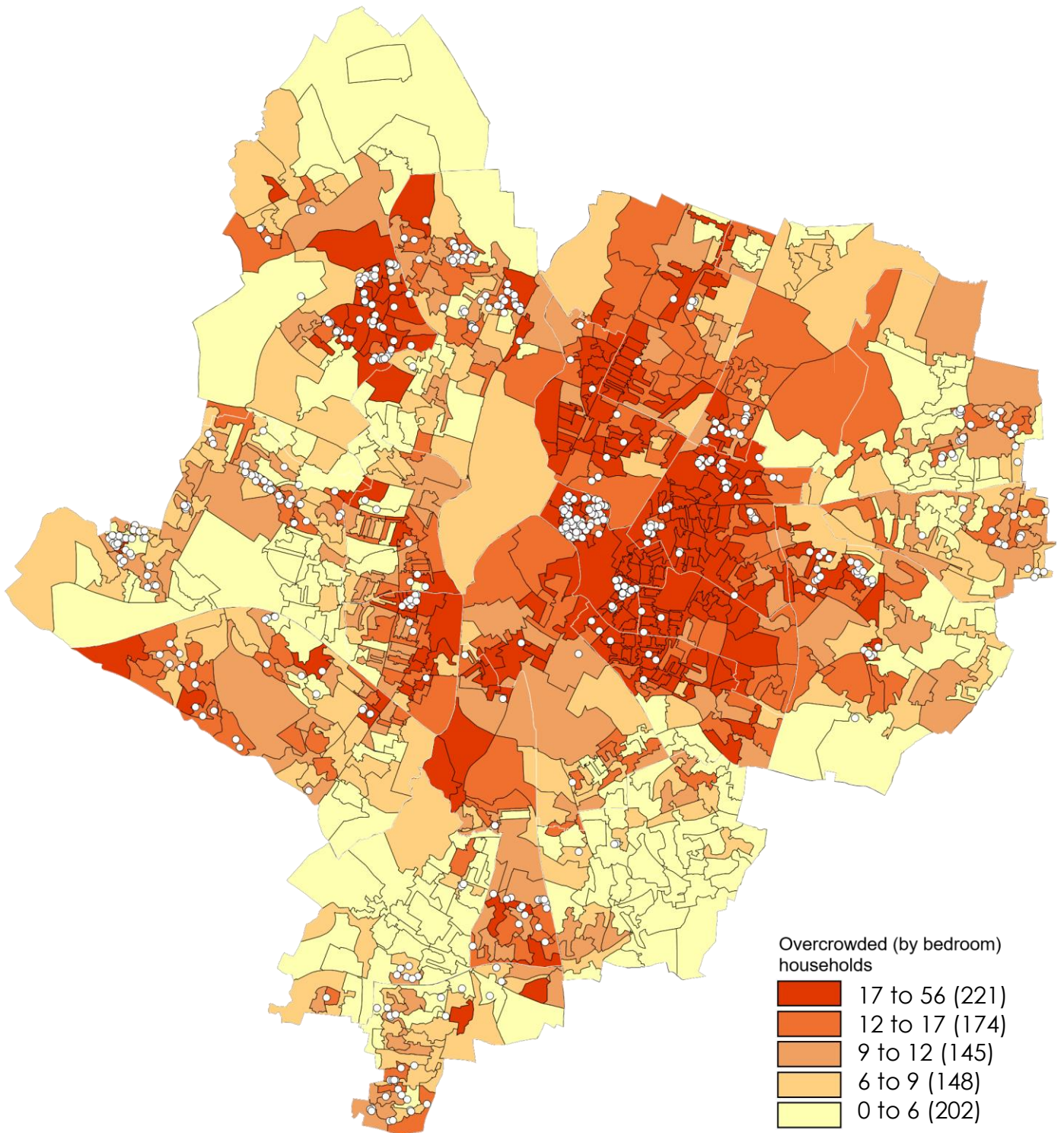
4.2 A key aim will be to have a full communication plan for tenants and stakeholders with a commitment to publish an overcrowding reduction strategy that is reviewed at regular intervals and adapted to meet any emerging and changing needs in the city.



**Appendix 1 – Housing Applications from LCC Tenants where Overcrowding is the main reason for applying, distributed across Wards**



**Appendix 2 – Housing Applications from LCC Tenants where Overcrowding is the main reason for applying (white dots), overlaid onto 2011 Census Overcrowding data for all Tenure Types (colour shading)**



Source: 2011 census