

Dear Lewisham Council,

We hope this letter finds you well.

As headteachers and members of Lewisham Citizens, an alliance of over 20 local civil society institutions, we are writing to urge you to **pledge your commitment to treating housing as an emergency issue across Lewisham Borough**. The current state of poor housing conditions is not only a matter of providing quality homes for our families, but it is also having a **detrimental impact on the education of our children**.

Please consider:

1. The Urgency of Action Needed: The housing crisis in Lewisham is reaching critical levels, with many families living in substandard conditions that pose serious health and safety risks. We cannot afford to delay action any longer. Every day that passes without addressing this issue is another day that children are exposed to unhealthy living environments that hinder their ability to learn and thrive.

2. The Impact on Children's Education: Poor housing conditions directly impact children's education. We as headteachers have seen that children living in inadequate housing are more likely to experience disruptions in their education due to frequent moves in temporary accommodation, overcrowding, lack of quiet study spaces, and exposure to environmental toxins such as mould and issues with sanitation. This is impacting on children's attendance and thus attainment and social skills.

These challenges create barriers to learning such as poor attendance due to recurring illnesses, punctuality due to further travel to and from school, and tiredness due to lack of sleep, all of which contribute to academic underachievement.

3. Health and Well-being: Beyond the educational implications, inadequate housing jeopardises the overall health and well-being of our community, especially our children. From respiratory problems caused by black mould and damp to increased stress and anxiety resulting from unsafe living conditions, the physical and mental health of our young people are at risk when they are forced to live in substandard housing.

4. Long-term Consequences: The consequences of failing to address the housing crisis extend far beyond these immediate concerns. Children who grow up in unstable or inadequate housing are more likely to face economic hardship, homelessness, and poor health outcomes later in life. By investing in safe and affordable housing now, we can break the cycle of poverty and create a brighter future for generations to come.

5. Community Responsibility: As elected officials, we believe it is your duty to prioritise the well-being of all members of our community, especially the most vulnerable among us. By pledging to treat housing as an emergency issue, you will demonstrate your commitment to fulfilling this responsibility and taking meaningful action to address the urgent needs of our residents.

We cannot afford to delay any longer. We ask the new Mayor and relevant Cabinet leads to meet with us to work on this within 30 days of the 7th March by-election.

We urge you to stand with us in recognising housing as an emergency issue and to take decisive steps to address this crisis. Our children deserve safe, stable, and healthy homes where they can learn and thrive. We look forward to your response and to working together to build a better future for our community.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Lisa Williams, Headteacher, Rushey Green Primary

Graham Voller, Headteacher, Beecroft

Claire Gillespie, Headteacher, St Winifred's

Dan Absolom, Deputy Headteacher, Edmund Waller