

Crowding and Space Hazards Policy



Introduction

When a tenant is identified as needing a larger home we must consider whether there are any serious crowding and space hazards at the property. Where we have concerns that a family is subject to overcrowding we must ensure that the appropriate action is taken.

Background

The 'statutory overcrowding' standard detailed in the Housing Act 1985 was first introduced in 1935 and comprises a very low, prescriptive standard which includes living and dining rooms as often being suitable as sleeping rooms. This is an out-dated piece of legislation which does not reflect modern standards. Nowadays we can assess crowding and space hazards using the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), mentioned in the Housing Act 2004.

The HHSRS assessment does not just measure overcrowding. But also takes into account other factors such as layout, amenities, location and presence of recreational space within the home. Additionally, the number of bed spaces is an important consideration when we are deciding whether or not the current accommodation is suitable for a particular family.

Government guidance on using HHSRS states: *'There should be sufficient provision for sleeping having regard to the numbers likely to be accommodated in the dwelling. As a guide, and depending on the sex of the household members and their relationship, and the size of the rooms, a dwelling containing one bedroom is suitable for up to 2 persons, irrespective of age. A dwelling containing 2 bedrooms is suitable for up to 4 persons. One containing 3 bedrooms is suitable for up to 6 persons, and one containing 4 bedrooms is suitable for up to 7 persons'.*

This refers to the "Bedroom Standard" which specifies the number of bedrooms which a household needs, based on the assumption that no-one has to share a bedroom unless they are a couple, both aged under ten, or both aged under twenty-one and of the same sex. Households lacking one bedroom will be considered to be overcrowded and those lacking two bedrooms will be 'severely overcrowded'.

'Permitted numbers' shown on the property screen of Academy can be used as a guide to the size of a property. However, when Derby Homes are considering what needs to award on a rehousing application we consider the number of bed spaces in available. This information can also be found on the property screen, and gives an indication of room size, for example 4 bed spaces in a 2 bedroom property means there are 2 double bedrooms. 4 bed spaces in a 3 bedroom property indicates 1 double bedroom and 2 singles.

When assessing crowding and space, official guidance suggests that a room of a minimum of 6.5m² will normally be suitable as a single bedroom and a room of 9.5m² or above is considered suitable as a double bedroom for 2 persons. However, this is not a hard and fast rule as the design and shape of rooms should be sufficient to accommodate the furniture and circulation space required.

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Policy

- We will visit families where we identify suspected overcrowding. We will make an assessment as to the size of property that a family needs depending on the family make up and the number and size of bedrooms in their current home.
- We will consider a referral to Derby City Council's Housing Standards Team for an HHSRS assessment of crowding and space hazards in the home.
- We will register all families who are lacking 3 or more bed spaces for rehousing, award them the appropriate needs and activate autobidding on their application.
- We will make up to three offers of what we consider to be appropriate accommodation for the family's needs.
- We will also look at whether a family can be split (i.e. where a family member living in the property is old enough to hold their own tenancy) and, if appropriate, register them on Derby Homefinder and assist them with rehousing.
- Along with rehousing we will consider other options which might alleviate the overcrowding situation. These may include altering the existing accommodation with internal modifications, building an extension, or in exceptional circumstances, look at combining two adjoining properties into one.
- We will conduct a safe and well check in all cases to ensure that the family know how to prevent a fire and also have an emergency plan in place.
- We will carry out an annual review to check whether the family circumstances have changed – whether the overcrowding has got worse or has been resolved with the addition or leaving of family members. This annual review will continue until the overcrowding has been resolved or we have exercised our duty.
- When we have made all reasonable efforts to find suitable alternative accommodation, and the family have refused to move, and where we have been unable to modify or extend the family home we will explain to the tenant that we have exercised our duty to them as a landlord.