



Health and Residential Space Standards

For consideration by: Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny
Commission

Date: 5 December 2019

Lead director: Ivan Browne

Useful information

- Ward(s) All
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1. Purpose of report

- To provide a view on factors that make for healthier homes and neighbourhoods and the specific role of residential space standards on this.
- To provide details of collaboration between the Public Health and Planning departments, in respect to residential space standards.

2. Report Summary *(to highlight key info /issues)*

2.1 Public health seeks to highlight that the built and natural environments we develop and live in can significantly influence a person's ability to adopt and maintain healthy behaviours. Therefore, policy and practice related to these environments should be carefully considered for their potential impacts on local patterns of health and health inequalities.ⁱ

2.2 Some of the UK's most pressing health challenges, such as, obesity, mental ill health, premature morbidity and mortality, can all be influenced by the quality of the built and natural environment we are exposed toⁱⁱ.

2.3 Housing, specifically, is a foundational determinant of health across the life course. To support health, it needs to be designed and constructed in a manner that helps people to live independently, safely and well. Unsuitable or 'unhealthy' housing is known to have serious long-term effects on physical and mental health and wellbeing.ⁱⁱⁱ These risk are particularly associated with cold and hazardous homes, those that don't meet the households needs (where the home is overcrowded or inaccessible) or a home that doesn't provide a sense of security.^{iv} In 2017 it is estimated that the effects of unsuitable homes cost the English NHS at least £1.4bn per year and wider society over £18.6bn.

2.4 The adverse health effects associated with a lack of space, overcrowding, damp and cold, are linked to a range of conditions and diseases in children and adults, including respiratory conditions, tuberculosis, meningitis and poor mental wellbeing and social cohesion.

2.5 Public health considers that the adoption of residential space standards, amenities and facilities can help to protect and promote the health and wellbeing of residents of Leicester City through the prevention of ill health across the life course.

2.6 Leicester's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2024^v recognises the wider environment-oriented factors and subsequently has 'Place' as one of its five key themes for health improvement. This strategy clearly acknowledges that some of the

shaping of the 'healthy' built and natural environment needs to be supported by Planning policy and practice.

2.7 Locally, public health has advocated for an increased focus on the health and wellbeing-related outcomes from Planning policy and activity through:

- An extensive response to the 2nd Stage Local Plan Public Consultation, which included a review of the evidence of the health impacts of housing
 - This calls for heed to be taken in the development or alteration of housing serving groups where risks to health and wellbeing from poorer housing are greater. These groups include children, and their families; people with long-term conditions, mental health issues and/or learning disabilities; people recovering from ill health, older people, people who spend a lot of time at home such as carers, low-income households, and people who experience multiple inequalities (inclusion health groups)
- Collaboration with Planning on the recent *Corporate Guidance - Achieving Well Designed Homes: Residential Space Standards, Amenities and Facilities* (August 2019), around:
 - a short section detailing the negative health impacts of limited and poorly designed residential space, amenities and facilities and the positive health and wellbeing gains from a built and natural environment that is sensitive to the needs of the population
 - an appendix offering basic Health Impact Assessment (HIA)¹ guidance for developers, in collaboration with Planning colleagues.

2.8 In 2015, the Government issued the Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS) around the nature and size of residential accommodation. For these to be adopted, a local authority must prove local need for such, unless locally developed space standards are included in the existing Local Plan, which is not the case for Leicester.

2.9 Leicester is looking to fulfil the series of tests which allow for NDSS adoption. A Corporate Working Group has therefore developed guidance - *Corporate Guidance - Achieving Well Designed Homes: Residential Space Standards, Amenities and Facilities* (August 2019) in response to 'concerns...about the amount of residential development that has been completed recently in Leicester which includes small units (i.e. below the Nationally Described Space Standards- NDSS), with unsatisfactory levels of residential amenity and the consequential health and social impacts on both individuals and on the character of parts of the city'.

¹ The most widely used definition for HIA is that from the European Centre for Health Policy (1999) Gothenburg Consensus:

'A combination of procedures, methods and tools by which a policy, programme or project may be judged as to its potential effects on the health of a population, and the distribution of those effects within the population'.

However, as the practice of HIA evolves, other definitions are being offered and the following definition emphasises the critical nature of collaboration and the multiple understandings of health and wellbeing, based on the varying viewing points, including the power of the participants and evidence-creators: '...a process through which evidence (of different kinds), interests, values and meanings are brought into dialogue between relevant stakeholders (politicians, professionals and citizens) in order imaginatively to understand and anticipate the effects of change on health and health inequalities in a given population'

2.10 Developers are 'encourage[d] to use the NDSS in proposals, and [reassured that] through application of this Guidance the Council will receive NDSS compliant developments positively'.

2.11 Space standards are particularly important for Affordable Housing, as this is usually let at full occupancy. The Council's 'Housing Division leads by example on this issue: [with] all new council homes built since 2010 have been built to the council's former "Space Standards for Affordable Housing" and all new proposed new build council homes will be built to NDSS'.

2.12 The application of space standards makes for a better home environment as they tend to lower tenancy turnover, which is more likely to render health and wellbeing benefits through 'more settled neighbourhoods, a greater sense of belonging and less anti-social behaviour'.

2.13 In addition to the application of space standards, The Housing Health and Safety Rating System is a requirement of the Housing Act 2004 and is 'a method for local authorities to assess housing conditions. The key principle of the system is that a dwelling, including the structure, outbuildings, amenity space, means of access etc. should provide a safe and healthy environment for the occupants and any visitors.' This is another Planning vehicle that can be used too support the health and wellbeing of our population.

2.14 Building regulations also encompass powers to ensure 'the health, safety and well-being of the public'.

2.15 When the Council sells land and property for residential development, any bids received are required to meet Council 'expectations towards residential amenity' and adherence to adopted local planning, housing, health and wellbeing policy. The degree of compliance in these areas would typically inform the final decision-making process.

2.16 Therefore while pursuing adoption of the NDSS is positive, it should be recognised as but one available Planning lever to support and protect health and wellbeing. Multiple health and wellbeing protective and supportive measures exist in the current Local Plan and more have been proposed in the forthcoming draft Local Plan.

3. Recommendations

3.1 Scrutiny members are asked to:

- Note the efforts being made to gather evidence to support NDSS adoption
- Note that other health and wellbeing-protective measures are entrenched within this Guidance and in the draft Local Plan, for residential developments.

4. Financial, Legal and other implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Rohit Rughani, Principal Accountant, Ext. 37 4003

Legal implications

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report at this time.

Mannah Begum, Principal Solicitor, Commercial and Contracts Legal, Ext 1423.

Climate Change and Carbon Reduction implications

There are no direct climate change implications associated with this paper. However, housing is a vital area to address in tackling the climate emergency, as it is responsible for a third of the city's overall carbon emissions, and there are many links between healthy and sustainable housing, such as the need for sufficient daylighting and good insulation.

Aidan Davis, Sustainability Officer, Ext 37 2284

Equalities implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have statutory duties, including the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which means that, in carrying out their functions they have to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

Whilst there are no direct equality implications arising from this report, the adoption of the Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS) should lead to improved outcomes for people from across a number of protected characteristics and should help towards advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations by having housing designed to support people to live independently, safely and well.

Sukhi Biring, Equalities Officer, 454 4175

6. Is this a private report (If so, please indicated the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?

No

7. Is this a “key decision”?

No

References

ⁱ Select Committee on National Policy for the Built Environment, Building better places. 2016. Report of Session 2015-16 - HL Paper 100

https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201516/ldselect/ldbuilt/100/10006.htm#_idTextAnchor045

ⁱⁱ Select Committee on National Policy for the Built Environment, Building better places. 2016. Report of Session 2015-16 - HL Paper 100

https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201516/ldselect/ldbuilt/100/10006.htm#_idTextAnchor045

ⁱⁱⁱ Shelter, [The impact of housing problems on mental health](#) (2017)

^{iv} Public Health England, [Improving health through the home](#) (2017)

^v Leicester City Council. 2019. The Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2024

<https://www.leicester.gov.uk/media/185984/joint-health-and-wellbeing-strategy-2019-2024.pdf>
